

Our Contributors.

CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS.

BY KNOXONIAN.

"Never go to congregational meetings. Haven't attended one for years. Can't endure such gatherings." Indeed? Why not? "Oh, congregational meetings are dry, tedious, uninteresting. They are not attractive, not entertaining, not enjoyable. Every thing about them is as dry as a lime-burner's shoe." Yes, that is just where the trouble comes in. A large number of professing Christian people won't go to any kind of meeting now unless some one takes a contract to interest them. Everything must be lively and spicy and racy and entertaining or they won't attend. The desire to be entertained is stronger than the sense of duty in such people. That is the real trouble. The good old word Duty, that once had such magical power seems to have lost its potency with these people. With them the main thing is to be entertained, pleased, interested, and unless some extraordinary means are used to interest and entertain at any given meeting, their sense of duty is not strong enough to induce them to attend. This growing desire for entertainment, accompanied as it always is by a lax sense of duty, accounts for many of the empty pews that are seen in too many churches on Sabbath. The people think there should be a fresh attempt made every Sabbath to entertain them. Of course it never occurs to them that they have souls to save, or that it is their duty to attend the house of God. The only question asked is—would it be pleasant and entertaining to go?

Now why should any rational man expect to be entertained at a congregational meeting? Why should any one expect the reports to be spicy, and the speeches racy, and the whole meeting very lively? There have been congregational meetings that were lively enough to please anybody, but these are just the worst church meetings ever held. They make good men hang their heads with shame, injure the cause of Christ, bring religion into contempt, grieve the Holy Spirit, and wound the Saviour in the house of His professed friends. The worst ecclesiastical meetings ever held, are, as a rule, the meetings that produce great excitement. A church court or congregational meeting is at its very worst when it pleases the people who love to see a fight. The people who attend simply to enjoy the fight would enjoy seeing a race between two horses, or a contest between two sluggers, or a fight between two dogs.

A meeting, say of the General Assembly is being held. The spirit of the Assembly is good. The opening exercises are well attended, and the Moderator's sermon has made a fine devotional impression. Business runs along smoothly. There is no friction and no fight. The reports are read, showing that the finances are in good shape, the colleges doing good work, and that the missions at home and abroad are prospering. The members are in good humour. The tone of the meeting is spiritual rather than ecclesiastical. At all events it is not belligerent. The best side of the individual members and of the court as a whole is seen—alas, that the other side should be so often seen in church courts!

Now what follows? That meeting is a dead failure in the estimation of several classes of people. The Bohemian reporter on the look-out for a "scene" to spread out in his columns under sensational headings, finds nothing. The ecclesiastical lawyer who hopes to make a reputation by nibbling at points of order, raising objections, and general pettifogging, who aspires to be a pettifogger, rather than a preacher, declares the meeting dull, irredeemably dull. The belligerent Christians who dropped into the gallery hoping to see a fight or a "scene" of some kind, are disgusted, and sigh for the good old days when there were annual fights over the organ question, and the hymn question, and other burning issues of that kind. They are disgusted, of course, and vote the meeting a bore. And yet it is perhaps the very best meeting the Assembly ever held.

All that is true in this regard of a meeting of the Supreme Court is true of meetings of Synod, Presbyteries and also of congregational meetings. As a rule the business that makes the least excitement is the real business of the church, and when that business is most prosperous there is the least noise. Burning questions often burn the fingers of those who

handle them. Too much "liveliness" too often indicates that men's passions are not under proper control and that the evil spirit has taken the place of the Spirit of God. If a congregational meeting furnishes entertainment for those people who love to see a fight, it is high time that congregation had mended its ways or ceased to hold meetings.

But after all *can* a congregational meeting, conducted with anything like business tact, be uninteresting to a fairly good Christian? The session usually presents a report or address giving some account of the spiritual work done during the year. How can a Christian man fail to be interested in that work? If he feels no interest in it does this fact not raise a question as to his own spiritual condition? The managers submit a report of the financial condition of the congregation. To say that any good loyal member of the Church feels no interest in that report seems like a libel on common sense. The report of the Sabbath-school is submitted. Are we asked to believe that Christian men may feel no interest in the teaching of their own children? A proposal is made to build a new church or repair an old one; to build a new manse or improve an old one, to pay off a long standing debt, to take additional measures to increase the contributions to the Schemes of the Church, or do any one of a hundred things, and if a man's heart is really in his Master's work, he cannot help feeling an interest in these proposals.

Many reports, or rather abstracts of congregational reports are being published just now. As a rule the best reports come from the congregations that have the most efficient staff of officials. It is a dream to think as some good, easy people do, that in large congregations the pastor does nearly all the work. The better the organization and the more efficient the office-bearers the less the pastor has to do, and he has the more time to do it. Now good organization is an impossibility unless people take an interest in the congregational meeting. At this meeting the office-bearers are appointed. Efficient office-bearers are indispensable to success. Therefore, if you would have a successful congregation you should go to the congregational meeting. And not only go but take a hearty interest in its business without the prospect of being entertained by tea, music, spicy speeches or a fight.

EASTERN ONTARIO.

