

## Our Contributors.

### YOUR OWN CHURCH: YOUR OWN TOWN.

BY KNONONIAN.

Mr. Chauncey M. Depew touches a good suggestive point in his speech to the Christian Endeavour Convention lately held in New York, when he told the Endeavourers that each one should think her own and his own organization the best and most important in the world, and should aim at being the most efficient member of it. A little sensible talk of that kind might do some of our congregations good. No one can tell how much harm is done to Presbyterianism by the abominable habit too many Presbyterians have of belittling and disparaging everything in and connected with their own church. They can see something good in every congregation but the one to which they belong; something to admire in every denomination but their own. Why they continue to favour such a poor concern with their presence, and make it worse by their growling, is one of the mysteries nobody can understand.

Years ago we knew a snug little congregation that came well-nigh being ruined by a man of that kind. He was not a particularly lovely kind of man. He was glib-tongued and lazy, and

His wife took in sewing  
To keep things going  
While he superintended the earth.

Well, no, not while he superintended the earth, but while he almost ruined the Church by his superintendency. When a probationer was coming he always announced to the neighbours that the man could not be much use or he never would come to preach *here*,—wicked emphasis on *here*. If a student was sent to supply he was sure to say the young man could not be of much account or they *never would have sent him here*. After a long time the people agreed to call a man, and then this burning and shining light, this model Christian, and loyal Presbyterian buzzed around, saying that if the minister accepted the call his acceptance would be ample proof that he was no good, because a man who could get called anywhere else *would never come here*. The minister accepted, the pessimist died—none too soon—and the congregation has been a fairly prosperous one ever since.

One of the indispensable conditions of successful church work is respect for your own sphere. It has many a time been said that if a congregation has lost all respect for and confidence in their pastor, he should go. Certainly he should. The other side of the story, however, is equally true. If a minister has lost all respect for and confidence in his congregation—well either they or he should go, and as they can't, he had better perhaps do the going himself. It is very doubtful if any minister, however gifted, can preach the Gospel in the right spirit to people that he does not trust in their capacity as a congregation. The real secret of many a ministerial failure, is that the fact that the minister had little or no confidence in his congregation, and he let the fact out in a dozen different ways without knowing he was making the disclosure. Perhaps he did not know himself what the real tap-root of the trouble was. To secure the best results it is just as necessary that the people should have the respect and confidence of the minister, as that the minister should enjoy theirs.

What is true of the minister is true to a greater or less extent in regard to every man and woman doing any kind of work in a congregation. If a man takes up his work in a half-hearted sort of way and seems anxious to apologize for being found at it; if he hankers after some other denomination; if he sighs for some other sphere and everlastingly talks about the way they do things somewhere else, he will never do much good. The man who works where he is and as he is and makes the most of his present opportunities is always the man that accomplishes most. Mr. Depew was quite right in telling the Endeavourers that the one thing for them to do was to go home and each consider his own organization the most important in the world. For those who have charge of the organization, it is out of all sight the most important in the world. To every loyal Presbyterian the most important congregation will be his own. At all events that is the one for the well-being and working of which the Head of the Church will hold each one of us responsible. That fact should surely have some influence.

Thanksgiving Day set many of us a thinking about our country as a whole, and it might do some Canadians a little good and Canada no harm, if they would catechize themselves a little about their duty to their own town. We have sometimes thought that we could tell the town in Western Ontario that a man comes from by his air. The people of some towns and villages have a depressed sort of atmosphere about them, which seems to say we live in—, but we are ashamed of the place. The typical man of another town by his bearing proclaims the fact that he belongs to a certain town and is proud of it. He never apologizes because he does not live in a larger place, nor explains why he does not move. He thinks he lives in the best place already, and that very fact helps to make his place one of the best. Civic pride has made many a town prosperous. Without it no place ever amounted to anything. The Highlandman, who said the Fenians might take Toronto and Hamilton and London, but they would never take Zorra, laid his finger on one of the

elements of Scotland's greatness. He thought his own township was the Hub of Canada, just as all Scotchmen think Scotland is the hub of all creation. Thinking a place is the hub often does a good deal towards making it the hub.

