

## Our Contributors.

FREE PEWS NO REMEDY.

BY KNOXONIAN.

In his recent sermon on Pews, Dr. Cochrane declares that free pews are powerless to bring careless people to the House of God. He says he has gone to such people in Brantford, offered them free seats, and asked them again and again to attend church, but they did not do so. Dr. Cochrane's experience, we venture to say, is the experience of every minister and elder who has engaged in that kind of work. There are men in every community who would not go to church if you brought in a sofa for their personal use, and asked them to recline on it during service. It is possible that the cry of free pews might advertise a church for a time and bring in some who would not attend if the cry had not been raised, but it is an undoubted fact that there are people in every community who would not darken a church door if every church in the place had free pews. The fact there are such people does not prove that a graduated system of pew rents is the right one. That system must stand or fall on its merits. It has demerits enough without charging it with keeping people out of church who don't want to go. If a man wishes to loaf, or drive, or shoot, or fish on the Sabbath, it is hardly fair to say that pew rents keep him out of church. Pew rents do not keep him out and free pews would probably not bring him in. The thing wanted is a change in the man rather than a change in the pews. Whilst we do not like graduated pews, we quite agree with Dr. Cochrane in saying that free pews are not a sovereign remedy for Sabbath desecration.

About twenty years ago we had an agitation in the Presbyterian Church on the organ question. It is amusing—perhaps we should say humiliating—to read the debates of those days and see how the predictions of good men on both sides have turned out to be—well, we shall not say what. Anti-organ men predicted that the organ would split the Church into fragments, and do many other dreadful things. The Church didn't split to any great extent. Some organ men made glowing predictions about the drawing powers of the instrument. It would keep the young people in the church; it would attract the masses; it would do several other good things. One enthusiastic brother said we must have "music to draw the masses." Well, we got the music, but it has not drawn the masses in many places. A melodeon has no power over the masses. Even a pipe organ does not draw a crowd. Hundreds of people walk the streets, or drive, or go to saloons during the hours of service within a stone's throw of dozens of splendid pipe organs. As a regenerator of fallen human nature the organ is a failure. It is said that on a recent Sabbath there was an average of only 336 in twenty of the larger churches in Chicago. No doubt each of these churches has a splendid organ. Old Adam is too strong for an organ.

Far be it from us to say that good church music is not a most desirable thing. No doubt the recent improvement in the service of song in many churches has kept some of our own people from wandering. We ought to give the Lord the best service we can in every department. Good singing is a great advantage to a church in many ways, but the hard fact remains that music does not "draw the masses" to the house of God.

As a regenerator of mankind, free pews may be put alongside of the organ. Both have some good points, but neither can bring many more people to church than come now. Old Adam doesn't want a pew of any kind very badly. That is the root of the whole trouble.

Is there no method by which people who neglect the house of God can be reached? Various methods have been tried. One is to hold evangelistic services in public halls. Events have shown that, as a rule, this plan makes no permanent impression on any community. Good may be done to individuals, and the services may, as some one has said, put "religion in the air" for a time, but the air is not the place where the religion is most needed. It is most needed in the hearts and homes of godless men. Spurgeon, than whom there is no better authority, says he has no confidence in that method of working

as a means to reach men who habitually neglect the House of God.

The only method by which lasting good can be done is by personal dealing—house to house—man to man visitation. This method implies that the membership of the Church work. No minister can do his own work and keep up a continual effort to bring in the careless. There are not days enough in the week for the pastor of a large congregation to do both. If the people who attend church—yes, even those who are members of the Church—would make a vigorous and persistent effort to bring others in, the pew system would soon adjust itself.

It would be interesting to know just how many hours a week some of those who write so confidently about free pews spend in trying to bring careless men into the Church. It is very easy to sit with one's feet on the fender and talk about what the churches should do. There is no great effort required to write an article on pews for the Saturday or Sunday paper. The smallest modicum of brains totally uninfluenced by the smallest modicum of grace, and blissfully independent of the smallest modicum of common sense, can find fault with any method of working.

During the late American War a number of Southern prisoners were being escorted by a military guard through a Northern city. The rabble gathered around them, and began to hoot and jeer, as they could safely do when the proud foe was in chains. "Why don't you go to the front?" defiantly shouted one of the prisoners. The reason why, perhaps, was because some of them were too fond of a whole skin. Perhaps some of them had hired a substitute to stop bullets, or had dodged the draft, or jumped the bounty. At all events they were not at the front. Their special business was to jeer at brave men who had risked liberty and life in the front ranks.

Every honest worker for Christ who is doing his best may well say to those who stand off and lecture the churches about pews and similar matters,

WHY DON'T YOU GO TO THE FRONT?

### CHRISTMAS IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES, SECOND PAPER.

Having sketched some of the ceremonies connected with Christmas in France, both north and south, we shall now pass on to Germany, and some other countries where we have spent that season, or learned of the festivities peculiar to it from others. Let us begin with

#### GERMANY,

where Christmas is the most joyous period of the year. At the beginning of the month active preparations commence. The Christ-market, or fair for the sale of toys, gifts, Christmas trees, wax-candles, etc., is opened—the booths being illuminated and adorned with green boughs of fir and pine. The fifth of December is St. Nicholas Day, and in many families, some one dresses himself with a mask, fur robe, and long tapering cap, and comes in with a bunch of rods and a sack, and a broom for a sceptre. Throwing the contents of his sack on a table, all rush and scramble for nuts, apples etc, while Herr Nicolaus, "the punishing spirit" gives the juveniles many smart raps on the fingers.

