

CHURCH THOUGHTS BY A LAYMAN.

A PICTURE OF MINISTERIAL LIFE IN AMERICA
AND ITS LESSON.

SOME years ago, when spending a few days at Niagara we had several "talks" with an American Baptist minister and his wife, "on life in a small town in the States." The inexpressible sadness of their faces appeared like the shadow of a terrible bereavement. This was not the case, but they opened out the cause of this melancholy by a very painful story of the trials of life which educated and refined dwellers in a small town suffer from in a land where culture commands small respect, where honor is not paid where honor is due, where the almighty dollar is the god in whom they live and move and have their being. The lady said that pastoral or social visiting with her husband was a grievous affliction, as whenever she sought to draw conversation to serious topics, she was crushed at once by questions most trivial and impertinent, as to what her dress cost per yard, who made it, where she got the pattern, how much she spent on clothes yearly, and so on. Even her woman's Bible class sessions were constantly ruined by a fire of such questions, and the imparting to her, *unasked*, of silly information as to the cost of the articles worn or used by the informant, by other members or by neighbours. As at the time, we were fresh from the old land where we had been led by American magazines and papers to believe that the intellectual standard of the States was infinitely higher than that of England, we were amazed at such a revelation. We knew much of country life at home, but never had seen a minister and his wife bowed to the earth with the intolerable burthen of life owing to the intellectual coarseness and deadness of the people. Yet these insufferably vulgar persons were educated, according to the American idea of education. They could all read, write and "figger" with ease; they had been suckled on the doctrine that all men are equal, with the American corollary, that the only distinction lifting one citizen in any way above another is the possession of money. But in culture and official rank they saw nothing to honor. Inasmuch as they paid the minister's stipend they felt not merely bound to treat him and his office without respect, but to snub him and his wife whenever their manners or speech revealed a consciousness on their part of the shepherd not being on the same social and mental level as the flock. Life amid such a debased civilisation is indeed a bitter experience to persons of education and refinement. This civilisation is indeed barbarism with merely a very thin veil drawn over its hideousness. Yet we and all who enjoy a nobler life of freedom from the petty thralldom of such ignominious surroundings are asked to take such people as our exemplars and guides, for it is out of such forms of society that come all such pet schemes as prohibition and the like, and those democratic notions of Church government which fascinate the vulgar. The glorious doctrine now sought to be elevated into an

article of belief as sacred as any in the creeds of the Church—that the people, the people are the true source of ministerial power and authority, meets in such a life as we have described a withering blast. It shows that wherever the people stand most in need of a bold, faithful, prophet-like evangelist and teacher, they are paralysed themselves and they paralyse him by the consciousness on the one hand of his being their dependant servant, *therefore their inferior*, and on the other hand by the bitter and humiliating consciousness that a vulgar, illiterate, gross minded community regard him at the best as on a level with themselves, but more commonly as their hired man. A story just published in the States and another in the *Century* for July give graphic pictures of ministerial life in an American town. The minister who is the hero of the former story is a Methodist, and his tribulations spring from the jealousies which arise whenever some one family a little less coarse than the rest shows the pastor more respect than do the others. His first offence was going away for a summer vacation, which led to one sister remarking that "Susan Chance of the other church had thrown it up in her face that there had been 19 funerals in their church and only 10 from the Methodist!" Shop! shop! their microscopic souls never get higher than the counter and scales! The same elevation of spirit found utterance recently in the lamentation of the party organ over the small attendance at one or two Toronto churches. These churches it has for years sought to blight and damage, yet now hypocritically laments over them because they are not as prosperous as Churchmen desire! Better, however, a thousand times better to have the lamp of Church truth kept burning even by a handful of faithful ones than to have the torch of sectarian Error blazing to the delight of crowded congregations! Susan Chance is a representative person, her sole test of the Church is arithmetic, she glories in numbers, she is proud even of the funerals of her set exceeding those of a hated rival, and doubtless feels when the race for this "business" becomes "nip and tuck," that those sick of her set who hold on to life are lacking in denominational pride!

The theory that the people should have exclusive power in ministerial appointments is a mere Church phase of political radicalism. It never had any basis in Scripture nor in Church history. It is the chief characteristic of the Independent sect, the sect which denies the existence of the Church of Christ, which teaches that the Church is not a Family, not a Kingdom, not a Body, with a common life like a Vine; but on the contrary there ought to be myriads of tiny Republics of Christians, each self-centred, and possessing an utterly and wholly independent existence. Such communities necessarily elect their own ministers as well as arrange what he is to teach and how, for he is the mere mouthpiece of the people who pay him, and verily is "the *dependent* minister of and upon an *independent* congregation." Those who uphold this theory

should join the sect where it prevails; it never was and cannot ever be in the nature of things, the practice of the Catholic and Apostolic Church, which is the Body of Christ. Those who are agitating to introduce the democratic forms of government peculiar to and specially characteristic of the Independent sect are not merely at war with the local usages of some branch, but with the fundamental condition of God's Church.

Students of facts rather than speculative theories know that election by the people means selection by a clique of busy bodies, or by some one masterful spirit in the congregation whose wealth has brought him into power. They know too, that in those dioceses where some portion of selective power is vested in the people, that this power is often wielded by a party agent who goes down to a vacant parish, like a political wire puller, to avenge the nomination of a minister approved by the party. That is the real secret of a party organ incessantly advocating election of ministers by the people. The spiritual interest of parishes is not the inspiration, they are merely working a party game in the same way and for practically the same ends as the game of politics. If the inner history of ministerial elections could be written, which God forbid! the story would be the blackest in ecclesiastical annals, it would give Christianity a greater shock than is in the power of all its enemies to compass by combined assault. The scandals and divisions arising from popular election have well nigh killed Congregationalism in Canada. In the gatherings of this body the chief business is criticism, worship is a mere incident. The battle of criticism rages frequently the hottest over the minister's prayers, for it is very remarkable that these ultra-Protestants who are furious at the thought of a priest coming between them and Christ, as the absurd phrase is, do all their public praying by a mediatorial minister! In their services those who voted for the preacher are gathering weapons for his defence, those who voted against him are seeking evidence of their superior judgment. The best man they ever had in Canada has just been driven away by the intolerable worry of life lived in an atmosphere of sultry eulogy tempered by arctic cold depreciation. If a minister is scholarly then "he does not preach the simple Gospel," if he is illiterate or studiously plain spoken, "he is not a man of culture," if he is broad and general in his teaching "he is indefinite and loose," if he magnifies one or two doctrines "he is narrow and monotonous," if he deals with the sins of the day or of the class he is paid by "he is personal" or "he preaches too much about good works," or "he thinks more of the Law than the Gospel." A people-elected minister is literally "on trial" every hour of his life; the sheep stand round him, not for food, but to see him perform tricks with his pastoral crook. The leading congregation in Toronto has for over a year been without a pastor, as the flock cannot agree as to who is to be their guide and teacher. Thus whenever a change occurs the congrega-