The Hon. Alexander Mackenzie used to teil with great gusto of a Fife elder, who always prayed for the "kingdom of Fife and the adjoining islands of Great Britain and Ireland." That elder had one quality that too many Canadians lack—he thought highly of his own community.

We may talk about political remedies until doomsday, but neither Canada as a whole nor any one part of it will ever amount to anything unless our people have a fair degree of national and civic pride.

You can easily tell when the people have no pride of the right kind in their town. The sidewalks are dilapidated, the cows stand in front of the stores and gaze through the windows at the spring goods, the geese pasture on the streets and the leading citizens use their shoulders principally for holding up the front walls of the taverns. The air is always thick with gossip. The school house is mean and the churches meaner. In any fair competition, the first prize for a first-class loafer would always go to a community of that kind.

Moral.—If you want to have a first-class congregation, consider your own the most important in the world. So it is for you.

If you want to have a first-class town, take some pride in making and keeping it nice. Plant trees, cultivate flowers, mow your lawn regularly, shovel the snow off your steps, vote for good councillors and pay your taxes regularly. If your conscience tells you that you should say every mean kind of thing about the town and country that gives you and yours a home and bread, perhaps you had better pack your "duds" and go somewhere else. This world is a pretty large place.

### THOMAS SMITH IN SEARCH OF A CHURCH.

Thomas Smith is a young man who was brought up morally pure but without any deep convictions of religion. At least until a short time ago he was not a true believer in the full sense of that word. His parents were nominally Christians; at all events they would not have felt comfortable if they had been accused of not being believers in the Bible and in Christianity. Nevertheless they were not connected with any worshipping assembly of Christians. Thomas grew up thoughtful, kind, industrious and frugal, such a young man as parents take honest pride in, in whom they have much comfort. As will be understood, nevertheless, there was not any religion in the best sense in that home.

For a little while past, however, there had been a change in Thomas. Religion has come home to him to stay. He sees Jesus Christ, the Saviour of men, as he did not see and appreciate Him before. We need not dwell on the external causes that led to such a result. It was an evangelist, it may be, who spent a few days or weeks in the place. It was a providence possibly that stirred the depths of his soul. It may have been a word in season dropped by a companion. Suffice it to say he was converted, as we sometimes say, and say rightly. He saw his own sin and what it deserved, he saw his need of a Saviour and what a Saviour was provided for him. He accepted the offer made him in the Gospel, he trusted in Christ for his personal salvation. It may be said that the Lord added him to the Church. But in what sense was he added to the Church, when as yet he was not in fellowship with any Church on earth? He was not even a seaholder. What is meant by Church in that sense? If he trusted in Christ for salvation, if he has a well-grounded conviction that he is in Christ, is he not already one of that concrete embodiment that Christ loves and for whom He gave Himself? The Church in that sense cannot mean any particular Church that we see, nay, it must mean more than all the particular parts of the Church universal on earth. Why? Because there is no Church known on earth whose members in every case can be said to be in living union with Christ. The Church for which Christ gave Himself must be that which embraces all that are already in the home of the redeemed ones, all on earth at this moment who are subjects of saving grace, together with all that are yet on to the end of the world to be gathered into the fold of Christ. Give all these what name you will, call it, as some do, the Church invisible, this is what is meant when Christ is said to have given Himself for the Church. To this, then, Thomas Smith now belongs, though as yet he is unconnected with any local congregation or denomination. All will agree in saying that he should as soon as possible associate himself with other believers, that is the proper course for him now to take. He has already made a decision in the greater matter; it is now for him to choose in what is of some importance, but yet subordinate to the former.

There are various forces that may work now, when he comes to choose the Church that is to help him and which he is to help, and all for the further development of that life which has already begun. As he looks around he sees a congregation that is conspicuous for activity and aggressiveness, perhaps he already knows some of the members, and as they commend themselves for their Christian manliness he is drawn in that direction. What the doctrine and the polity of the denomination may be does not cost him a thought. Lower motives than that have weight many a time; for instance, the wealth and social standing of the members of the

congregation, with a glance into the success that may be counted upon from the business point of view. The question as to what God's Word says ought to be considered. What does it if it says anything respecting the conspicuous doctrine emphasized by that denomination? what does it say, if any thing is said, regarding the form of polity adopted by it? We will freely grant that side by side with that the question is of very great importance. Is this Church or denomination, whose claims on my sympathies I am considering, doing effectively the work which God has given it to do? Is the spiritual life of its members of a character that commends it self to men of judgment, is it solid, real, manly, free from mere cant and hypocrisy? There is, moreover, another question which it is not out of place to ask, viz., what are the claims that the Church itself makes? Let us see what this has to do with the question that is more or less agitating Thomas Smith's mind.

