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The Canada Presbyterian.

TORONTO, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 1st, 1890.

HAPPY New Year to every reader of THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN. Eighteen years have come and gone since the journal first entered the homes of many of our readers. To not a few recently put on our list we are comparative strangers. To all—old friends and new friends alike—we wish the compliments of the season, and hope that 1890 may in every respect be the best year they ever saw.

WE have looked into the speeches of a goodly number of municipal men who are retiring with a view to finding out the principal causes that lead them to decline further public service. One cause assigned by many is the abuse heaped upon them by many of the people they serve. Making all due allowance for the fact that some sensitive men consider fair criticism abuse, we must conclude that each year many good men refuse to serve their fellow-citizens mainly because some of their fellow-citizens consider that one of the rights of a free man is to slander everybody who gives time and labour to the public service. This is a humiliating fact, but it is a fact all the same. Newspapers that make a habit of throwing dirt at every public man they do not like are largely to blame. Free speech is a great blessing, but it can easily be made a great curse. Freedom of the press is a priceless boon, but a newspaper may easily become a greater nuisance than an open sewer. The best things are the most easily abused, and become the worst when they are abused.

THE discussion on Revision is bringing out noble traits of character in some of the ministers and elders of the American Church. The position taken by a goodly number of excellent men may be stated in this way: "Whilst admitting certain infidelities of expression in the Confession, and whilst we believe that more prominence should be given to the love of God as manifested in Christ, still we are satisfied with the book as a whole, and would rather not have it revised. If, however, a decided majority of our brethren desire Revision, we are ready to give whatever aid we can to do the work effectively." That is a noble spirit. Any kind of a creature can stand against what he does not want done, but it takes a man with sense in his head and love in his heart, and grace in his soul, to bow to the decision of the majority in cases in which the majority must rule, and say, "That is not my way, but if the majority decides in that way I shall not be an obstructionist." It is just in such cases that the difference between a loyal Christian and an obstinate obstructionist always comes out.

REFERRING to the very moderate changes recommended by the report of the Revision Committee of the Presbytery of New York, Dr. John Hall said:

He would like to have it reach the daily newspapers and the organs of other religious denominations, so that they might have their minds relieved of any impression that the Presbytery meant to abandon the old system of doctrine of the Presbyterian Church. He was very glad that the report had stated so plainly that they did not want to make any new creed or modify the doctrine, but were simply to deal with certain changes of phraseology. Some "world-enlightening" editors had been writing as if the Presbytery was going to "go back on" the old Standards, and he wished that they should have the opportunity to study this report and give their readers correct impressions about the matter.

The "world-enlightening" editor can scarcely be blamed for not distinguishing between changes in phraseology and changes in doctrine when not a few clergymen of other denominations fail to make the distinction. So far as we know no representative man in the American or any other Presbyterian Church has advocated a change of doctrine, and yet some of the ministers of every anti-Calvinistic Church speak as if Revision means an actual change of the distinctive doctrines of Calvinism.

TWO or three weeks ago one of our contributors drew a picture of a returning officer running about the streets trying to find an elector to second the nomination of a school trustee. No doubt such cases have too frequently occurred, but we have heard of a worse one. In a town not a hundred miles from Toronto, a town noted alike for the beauty of its situation and the enterprise of its people, the returning officer went at the appointed hour to the place of nomination. No person appeared to make nominations during the time specified by statute, and the official, instead of running about the ward in search of electors, quietly gathered up his books and went home. There was no election. It was not in this way that Free Schools were obtained for the children of Ontario. The best men of the last generation had to fight a hard battle to bring an education within the reach of every child in the Province. Some of their sons do not take interest enough in the matter to elect trustees to work the system. The town alluded to is neither better nor worse than dozens of others, but it affords a striking illustration of the easy way in which people deal with what costs them little. Do the people of this Province know what their schools and churches are worth to the country? A good many of them don't seem to think anything about it.

THE fact that the twelfth juror—the man who held out for three days and saved the alleged murderers of Dr. Cronin from the gallows—is an effusively religious man has caused no small amount of discussion. Of course it was to be expected that the enemies of religion would blame religion for the supposed failure of justice. Religion is always saddled with the inconsistencies of its professors and the fact that this juror read his Bible every evening in the jury room is made the most of. The *Interior*, however, has a theory which, though not by any means new, affords ample food for reflection. Our contemporary declares that religious fanaticism always indicates defective moral sense:

The rule in human nature is that religious fanaticism indicates defective moral sense. This lack of moral perception in such cases is in all degrees from slight aberration to total moral blindness. The most unconscionable liar and rascal out of prison whom we ever knew was a man of effusive piety. He was regarded as a religious crank, and as a hypocrite and his immorality was charged to the discredit of religion. We do not think he was a hypocrite. He evidently regarded himself as a truly good man. He was only one of numerous cases of the occupancy by extreme religiousness of the vacuum caused by the absence of a moral nature. No shrewd observer of character will trust a clamorous religious fanatic. This is the result of experience. The consequence is an indiscriminating mind, or one that is hostile to religion, and in such cases excuses for irreligion, or for hostility to Christianity. Such characters are bemoaned by good men as disgraces to religion. They do not understand how religious and moral opposite extremes may meet in the same character.

