

Our Contributors.

DR. COCHRANE ON PEWS.

BY KNOXIAN.

A man who has done as much to fill pews as Dr. Cochrane, is entitled to a large audience and a fair hearing, when he discusses the pew question. In a recent sermon, which has been published, he handles free churches, pew rents, and mission churches, with his usual vigour, and comes to the conclusion that the true free church is that church that provides sittings for poor and rich alike, according to their means; for the man who can give a large sum for his sitting in the House of God, in order that others less able, may be less burdened, and yet hear the same Gospel—that graduates its pew rentals, according to the means of the different classes in the congregation, and that says to those who are so poor as to be unable to give anything whatever,—here you can have a Gospel ministry without money and without price. To this theory of graduated pew rentals there are some serious objections. It recognizes and perpetuates class distinctions, based entirely on money. That should never be recognized within the Church of God. It might lead, and in this country where money is so easily lost, would almost certainly lead to most painful complications. Is there a church in Ontario, in which some good, rich man, has not become poor within the last twenty years? The moment the man loses his money and becomes unable to pay a high rental, the church officers are bound to go to him and say "You are poor now, you must give up your family pew and take a back seat in the part of the church allocated to the poor." The man may be an elder, who has served the Church long and well, he may be a deacon, or manager who has worked faithfully, and given liberally for many a year; but because he has failed in business, perhaps through no fault of his own, the church must join with the sheriff and official assignee in making him feel the ills of poverty! Even worse cases than this might occur under the graduated system. A widow might be unable to pay the pew rent which the family could afford while their bread-winner lived. Is she to be asked, as soon as he is buried, to move out of the pew in which she worshipped by his side, and take a back seat with his children, because they cannot now afford to pay high pew rent? Surely she and her children have enough to bear in their bereavement without being forced out of their pew by the system of graduated rentals.

Nobody needs to be told that fortune is extremely fickle in a new country like Canada, or for that matter in any country. The rich merchant of to-day may be a bankrupt to-morrow. A sudden change in the tariff may bring sudden changes to the richest lumberman or manufacturer. The occupant of the best government office may lose his place. The most prosperous lawyer or doctor may meet serious and sudden reverses. Are these changes that are constantly taking place, and that often crush the best men we have, are they to follow families into the Church of God, and constantly remind the sufferers that they have gone down in the Church as well as in the world? Under a system of graduated rentals strictly carried out, the Church of God becomes a kind of mercantile agency, an ecclesiastical Brad-streets or Dun Wiman concern, in which you can estimate the financial standing of the worshippers by the location of their pew in Church.

Whilst it is true that very worthy people might be forced back under a graduated pew system, it is also true that under that system very unworthy people might push themselves forward. Money is often made in this country by methods that are the reverse of clean. Whether the money power is a good thing or a bad thing in the Church depends entirely on the kind of man that has the money.

There are other difficulties that must present themselves if a system of graduated pew rentals is strictly carried out. In most of the churches that are now being erected, one pew is about as good as another. If there is a proper "dip" in the main floor, a back seat is just as good as a front one. A properly constructed gallery is quite as good as any part of the church, and is preferred by many people. The modern "horse-shoe" audience room makes all the pews very much alike, and there is no rational system by which their prices could be graduated if

they were rented. If we go to the bottom of the matter we may find that badly constructed audience rooms gave birth to the system of graduated rentals, and that certainly is no reason why the system should be perpetuated in churches where all the pews are as nearly as possible alike. Bad architecture begat the long, narrow church; the long, narrow church, begat the high priced front pew; and the high priced front pew, begat the graduated pew rents. That is about the genealogy of the thing.

We have nothing in common with the enthusiasts who seem to think that abolishing pew rents will bring the millenium. The system has worked fairly well in many Churches, and where it has taken deep root it might be the most foolish thing imaginable to try to uproot it violently. To disturb the peace and obstruct the work of a good congregation for the simple purpose of changing a system, would be criminal folly. Still we believe that a graduated system of pew rent has some most objectionable features.