Here is a Church, let us say, that claims to be the only true Church on earth; because of such a claim no other body of Christians is to be allowed the use of the word Church. That Church virtually monopolizes to itself the treasures of the grace of God, the benefits of the death of Christ were exclusively assigned to its keeping. There is no Christian ministry outside of its pale, there are no valid sacraments anywhere else but as administered by its priests. Logically there is no salvation outside of that one true Church. There are three bodies that are known to put forward such claims, the Greek Church, the Romish Church, and a section of what is known as the Anglican Church. While all these make these claims, every one of them excludes the other two. All claim a monopoly of the promises of Christ, of Christ's presence to the end of the world, and because of this the indefiniteness of the Church of which the claimant is a member. Yet the positions held by all are mutually destructive of one another. An outsider cannot for the life of him see why if one has a clear evidence that Christ's promises are exclusively with that one, how they can be denied to any other of the triad? On the other hand, if anyone holds that the other two have fallen from the position they once occupied, notwithstanding the promises made, what guarantee has the third for the perpetuity of its existence because of those promises? If the Greek Church has become corrupt, what surety has the Church of Rome, and if the Eastern and Western Churches have ceased to be living Churches what guarantee in succession of the transmission of spiritual grace has the Anglican Church to be preserved in purity? To grant that any one of the Churches has become corrupt, and that life has ceased to flow in it is giving up the whole question so far as the application of the promises are concerned. We conclude then that when a Church makes such enormous claims there is ground there for grave suspicions on the part of an intelligent and fair-minded man. It has ever been the case that the more pretentious the claims that are made the flimsier are the grounds on which these claims rest. The solidity of the support is in inverse ratio to the assumptions that are made.

Furthermore, when we apply a practical test what do we find? When we ask as to the lives of the members of the one and only true Church, what then? Are these members men of higher character, of purer life, of more devotion to Christ, are they more earnest and self-denying in the evangelization of the heathen world than the members of "Dissenting bodies" so called, can one in all fairness say that they are? We may very confidently deny that the members of the only true Church have a monopoly of the Gospel virtues in their everyday lives, that they and they alone are the pure ones, the holy ones in this world. Thomas Smith in his search after a Church, if he has the intelligence and common-sense and spiritual insight that we give him credit for, will very soon come to see that, and he will not choose to cast in his lot with those who are so unlimited in the claims which they make as to the grounds, authority and exclusiveness that are made.

There are many in the so-called Anglican Church that he will love when he comes to know them and the principles on which they act. There are many that refuse to make such exclusive claims on behalf of prelatic episcopacy. They scout the adage—no bishop no Church. They know and are fair-minded enough to acknowledge that there are good men in every branch of the Catholic Church. They do not say that bishops in the sense in which they have bishops are necessary to the Christian ministry, are necessary to the validity of the sacraments. They do not put any faith in what is called Apostolic succession. Episcopacy as they think of it, as they understand it, is the best for them, their preferences are all in that direction. While that is so, and while they do not claim that that and that alone is of divine authority, the rest of us have no fault to find with them. So long as they are fair enough and courteous enough and Christian enough to regard us on terms of equality, we are only too glad to meet them half way, and possibly more than that. Neither they nor we can claim to be followers of Christ and the Apostles, if we say a word to disparage the conscientious convictions and the Christian life of one another. When men have sense enough and Christian candour enough to cease to be so exclusive, then there is room for us to get along in the world as brethren in the Christian faith, even though there be minor differences.

There is another point of view from which Thomas Smith will look at the question of the Church that claims to be exclusive. If that Church be the only true Church, then all blessing must come through it. Then Thomas Smith's conversion was not conversion in the true sense, because it did