

First Congregational church, a most commodious and comfortable audience room with other rooms besides. Here is a prosperous church under the pastorate of the Rev. Dr. Jackson, one of the most respected ministers of the city.

THE CALLING SYSTEM.—III.

BY REV. JOHN BURTON, B.D.

Though I fain would trust that there are many of my brethren whose intense spirituality of heart would suppress the candidating spirit such as I confessed to in my last, yet, seeing misery loves companionship, it has been a kind of consolation to me that some, who, in the course of events, have been in a similar position, have experienced the like tendencies. May we hope that they who voluntarily offer themselves as candidates escape the humiliation altogether!

But what is the effect of the candidating tendency upon the people. Of this one whose sphere is the pulpit can only judge by the echoes of the voices that come from the pew; yet echoes are frequently very distinct. I have heard a few. Here is a large Christian Endeavor Society. Of course, the candidate must present himself there. He has made his bow and done his best. The members are requested to remain for a few moments after the meeting has closed. "Well, how does this one do? Oh! I don't like him; nor I, why does he not shave decently? I don't like the way he stands when he speaks; it is not as nice as Mr. —. No, and there is a squeak in his voice."

Verdict: "He won't do"; and the after-meeting is over. There are thirty votes there, and they count as many as thirty of the most experienced and wise heads of that congregation. Fact, gentle reader, all of it; and much more of a similar kind. "I shall be glad," says a thoughtful elder, "when this business is over. Every form of criticism from a creaking boot to the parting of the hair." "He tells a story well, I like that," etc., etc., etc. I remember a story, heard in youth, of a good woman's opinion of a candidate: "Oh! it was grand! How sweetly he pronounced that word Beelzebub." And on such lines some majorities are gained. Not always. "Did you see Mr. —; he is not much as to character, but he made a lot of money and has influence," and he may be a good man with a hobby. Good men possessed with hobbies or fads and money have influence, and their influence may determine the balance of honest difference of opinion; the candidate knows this, so do the people, and judge accordingly. "We cannot afford to lose him, we are more than satisfied that you are our man, but unless you win him over we cannot manage it." Here again, I would say, I am not making an universal charge—far from it—but stating facts that indicate tendencies, and these tendencies show how needful it is at times that the old order should change, giving place to the new, lest one good custom should corrupt the world. If candidating has a degenerating tendency upon those who are supposed to speak as Christ's ambassadors, it is equally pernicious in its results upon those who hear, who professedly come together for worship, hear as critics, and separate as judges, not of the Word, but of the dress, features, parts of the man who is supposed to lead them in devotion. I have no desire to be father confessor to any people, still I would like to know how often in the selection of a minister the standard given to Titus by Paul, is kept in mind: "In doctrine, uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you."

To bring these notes to a close, the system of calling has followed the abuse of presentation, and was needed to preserve the spiritual liberties of the Church. It has served a good purpose, and has in it elements of permanent value, but it has largely degenerated into a system of "candidat-

ing," which is strictly un-Presbyterian, as it is pre-eminently self-seeking, and self-pleasing. Could the spirit which all our forms of calling imply be generally realized, we would say, leave things as they are, there are spots on the sun, and all things human will show defects; but in all honesty we know that "calling" exists largely but in name, and "candidating" is fast becoming the rule, and of candidating my verdict emphatically is that it is evil only and that continually. During the entire period in which candidates are being heard, the preacher is virtually an actor playing as best he can his part, and the congregation "the gods" in the theatre gallery who are preparing to applaud or otherwise as the humor affects them. I know that these words to many may appear strong, I know, too, that over all human vagaries the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. He can make man's folly to praise Him, I also, most firmly, believe, to use the words of the Assembly, that "modifications in the present practice of the church" are imperatively called for; and if these utterance of mine only tend to deepen the interest of the Church at large in the question now in the hands of an able committee, my humble task will have been accomplished meanwhile. Some other day, as opportunity occurs, further notes may be added.

Gravenhurst, Ont.

ANOTHER WEAK CONGREGATION.