(FROM OUR KINGSTON CORRESPONDENT.)

We, down in this quarter, are anxiously looking day by day for an authorized statement assuring us of the revolution wrought in preaching in the Toronto pulpits as a result of Mr. Moody's late visit. What a dead-and-alive place (more of the former than of the latter) Toronto must have been. It is well, however, that a faithful friend (?) has been found to point out the disease. What a pity, however, that he went all the way to Montreal to get a paper to print what he had to say in the matter. Why did he not send his communication to some of the Toronto papers? Possibly he did, but the papers in your city are so servile, so much in bondage to the ministers, that they dare not give the truth to the world. It is doubtful whether even THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN will be manly enough to print this letter, having any reference to the deadly evil. At all events, here is what was said, what was written down by a professed friend of religion, and mailed to Montreal: "Listen, ye ministers of Toronto! In the first place your preaching is dry, at all events it was that before Mr. Moody's visit. In the second place, your so-called sermons were not sermons, but moral essays. In the third place, they were either read in a dry manner or else memorized and said off in a parrot-like way." No wonder religion was at a low ebb among you. Remember, it was not in a professedly political paper that the letter appeared, but in a religious (?) one, a paper whose writers, nay, even correspondents, are of the most trustworthy kind. We, down in this quarter, were not only shocked, we were surprised beyond all words to express our feelings, to hear of such a state of things. We thought far otherwise. We believed that Toronto was blessed in having such men in the pulpit as it has. We did not think much about the length, that quality of the discourse we had not given so much attention to, but we did think that the Gospel was preached in your pulpits, and that with a very great measure of earnestness and fire, as well as ability and scholarship. We had the impression that the Macdonnells, the McLeods, the Milligans, the Parsons, the Wallaces, the

Smiths, the Camerons and indeed all the others, were the last men in Canada who could be accused of giving the stone of cold morality when the bread of saving knowledge was what was asked for. Language would fail me were I to try to describe the state of our feelings. The only consolation we have is that the visit of Moody has broken up all that, and we are waiting to hear news to that effect. Surely we will not be left in suspense much longer. There is one thing that has sort of damped our hopes in the matter. That is that the editor of THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN said last week that some men preached most effectively when they read their sermons (did he not mean essays?) and gave a somewhat illustrious example in favour of the statement. Surely the editor cannot have read the letter that appeared in the Montreal paper—I mean the religious paper.

"Knoxonian" has been showing up, in a most refreshing manner, some cranks. I hope he will continue, and give us a few more varieties. There are men, for example, who come up to the surface at times of revival or of religious excitement, and you would think that they had got a mission to slander ministers and elders. We have seen this phenomenon again and again. It is done sometimes in meetings; it is done sometimes in letters to newspapers. These creatures ascribe every hindrance to the progress of religion to ministers and elders—to the former especially. They have for a generation been bearing the burden and the heat of the day, breaking up the fallow ground and putting in the seed and watching over it carefully, and then when the reaping time comes, if it be a reaping time, no credit is given where credit is due, nay, it is discredit, pure and simple, that is heaped upon them. And newspapers do not hesitate to join in the cry or else thoughtlessly open their columns to some characterless knave to ride his hobby, even though the best of men be blasted in reputation. This variety of knave is commended to the pen of "Knoxonian." It is certain that he can do him justice. Let us have a full-length portrait of the scamp, for of all scamps commend me to the religious one.

THE ELDERSHIP VINDICATED.

MR. EDITOR—Last spring there appeared in several of our public prints a very scurrilous paragraph respecting the services of those elders of our Church who had volunteered to supply the mission vacancies of Manitoba during the winter months. It was to the effect that the elders so volunteering had proved a failure, and, strange to say, more from a lack of good manners than anything else. We have never seen that statement explained or modified. It attracted unfavourable attention among our elders at the time; and it is not likely that so long as such statements pass unchallenged, our elders will be prone to offer themselves for Manitoban mission work again.

However, not to occupy more of your space than is necessary, there is a great want felt in our Church every winter, namely, the supply of those mission stations of our Presbyteries, that are left vacant by the withdrawal of our students to their colleges. Is it better to leave these stations without any service for six months every year, or to ask the more intelligent and better qualified of the elders in our respective Presbyteries to conduct service for them once in two weeks, or at least once a month?

As to the piety of these elders and their soundness in the faith, their position in the Church ought to be some guarantee for these. With respect to other qualifications—if an elder is capable of conducting divine service in a solemn and impressive manner, to the edification and satisfaction of a congregation—this also, in an urgent contingency of the present kind, ought to be accepted as enough.

Now, thank God, we have not a few elders in the Church that can do this, and do it well. Even such of them as are not qualified to preach may be able to exhort, or at least read a sermon, and in other respects conduct the worship of the people in a devout and profitable manner. Surely, services so conducted at these vacancies, would be a great gain over no service at all.

Our own session, which is not an uncommon one, is composed of seven elders. All of them can take their part at prayer meetings, and one of them has several times conducted public worship on the Sabbath—while we have been ill—doing it well. Two of these elders travel alternately a distance of nine miles, and conduct divine service twice a month at a