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TORONTO, FRIDAY, MARCH 29, 1878.

COURSES OF LECTURES.

It is with pleasure we observe that a course of lectures upon purely Presbyterian subjects is being delivered in Montreal by the ministers in succession. The pastors of a city by such united action exercise a wholesome influence upon the community. The brethren in Montreal evidently find it of great practical value and interest to treat in a popular manner the distinctive principles of Presbyterianism, while the numbers in attendance evince the appreciation of such subjects by the general public. Another special course of lectures is being given in New York under the auspices of the Sabbath School Association. During the winter, leading ministers of all Evangelical denominations in New York, have been treating the various books of the Old Testament from a historico-philosophical point of view. The lecturers constitute quite a galaxy of talent, and include all the ministers who are known in Canada by their writings or by their preaching ability, as well as others who though obscure are men destined to make their mark. The last lecture delivered by Rev. Dr. Fowler is a masterpiece. It presents the Epistle to the Hebrews in a very attractive manner. The preceding lecture, by the Rev. Dr. Taylor, upon the Epistle to the Galatians, was, as might be expected, very able and instructive. Drs. Hale, Ormiston, Tyng Jr., Rogers and a number of others have all distinguished themselves by their excellent delineations of the books of Scripture which were committed to their care. When these lectures are finished, they will form a very valuable volume to those who want to be armed on such points as the genuineness and authenticity, the contents and literary merits of the books of the New Testament. One of the strange phenomena of the day, was the delivery of a lecture by Rev. John Hall, D.D., of Presbyterian fame, in the Jewish Synagogue. But why should it be otherwise? The Jews and Christians have much in common, and the learning of Protestantism has done much for the Jewish literature and worship. Meanwhile the Rev. Joseph Cook, that stalwart Christian knight, is showing valiant fight in that mighty stronghold of all the isms—the Philosophical Boston—the literary hub of the universe.

THE ECONOMY OF HARD TIMES.

It is painfully evident to all that the commercial depression is proving itself to be of a very obstinate character. It continues in spite of all prognostications to the contrary. There is no doubt much of it is traceable to the peculiar winter which we have this year experienced. The purchasers of large stocks of woollens, and heavy clothing and furs, have been extensive sufferers by reason of the unwonted mildness of the past four or five months. Severe weather would without doubt have led to sales in these respective lines of goods. But we must remember that a genuine Canadian winter, while it would have ensured some degree of activity in business, could not have resuscitated trade from its widespread depression. Supposing commerce is in the first stage of convalescence, as has frequently been asserted by writers and speakers, it could certainly not be expected to reach a complete recovery during the current year. The mildness of the past few months has therefore been a merciful dispensation. The necessities of the poor have been more easily met. The small consumption of coal has kept down its price, and the warm clothing which the more needy required has been the more readily obtained.

While expressing our sympathy with the real sufferers during such trying times, we are not sure but that commercial depression has its own valuable lessons. For one thing, great prosperity engenders extravagance on the part of the people. It is easy for many to rise on the crest of the wave of prosperity, and enjoy a good time while it lasts. Were this to go on for any lengthened period, it would lead such persons to greater indulgence. They would be thinking only of showily emulating their neighbors. The thought of danger would be put off in the presence of unlimited credit, until at length there would be such a load of indebtedness that the withdrawal of even one creditor might result in their total prostration. As it is, there have been many instances of this. What a record of disasters and failures has been that of this and the preceding years! We are not sure that this is an unmitigated evil, for while of course we have to mourn the fall of many a well-deserving man, a wholesome exposure is made of all that is hollow and dishonest in trade. What astounding revelations of crime have been made in the United States through these sifting years, which would not have come to light until it had accumulated a still greater amount of guilt and prepared the way for even more disastrous consequences. But away from this obvious lesson, there is the good which these dull times have accomplished for a large section of the community. The storm has compelled the taking in of sail, the more thorough ballasting of the ship, and the more cautious sailing through the troubled waters. Let us hope when business revives we will all carry the lesson of the panic, and not carry more sail than we actually require.

There is no doubt that the "hard times" have led many to give up expensive and luxurious habits, which could do them no good whatever. It is extraordinary what a vast amount of money is thrown away not merely upon things that are useless, but upon those which are positively injurious. In the matter of tobacco alone there is more spent annually

than what would support all our foreign missions, and a good many other missions to the bargain. Were there a corresponding gain in health, morally and spiritually, there would not be so much to complain of. But when we know that the nervous system of untold numbers is hopelessly ruined by such indulgence, we cannot but mourn over the evil. If hard times will break this pernicious habit—at least in so far as undue excess is concerned—they will have served an important end indeed. We say the same thing of the use of many similar stimulants, such as opium and all the host of them. In regard to drinking customs, we are sure that the commercial distress has proved somewhat of a friend. There are of course the hopeless cases of drunkards, who if they are ever saved from their terrible thralldom it must be by some remarkable miracle. In regard to most of these, we can only look on with a feeling akin to that of despair. But there is a large class of people who take drink, not because they love it so much, but because it is fashionable to do so. Hard times come, and they find they cannot afford the useless luxury. They are compelled to give it over, or prove themselves dishonest for a very contemptible thing. When they give up the use of liquor, they make the valuable discovery that they are better in health—better every way—and it is to be hoped when the cloud of depression has passed away they will not foolishly return to a habit which they have learned was only pernicious in its results. If "hard times" do this, they will have helped on the great temperance movement to a wonderful extent.

We are not certain but that Churches benefit largely in times of depression. Of course, we do not wish to be understood as asserting that there is no loss incurred by the shrinkage of contributions to the schemes of the General Assembly. There may be to some extent, or the contributions may in consequence not prove so large as the increasing expenditure requires. But we are sure that as a rule congregations do not suffer. This we should hope is the result of people in times of suffering giving more heed to the duties of religion. The Church is the ready helper of those who are cast down, and there is a reflex action from such that will soon tell upon its resources. But more than this, the Sabbath services of worship and instruction are appreciated in their true character. In times of abounding prosperity people rush to expensive theatres and concerts—to all sorts of questionable places of resort. When they are cut off from these and are led back to the Church, they discover there is something of a delightful entertainment after all in the services of religion. There is something refreshing in the singing of God's praises, and they soon learn to appreciate sacred music as they never did before. They can now see a meaning in the prayers that are offered, and for the first time perhaps they become conscious of the beauty of language and thought that generally marks the devotional part of the public worship. They even learn to admire the sermon, and to feel that the preacher who is getting up two good discourses for every Sabbath stands head and shoulders above the mere actor, who is only original in manner, and never in words or thoughts.