BY REV. THOMAS NAIFRESS, B.A.

In the issue of December 12th, of THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN, the Rev. Dr. Dickson describes a congregation that is essentially weak. Perhaps it would not be uninteresting or without profit to tell of another that is weak in a different way, accidentally weak. It is to be hoped there are not many like it in the Church, but without a doubt there are some besides this one, and a more intimate knowledge of them would help to explain why funds in greater amount are not forthcoming from certain quarters for certain purposes always rightly kept before the attention of congregations by Presbyteries and Assembly's committees.

The congregation in question has session records dating back to the twenties, and long time before that it existed as a mission. It has about one hundred and four *bona fide* members, and has hitherto been reported as having some eighty families. It is, therefore, a small congregation. Let us analyze it and consider the circumstances, which it is affected.

To begin with, it has sixteen remnants of families, with only one person left in each; five parts of families with more than one person, the other part of each family, with one exception, being Roman Catholic; and sixty families,—four of them Church of England and one Methodist, leaving fifty-five Presbyterian families, twenty-one of whom are either hereditarily non-church-goers, or, as in some cases, non-church-goers of very long standing on their own account.

Then, the community in which this congregation is found is one two-thirds of which is made up of French Roman Catholics, who are the old settlers. The consequence has been mixed marriages without number, with the resulting divided families, indifference to one church or both, and loose ideas about the keeping of the Sabbath Day, and mistaken ideas about much besides.

A congregational element introduced in days long gone by has never properly assimilated with the congregation. Numerous families were alienated from the church many years ago, also, by a church heresy, and the most of these have never identified themselves actively with any other religious body although lost to us. Hence the old bitternesses rankle still, and only death and time can efface their marks.

There are in this congregation twelve young people (a considerable proportion) not connected with families, withdrawn from home influences; twelve widows and three

widowers, with some six or eight young people all told in their homes and no children; and some forty families altogether who have no children of Sunday School age.

The congregation is made up in part of townspeople and partly of farmers living at from three to seven miles from town. Seldom is a congregation so made up found to be a success. There is no discord,— "but, but." A union Sunday School (and a good one) in the country divides the forces, whilst the church Sunday School (proper) has a large percentage of children from the Church of England and Methodist Church who do not attend their own church schools, and are yet not sufficiently amenable to discipline in ours in the matter of preparing their lessons, the parents not being particularly interested. Up to five years ago, the catechism was not taught in the schools for many years. Even those who are teachers now had not studied it.

There is no manufacturing done in the town, so that young men are obliged to look elsewhere for a livelihood. Quite a number take to sailing. Several families—a representative part of the congregation—are absent every winter; whilst some twenty sailors and lake men, whose church home (if they would claim it) is in this congregation, are here in winter only. And if there is any man who needs the help of the church nine months of the twelve instead of the two or three he is at home in the course of the year, it is the sailors—such is his exposure to temptations and spiritual dangers.

One of the strong points of our noble Presbyterian Church, one that, amongst others, places her easily at the forefront and at the same time *in medias res* in relationship to the other branches of the Christian Church, the fact, viz., that the Baptist, the Churchman, the Methodist, and who not besides, flock to her for shelter and remain for her sound teaching when estranged from their own church for any reason, or temporarily absent from her, has for once proven a weakness. She has not been firm enough in requiring substantial support from Baptist, Churchman and Methodist alike, who, having sought temporary shelter, have remained with her these many days. Moreover, such has been the notoriety of the cause for the temporary and prolonged absence of some of these from their own church home that they have been largely a source of weakness rather than of strength to the churches among whom they have been scattered; including our own. In any such instances, if these people are not given to understand that they must bear their share of the burdens of the church along with others, they will prove a source of weakness.

It remains only to be mentioned that this congregation has been a stranger to discipline at times when there was flagrant cause for discipline to be exercised in years past.

For reasons that will be quite obvious the writer of this sketch signs himself simply.—One who has had the heart fairly crushed out of him sometimes by the conditions determining his congregation, but who has as often sought courage again by an analysis of the case.

