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THE DOMINION PRESBYTERIAN,

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J. BLACKETT ROBINSON, Manager and Editor

Ottawa, Wednesday, Jan. 6 1904.

You can not do better than send your absent son, daughter or friend The DOMINION PRESBYTERIAN for 1904. As a New Year's gift it will carry weekly greetings from the home circle for twelve months. One dollar will pay the bill.

It is to be hoped the terrible disaster at Chicago, where hundreds of lives were lost by fire at a theatre, may not be without some usefulness as a counterpoise to the weight of sorrow. All buildings in which people congregate ought to be critically examined, and made more safe, with special reference to egress in case of fire or panic. We do not approve of filling the aisles of church buildings with chairs; the risk is too great, especially when one sees how readily sudden fright converts ordinarily composed crowds into flocks of irresponsible sheep. Your own church? Could the people get out?

A reader of THE DOMINION PRESBYTERIAN wonders if anything like adequate use is made of the new Canadian Presbyterian hymnal. He says he knows of congregations where the range certainly does not exceed fifty hymns, though the book contains between six and seven hundred. In going into other congregations, he says he has often struck into a set of hymns from the same hymnal, which were quite unfamiliar to him in his own congregation. This set him thinking, and he soon saw it could not be otherwise, as the range of hymns in each congregation was usually the outcome and choice of a single mind. Our correspondent thinks some method ought to be possible, under which a congregation should be encouraged to lend a self-governing assistance in regard to the elements of the praise service, likewise to be helpful and of widest scope of appeal.

OUR PRINCIPLE OF SELF-GOVERNMENT.

We mean, the principle of self-government in congregations. Once a year, usually in the month of January, an open meeting of the congregation is held, at which both members and adherents have the right to be present, and at which the accounts for the twelve month, spiritual, and financial, are given. This is a large democratic opportunity; it is on the principle of comprehension, not exclusion; in the Presbyterian churches it has worked well; as is known, the annual meetings of some other Christian bodies are confined to communicants.

At this annual occasion, the people have the opportunity to say what they think; it is well they should speak freely. It may be a duty to point out what the speaker thinks a better way; the great thing is how best to do it. The bull-in-the-china-shop method is not ordinarily the most effective. A conciliatory manner growing out of a right spirit is rarely repelled. Such manner and spirit have often piloted an annual meeting safely through threatening waves into the calm waters of a peaceful and satisfactory ending. Thorough, frank, and courteous discussion, we repeat, is wholesome and invigorating; but it must be along the principle of parliamentary self-government, namely, that of submission ordinarily to the voice of the majority. Do not sulk if you cannot have your way; it is within the bounds of possibility you may be wrong and the majority right; you have delivered your soul and lightened your load of personal responsibility; your next duty, in nine cases out of ten, is to show hearty and helpful acquiescence.

There is one person who ought not to object to anything done at an annual meeting; we allude to the person who might have been present, but did not think it worth while to take the trouble to come out. He is morally debarred from criticism.

We have spoken of the principle of self-government running through our Presbyterian system, and much of which takes its start at the annual meeting. We, ourselves, elect our managers, our elders, our ministers. We have the representative, parliamentary principle alike in session presbytery, synod, and General Assembly. If we are not properly governed, we should have the grace to lay the blame where it belongs, namely, on ourselves.

We are asked, how much nagging should be done by a minister from the pulpit? Ordinarily not much. In most cases where some corrective is needed, there are tactful, indirect reminders, which are much preferable to anything like direct scoldings. Our correspondent doubts if, for example, prayer meeting attendance is ever promoted by naggings on the subject, and thinks the fire should be built up in the prayer-meeting itself. We do not think there is a great deal of nagging in our pulpits. Most Presbyterian ministers have too much sense.

LOOKING FORWARD.

No matter what the mistakes of 1903, you cannot live the year over. Pensive reverie will not assist you in the duties of 1904, nor will unavailing regrets for past mistakes and misused opportunities. Gladstone says, "No wave on the great ocean of time, when once it has floated past us, can be recalled. All we can do is to watch the new form and motion of the next, and launch upon it to try in the manner our best judgment may suggest, our strength and skill."

It is not wise to fret too much over the mistakes of the past; nor should we be too confident we would do better if allowed to live our past lives over. Perhaps we would make as many, or worse mistakes in the future, than we made in the past. Mayhap the mistakes of the past, if properly used, are the very guide-posts we need for the future. Cease fretting. Look forward; not backward.

Do your best;
Leave the rest.

At an executive meeting of the Oxford Prohibition Association held last week, Rev. Dr. MacKay tendered his resignation as president of the association, a position he has held for some years. The Dr.'s resignation was owing to ill-health.

KEEP THE IDEA IN VIEW.

The Christmas season is past; congratulations and good wishes have been exchanged; gifts have been sent and received, so that, probably, there are comparatively few who have not in some measure enjoyed the glad time that comes with the closing of the old and the opening of the new year. The exchange of gifts at the Christmas season is a happy thought. A gift, no matter how limited be its intrinsic value, is tangible evidence of the spoken or written good wishes. Better still; the sending of gifts to those whose creature comforts are few and far between is thoroughly in keeping with the angelic announcement, "peace on earth, good will to men." No other religion on earth but Christianity embodies so ennobling a sentiment.

But there is a more extended and practical view of Christmas giving which deserves attention. For those in comfortable circumstances it is comparatively easy to send gifts to their friends, but why should Christmas giving be confined to exchanges between friends? This has become rather common place and stereotyped. Would it not be more practical and more in accord with the sentiments embodied in the Christmas celebration, for people to largely revolutionize their system of gift-giving by making it a first charge on their Christmas generosity to care for the poor. It does lighten their burdens and send gleams of light into their often cheerless lives to be the recipients of cheer and comfort in the Christmas season. The blessed influence lives with them for many a day. The donors of such gifts, perhaps, do not realize how much joy such giving brings to the homes of the poor. If they did, they would see