On Christmas Day, an exchange of gifts takes place all round, the Christ-kindchen—the "rewarding spirit" rings his bell, and all the household run, tumbling over each other to the apartment where the gifts are arranged, and excitedly hunt up his or her share, and on discovery, embraces the giver. It is a scene of the purest and most joyous feelings—full of poetry and sentiment and happy associations. Customs like this renew the bond of fellowship between families and friends, and produce kindly sympathy.

On New Year's Eve, the people stay up all night, relight the Christmas candles which have not been removed from the Christmas tree, and all join in general merriment. Next day service is held in all the churches, and in the evening, in every house joyous parties amuse themselves with games, charades, dancing and feasting and pledging each other in bumpers of beer to the "Happy New Year."

#### FLANDERS

at Yuletide used to outstrip even England in beer bibbing and gormandizing. By the way, do not the mince pies and plumpuddings served up blaring with rum or brandy, strongly resemble the sacrifices on Saturnian altars? There is a general letting loose of

animal spirits amongst the youthful and robust at Christmas in the northern lands, which are not to be found in the south, at least since paganism has been superseded. Christmas cards are of Flemish origin, and many of the cheap ones, bordered with lace and bright with flowers and gilding, have been made in the convents in the Low Countries, as they were called. Rich Walloons think it a religious duty to minister at this season to the comfort of the poor. Legends abound, which teach the blessedness of active charity at Christmas, and the "accursedness" of the full hand which refuses to scatter to the poor. At Brussels, Ghent, Bruges and Mechlin, there is much in the celebration of the Nativity, which was imported from Spain when Charles V. and his descendants ruled the Low Countries.

#### SWEDEN.

Frederika Bremer gives a pleasant glimpse of Christmas time in Sweden. Though writing at the time in New Orleans, she says her thoughts were far away from her surroundings. She was thinking of the early Christmas morning service in her own country churches—of the sledgings thither in the gray morning twilight, through pine woods, along the fresh snow—of the little cottages in the woods, shining out with their Christmas candles; of the train of small pleasant sledges, with their bells ringing merrily by the way; of the beautiful church with its dark background of wood, beaming with its lighted meadows around; of the cheerful scene of light and purple within it, with those good country folk in their warm costume. "I saw" she adds "the representative of the Diet of Trieste, enter into his wolf-skin cloak at the church door. I saw the children with their beaming glances: I heard the animated powerful hymn 'Hail to thee, lovely morning hour.' Yes, that was Christmas life and Christmas joy."

#### NORWAY.

In Norway, there is a delicate way of giving a Christmas present to a lady on this occasion. It generally consists of a brooch, earring, or other jewellery, which is put in a truss of hay, sheaf of corn, or bag of chaff. The door of the lady's house is pushed open and the bundle or bag is thrown in. In this, the fair recipient has to seek for her present which causes much pleasant anticipation and good humour.

Another delightful custom here is to give a dinner to the birds on Christmas day. In the morning, every gateway, barndoor and paling is decorated with a sheaf of corn, fixed on the top of the pole, from which, it is hoped, the birds will regale themselves heartily on the festive day. Even the humblest peasant saves up a handful of something for the "birds of the air," and what is not picked on Christmas Day remains as a provision for the birds during the winter. The chirping and carolling of the birds about these little granaries, gives an air of heartiness to the day which can be fully appreciated by those who reside in country houses in the winter.

On New Year's Day, friends call on one another, and a routine of wine sipping, flirting, etc., goes on from house to house. Between Christmas and Twelfth Day (January) Mummers are on foot. They are here called "Julebukker," or Christmas goblins. They generally appear after dark, masked and dressed fantastically, and are entertained at the houses where they call. The Mummers perform their antics in silence, representing probably the ghosts of the persons whose names they bear, such as Mephistophiles, Charlemagne, Gustavus, Oberon, etc.

Both in Norway and Sweden, at this season of mid-winter, all, except the very aged and the sick, throng to the venerable wooden church in the midst of the valley; and in the evening the lights of unnumbered cottages, deep down in the valleys, and high up on the mountain crests, will mark the happy and peaceful homesteads of a unique race of peasants. Their robe simplicity and freedom of manners bear witness that they have never submitted to the yoke of a conqueror, or to the rod of a petty feudal lord—a peasantry at once so kind hearted, so truly humble and devout, and yet so nobly proud where pride is a virtue, and who resent any wanton affront to their honour or dignity.

#### CHRISTMAS EVE IN SPAIN

is the gayest, noisiest time of the year, the *buena noche* on which people of all ranks and classes enjoy themselves from dusk to dawn in all sorts of ways. As midnight approaches, there is a great ringing of bells and praying for souls in purgatory—the bells tolling at first in a gloomy strain, and ending in merry chimes. Mass over, joy reigns, the guitar is thrummed, the