Ram's Horn: Every Christian ought to determine that he is going to follow Christ every day of his life, no matter what it will cost.

Philadelphia Presbyterian: A remark which was not credited to any one, but which deserves consideration by the great host of people in this land, who gather in churches every Lord's Day, is put pointedly in the following sentence: "Doubtless we need better preaching, but our greatest need at the present time is better hearing."

Mr. A. P. Cockburn, ex-M.P., an esteemed elder of the church at Gravenhurst, was banqueted the other evening by his friends in the districts of Muskoka and Parry Sound. Liberals and Conservatives alike joined in doing honor to Mr. Cockburn for his thirty years of labor in the interests of the district. No man in Ontario deserves such an honor more.

Christian Endeavor.

SOUL HUNGER AND SOUL FOOD

REV. W. S. MACFAVISH, B.D., ST. GEORGE.

JAN. 13—PS. 84: 11-2.

Wherever there is life we expect to see growth. But there can be no growth unless food is provided for the living organism. The living, growing plant draws nourishment from the soil, the sunshine, the rain; the animal partakes of that food which will nourish it—the herbivorous partakes of herbs, the carnivorous of flesh. When we have been renewed by the Holy Spirit and endowed with spiritual life, we naturally hunger for spiritual food, and unless we partake of it regularly there can be no growth, no progress, no development. It is natural, and it is even desirable, that we should long for this food, for the hungry soul is filled with good things. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled." (Matt. v. 6.)

What food is provided for the soul that hungers?

The Bible. "This is the nutriment of faith; from it and it alone does faith draw its strength. Man shall live by every word that cometh from the mouth of God." In the Bible there is "sincere milk;" and of this the youngest and most inexperienced child of God may partake and be nourished. Paul told the Corinthians that he fed them with this because they were not able to bear stronger food. (1. Cor. iii. 2). "Young Christians are exhorted to desire the sincere milk of the Word that they may grow thereby" (1 Peter ii. 2).

But there are Christians who are far advanced in knowledge and experience, and for them stronger food is necessary, hence there is provided for them what the Bible calls "meat." Just as a full-grown man who is engaged in active duty requires nourishing food, so the Christian who would exert a powerful influence for good must partake of such food as will strengthen him for his work. How soon a man who set to work without his breakfast would experience a sense of weakness! And yet it is to be feared that a great many undertake the duties of the day without first feasting upon the sweet truths of Holy Writ. Is it any wonder that they soon feel weak and dispirited?

The one who hungers for, and feeds upon God's Word finds it very satisfying. It is said that "hunger is the best sauce." David found the Word of God sweeter than honey in the honey-comb, but this was because he longed so ardently for it (Ps. cxix. 103; Ps. xix. 10; Ps. cxix. 20).

We should be on our guard lest we read the Bible professionally—i.e., read it only with a view of edifying and comforting others. Let our first aim in the study of the Word be, not to prepare something to say to others, but to have our own soul nourished with sacred truth. When we have been nourished and blessed by feeding upon the Word, we are prepared to help and edify others. Moody tells us that he once read the Bible to help others, now he reads it for his own spiritual profit. Doubtless one reason why he handles the Word so effectively is that his own heart is nourished by it.

Though every Christian may have this food at home, there is a place where it is specially served. The Church is the banquet-house. There each is given his portion in due season. It may be that some do not find themselves much strengthened by attending, but the fault is much more likely to lie in themselves than in the food which is served. They come so full of self that they have no relish for what is offered. It is the hungry who are filled with good things; the rich are sent empty away. "The full soul loathes a honey-comb but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet." This Psalm indicates how earnestly the writer longed for the house of God, and doubtless one reason why he was so anxious to be there was that he expected his soul to be abundantly satisfied.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper furnishes pleasant food to the hungry Christian. He can say:—

Hail sacred feast, where Je us makes
Rich banquet of His flesh and blood;
Thrice happy he who here partakes,
That sacred stream, that havenly food.