An illustration of the truth of the foregoing may often be seen at so-called revivals of a certain kind. How often does it happen that the most noisy, fussy and effusive workers at such meetings are men in whose integrity or purity, or both, the people of the neighbourhood have not the slightest confidence. To such an extent has this scandal gone that a respected minister brought the matter up at a religious conference held not long ago in Toronto and insisted that men allowed to take part in such meetings should be men of reputable character. It is difficult to imagine a surer or swifter way of bringing religion into utter contempt in the estimation of honest men who are not Christians, than to have a lot of noisy, characterless, and perhaps unclean scamps fussing around a so-called revival meeting. It is, we believe, a fact that effusive, clamorous religiousness often indicates the absence of moral principle, more especially honesty and truthfulness, and infrequently purity.

ON THE THRESHOLD.

TO-DAY the old year is behind us, and we have crossed the threshold of the new. The events of 1889 have been indelibly inscribed on the records of the past; 1890 with its possibilities is before us. Hopes unfulfilled, purposes unachieved, anticipations falsified, and wise resolutions strew our pathways in the vanished year, and he would be a man of rare wisdom, and one of still rarer insensibility, who could bid the old year farewell without misgiving and without regret. In one sense the old year is past and done with. Its record is unalterable, none of our mistakes can be recalled and rectified; neglected opportunities are gone for ever. For us the past year like all its predecessors is just what we have made of it. It is a finished chapter of individual biography as well as a completed section in that illimitable evolution of the divine purpose that advances without pause and without deviation through

the ages. There is another sense in which the lapsed year may still be profitable in a measure. Reflection on what we have done and on what we have left undone may lead to a wise improvement of the uncertain time yet allotted us. What in the retrospect may bear the approval of conscience can be made serviceable in strengthening resolve and confirming those habits that help in character-building, while a recollection of the follies and failures of the past ought to make us more vigilant over ourselves and more determined to avoid whatever mars and hinders our progress towards the grandest and most comprehensive of all ideals, "Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect." Tried by that high standard how imperfect and full of flaws will even the noblest and most self-denying human life appear! And yet we are not done with the year that is gone, for "God requireth that which is past."

Whatever may be the result of a calm survey of the vanished year in its relation to individual life, on the wider sphere of the world's progress much has been achieved. In material things, characteristic of the century, there has been no little advancement. Railway enterprise has been extended even in lands that for long resisted change, and Chinese prejudice is beginning to yield to the pressure of western ideas. The spanning of the world with the iron highway is now within measurable distance and there is nothing fantastic in the forecast that in a few years it may be within reach of the average man to spend his short summer holiday by making a journey round the world. Applied science has largely administered to human comfort by abridging distance, economising time, and awakening hopes for still greater advantages in the future. Last year, though it may be said that all Europe was under arms and several of the nations were suspiciously watching each other with furtive glance, peace has been preserved. There are some who think that to some extent continued peace is to be ascribed to the Paris exhibition which presented to the view of the vast multitudes who thronged its courts the latest results of peaceful industry and ingenious invention, a sort of panoramic view of the material triumphs of the age. It has, however, to be borne in mind that material advancement has its accompanying dangers. It would be a great mistake to suppose that realism and faith were incompatible.

Through the past as in preceding years the work of social and moral reform has been steadily carried on. Still there are gigantic evils menacing the welfare of mankind against which an uncompromising warfare must be maintained. Though the war in the United States and President Lincoln's emancipation proclamation put an end to slavery, in a land where the peculiar institution was peculiarly anomalous, and though it was wiped out in Brazil by imperial proclamation, recent events show that through Arab greed and European indifference the "sum of all the villainies" has grown to alarming proportions on the dark continent. The extent to which this evil has developed in recent years, and the awful curse it has been spreading has not deterred the friends of humanity from resolving to secure its entire suppression. The Brussels congress will doubtless lead to a crusade against African slavery that will cease only when the infamous traffic has been crushed out of existence.

The movement, common to all civilized and Christian lands, for the suppression of intemperance may not have made any marked triumphs during the past year, but its devoted friends have been as earnest and resolute in their endeavours as ever. They have relaxed no efforts, their resolution has suffered no abatement, and if signal success in efforts to secure restrictive legislative enactments may not be recorded, it is manifest that popular conviction as to the evils of intemperance and the pressing need for their removal is at this moment more widespread and deep than ever before. Startling and hideous as have been the disclosures concerning certain forms of evil, it is no less manifest that the public conscience has become increasingly sensitive to the imperative necessity for the maintenance of moral purity. Many and faithful have been the workers in the wide field of practical philanthropy, and the good seed sown will ripen in due time.

In the highest of all fields of Christian effort, in the publication of the glad tidings of salvation, the past year has been one of great diligence and fruitfulness. Quietly and steadily have the ambassadors of the cross faithfully proclaimed the unsearchable riches of Christ. To thousands has come the blessed message with its transforming power. To many, over-wearied with the presence of life's burdens, it has brought renewed heart and hope; to the sick and bereaved it has ministered consolation such as no other voice could speak. It has carefully warned against the snares and the perils of this