

Confessions of a Sexton

BY Q. E. D.

IF my confession is to be a perfectly candid one, I must state at the start that I have always felt that I am peculiarly fitted by nature to be the sexton of a church. In the first place, I am an optimist, as a man certainly needs to be if he is to be a sexton for many years.

Secondly, I am a patient man—more patient than Job, for he answered back when grumbled at, and I never do except by pointing occasionally to the thermometer when some one tells me the room is freezing cold.

Thirdly, I am a modest, contented man. When some rare soul tells me how well the wheels of my quiet machinery are running, I do not immediately feel called upon to resign my office in the hope of having the position of a bank president thrust upon me.

And fourthly, I am methodical. I sweep the church on Fridays and dust on Saturday afternoons. I give a few whisks of the duster to each pew, and I put three hymn-books in each long centre seat and two in each shorter side pew. I set my watch by the jeweller's every Saturday, so that the bell may be rung on the proper second; and I

part of my work. But I do groan inwardly—inwardly, mind you—at doing needless work.

Sometimes in preparing for a social, a group of ladies will say, "Oh, let's put the piano over there between those two windows."

So I put my shoulder to the wheel and move the piano. Pretty soon another group comes along and says: "Who moved the piano? It will never do to have it there; the music won't sound well." And so I trundle the thing back.

It is the same with the seats; one woman says, "Put them all sideways, sort of free and easy," and then another doesn't like the arrangement, but wants them all removed except a few around the sides of the room. And so my work has been doubled many a time because of the want of the head of the social committee, that makes all its plans and knows what it wants and remembers that there is just as much work to be done after a social as before, with less enthusiasm to carry it through.

Often I have had plenty of willing hands to help remove a heavy object, and the next day had to scour the neighborhood

to find a man to help me get it back into place. And once, just once, let me whisper, after a Christian Endeavor social, I washed all the dishes and then took the dish towels home to rinse out.

But you are not to suppose that such things as these can happen often in a church like ours, or that when they do happen it is with the intention of getting the church's money's worth out of the sexton. It is pure thoughtlessness. Indeed, the church sexton is perhaps the most likely person in the world to fall a victim to other people's thoughtlessness; certainly no one will indorse more heartily than he those old lines,

"More evil is wrought by want of thought
Than is wrought by want of heart."

I have sometimes been tempted to think—for I am an optimist, you remember, and know it is only thoughtlessness—that the best cure would be to have the sextonship a sort of training school through

which each member of the church should pass. I am sure that such a course would result in more genuine sympathy and appreciation than usually falls to the lot of a sexton.

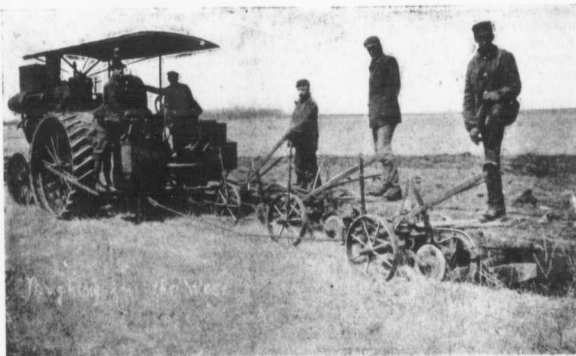
It is said that a man never knows he has a stomach until it gets out of order, and I sometimes think a church never knows it has a sexton until something goes wrong.

If I should ever be promoted to the pastorship, I shall take particular pains to let my sexton know when he pleases me.

Now do not smile at this presumptuous supposition. I said I was an optimist. So I am, and I am optimistic enough to see golden opportunities from my lowly point of vantage. If a minister is one who ministers, then I may claim the title even now.

I believe I have it in my power to be my pastor's best helper, not only in anticipating and quietly providing for his comfort and that of his hearers, but I may install myself as chief watchman on the wall.

It may be my blessed privilege to let the pastor know of this or that young person who left the evening service hastily for fear of showing his emotion; to let the pastor of the deacons know of the stranger who sat in the rear pew; of the Sunday-school boy who hung about pretending not to want anything, but who was really hungering for an encouraging word; to speak a word here and there about the choir's faithful work at their rehearsals which nobody else has so good an opportunity as I to know about; it always delights me to feel that I have been the instigator of some appreciative word.



PLOUGHING BY STEAM IN THE WEST

This represents a scene on Mr. J. P. Dill's farm, near Woomalee, Assa.

Photo by Jas. A. Ismond.

always know just how many taps to give, and when to close with the double tap.

Now having described myself, let me say a word about the church. There are some of the very best people in the world in my church, and sometimes I have thought that even a pessimist could get along as sexton in this most thoughtful, most appreciative of churches.

I must confess, however, that even among these there are people who expect the sexton to do miracles in the way of ventilation; that there are those who cannot stand a draught but will persist in sitting in one; that there are other cold-blooded ones who will choose the seat farthest from the register and then blame the sexton.

I have had complaints from two people at the close of the same service; one that the air was stifling, the other that it was cold and draughty.

And then I must confess that there are a few even among us who will decorate until dark Saturday evening or late Sunday morning, leaving a scattered mess to be swept up; that sometimes even our choir expects the sexton to know by instinct when to have the church open for rehearsals; and that sometimes our women—bless 'em—want the seats dragged out of the lecture-room, the unsightly big stove removed, the piano put into another corner, the primary chairs and tables stacked away, and sometimes rockers and rugs brought from near-by homes for an evening social.

Not that I mind so much doing these things; they are