

CHURCH THOUGHTS BY A LAYMAN.

SHALL THE SHEEP ELECT THE SHEPHERD?

A LETTER signed "An old member of the Church of England" has been widely circulated, in which the writer attributes the success of dissenting congregations to their electing the pastor. He then accounts for the alleged failure of a certain Church to the people not being allowed to appoint the Rector. From these facts he draws the wide conclusion that the Church would prosper if each flock elected its shepherd. The writer places himself in a very doubtful position by heading his unhappy epistle, "The decadence of the Church of England." No loyal, or well-informed churchman could use such a phrase—*save as a target*. There has been no decadence of the Church of England this generation, save in a few isolated spots of no significance. In one city in Canada there have been twelve churches built in the last thirteen years, in spite of adverse circumstances. The letter reminds us that in the stormy days of 1848-50, Ledru Rollin issued a tract on "The decadence of England," based on the refusal of England to join the revolutionists. Nothing short of revolution would satisfy the pessimists in the Church. The whole argument in favour of popular clerical elections is a tissue of sophisms. Dissent has its failures as well as the Church. The infamous but successful pastor of a Congregationalist flock was elected by the people. The pastor of a Presbyterian Church who has been driven away by petty persecutions, was elected by the people. A Baptist pastor just ousted by a clique of opponents, was elected by the people. These three cases are recent in one city; *they are types of thousands which dissenting annals record*. So disastrous, indeed, had become the results of the popular election of pastors in the Congregationalist body, every vacancy causing a split, that the system is practically abandoned. It is notorious that every dissenting "Church," so-called, has a chief ruler in its synagogue, a Diotrephes, who not only *loves but insists upon pre-eminence in power*. This "Boss" selects, elects and ejects the pastor. When a new preacher is wanted a committee of two or three roam about the country inspecting pastors, just as cattle buyers visit farms inspecting bullocks. The visit of these worthies is known to the preacher who, if anxious for change, "makes an effort" to get a bid, as female slaves used to display their charms to catch the eye of a buyer they fancied. The system has been denounced by the leaders of Nonconformity as a degradation to the ministry—but it is essential to the popular election plan. But even granting that the flocks of dissent do elect their shepherds, there is not one atom of proof, direct or derivative, that any success they attain is the result of this system of election. A gifted preacher draws a crowd not because he was elected by the flock, but because of his eloquence. If "Old Member" is right, then, it follows that a pastor of great gifts would fail if appointed by the Bishop, whereas any stick will succeed if appointed by the people. The

theory is too innocent for this earth. It attributes to a popular vote not only such power as the highest spiritual and intellectual gifts exercise, but blasphemously gives to a Congregational ballot box the honor and the influence which are due to the Spirit of God!

The number of those blessed with supreme gifts for the ministry, is very limited, as it is for all the higher vocations. Men who set so much store on popular election talk as though it is needed only to give each flock power to elect its shepherd in order to fill every pulpit with a Chrysostom or Liddon. There is already sadly too much grading of our clergy according to the vulgar demands of worldly minded congregations, who attend Church not for devotion but to have their ears tickled. The Christian plan would be to send strong men to aid weak congregations, and not for rich churches to monopolize high talent in order to please themselves. The Church of Rome, with its proverbial wisdom, does this; we have met distinguished Roman Catholic preachers who had been placed in charge of very poor congregations in order to build them up. The whole system of placing popular preachers in charge of large city churches is rotten to the core with intense, selfish worldliness. See its fruits in a western city. Three years ago one congregation, because of its wealth and endowments, dominated the Church of that city. Every movement for Church extension the rector and his people plotted to destroy. New parishes were needed; these they worked hard to prevent. Popular services were carried on with most successful results; these they raised up an agitation to squelch. Funds were in their hands ample for new churches, given for this sacred purpose, yet these large funds, sacred to pious uses—*God's money*—were monopolised for the building up, not of the Church, but of a vast family fortune. The agitation to which this pastor and his flock devoted themselves to carrying on, and the diversion of Church money to private enrichment together, robbed the Church of not less than two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Had those funds been owned by the Presbyterians or Wesleyans, they would have reaped therefrom fifteen thousand dollars a year for missions. If we could recover this terrible yearly loss, and could also divert to the cause of Christ the sum now wasted in maintaining party institutions, and regain the loss inflicted by the paralysis caused by party strife, we should acquire for one diocese a yearly revenue of not less than forty thousand dollars, now wickedly wasted every year. A body bled and kept bleeding so exhaustingly, must have miraculous vitality to keep up its strength. Yet those responsible for this appalling waste affect to lament the decadence of the Church, which, but for Divine intervention, their party strife would have utterly ruined.

In the present state of affairs a few crafty, cranky men may rule a Church of England congregation, they may have set their hearts upon schemes for revolutionising the Church. However foolish, however vain such schemes might be, the promoters could inflict irrepar-

able damage by agitating for their adoption. If such men could have their way, they would secure a pastor like-minded, a mere tool of party. Such men are very scarce thank God, but one is in the Devil's market occasionally. To give such men power to afflict the Church for a whole generation, when in all probability they will be soon mercifully removed to another sphere, is a gross injustice to those who would naturally be their successors in the congregation shepherded by this party wolf. Popular election is a danger to the Church in such a case by giving some wealthy, imperious congregation the power to perpetuate a scandalous regime. But, doubtless, we as a Church, have been lamentably deficient in that passion for border enlargement which is a necessity in a country like Canada in order to keep pace with expanding populations. We have been too self-satisfied, we have been content to hold the fort instead of pushing out our forces for conquests over new lands. Popular election of clergy would have aggravated this evil by giving deeper intensity to congregational selfishness, which is the curse of the Church in Canada. No man is a Christian, save in name, as every jail bird is, who cares the snap of his finger whether his pastor was elected partly by his own vote, or was sent by the Bishop, for such a man puts his self-will high above the cause of Christ. The trouble of which the letter we allude to speaks of, arises from the members of a certain Church giving themselves up to a policy of obstruction and petty persecution of their pastor because they did not elect him. Then having abandoned their duties they set up a cry of the "decadence of the Church." It is pitiful. Two of the malcontents are seldom at Church service, they spend their Sundays preaching in Wesleyan and Presbyterian, Baptist and Congregational places of worship. In their cases there is indeed decadence of the Church of England.

Although Wesleyans do not elect their pastors, they give to every new shepherd a loving, honourable, welcome, he is made at once strong by the whole-hearted sympathy of his flock. Where we give a new pastor icy criticism and party snarls, because we did not appoint him, the Wesleyans give affection and help. Every generous heart must be drawn out towards a people so magnanimous, so Christian in spirit. The withering blast of party strife, ever howling in the Church, disgusts every noble nature, so that thousands of souls offended on the one hand by our repelling, revolting agitations, and their waste of God's treasure, are attracted on the other hand by the genial, brotherly, and sympathetic spirit of unity, which prevails outside our borders.

To laymen let me say, if the clergy in your parish are apathetic be you the more energetic. The most splendid victory of the Crimean war was won on Balaklava heights not by the genius of the Commander, but by the fiery enthusiasm of the common soldiers. The Church in Canada needs a common soldiers' battle raging all the time. Men who will not fight unless they appoint their officers, should be

Ang
drumm
appoint
cess.
pastors
such mi
men l v
growth
or wea
shame,
THE
T
A
educat
no dou
insistir
mental
into H
confes
every
the ov
aspirat
minist
of ordi
time s
for su
deavo
howev
The C
she pe
her ne
increa
also t
which
that i
positi
insisti
of edu
for th
No
so lor
vices
faith
may
prop
There
in wh
solut
as if
posse
throu
all hi
of ho
sium
in th
distr
again
even
grav
beca
miss
man
mini
fre
disp
Hol
thos
will