It may be found that the system best adapted to most congregations, is that which allocates pews to families for the sake of convenience and propriety, and asks each individual to contribute weekly according to his ability—not according to the location of his pew. The most liberal contributors may often be found in parts of the church that is called "low-priced" under the graduated system.

It may be asked, What is gained by this system? Many things—only two of which have we space at present to mention. A man's place in the church is not fixed by the amount of his money, and the church is not compelled to do the odious work of pushing his family out of their pew when they lose their money.

With all that Dr. Cochrane says about the foolishness of supposing that "free pews" will bring people to church who do not wish to attend, and with what he says about the methods that should be employed to bring them to the House of God, we cordially agree, and to this part of the sermon we hope to return next week.

CHRISTMAS IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES.

We spent Christmas in Paris, as we had many times before, and New Year's Day in Nice, in the South. It may not be amiss, therefore, briefly to describe some of the customs in France, and other European countries at that season. Of all the festivals of the year, Christmas has always been the

MOST POPULAR,

and this, perhaps, for two reasons—its date and its object. Every thing connected with the birth of Christ tends to make it popular in the Church. Bethlehem with its infant, to which great hopes are attached, the stable, the shepherds, the Magi, Herod the cruel tyrant, etc. But the date counts for something in its universal popularity. The early Christians up to the fourth century knew nothing of the *fete* of Noël, the name by which Christmas is called in France. The birth of Christ is, of course, chronologically uncertain. Neither the year nor the season, much less the month and the day are known. In the fourth century, it is said, the Roman Church—which has always an eye to popularity—attached the souvenir of the birth of Christ to the day of the Pagan festival of the Sun, at the winter solstice, when the revolution of the year was finished and when the light which had declined so far, began slowly to increase and give hope of fresh life to the heart. So the *fete* of the Sun of Righteousness was confounded in the imagination and joys of the people with that of the natural sun, and tradition has continued to connect them.

The Mediaeval Church grafted many of the rites, in which her dogmas were shadowed forth, on Pagan ceremonies. The Old World root of the Christmas tree was the feast of Equality or Saturnalia that came close on the heels of the winter solstice. While that festival lasted the slave was as good as his master, and had unlimited license to feast and say what he liked. In earlier times the Church held the day as a *fast* in opposition to the Roman feasting and dancing and present making. By degrees, however, the necessity for this distinction grew less important, and in the eighth century the fast was abrogated, and the earlier and more jovial customs were to a great extent resumed, and have continued throughout Europe to the present time.

Still, in later times, the popular celebration of this festival has partaken of the double character of license and piety, Pagan and Christian customs having become rather mixed.

FRANCE.

Even among the Protestants in the South, Christmas Eve is designated by the peasants the time for indulging in eating, and throughout all the country the midnight mass is followed by the midnight revel. The people cannot conceive or accept the one without the other. Cafés and other kinds of eating houses remain open to five or six o'clock on Christmas morning. It is for the same reason, perhaps, that the *fete* of Noël is the

MOST LITERARY OF ALL THE FETES.

Songs and legends at this time seem to spring up spontaneously. During last century in France literature of this sort was singularly rich, and still continues interesting. Many sacred songs remain in collections even from the sixteenth century. These traditions of Christmas are now, however, all but lost. True, the press continues to publish Christmas stories which the people continue to read; but there is a difference between the song and the story, the former proving faith in some measure, the latter does not necessarily do so. Faith has now rather passed into mythology—the most diverse ideas and sentiments being developed in these stories. Let me quote the substance of a few of the best of those which appeared in the Paris press last Christmas, beginning with

"KING NOEL," BY ALPHONSE DAUDET.

The King arrives at Paris with his little messengers, the Kobolds, laden with playthings for the children of the capital. The chimneys on the houses, the bells in the steeples, the sparrows on the gutters of the roofs, make *fete* for him and celebrate his praises. And what does *he* do? He orders his servants to let fall toys worth a sou into the houses of the rich, and elegant and rare toys on the hearths of the poor. The natural order is thus reversed, and all goes better in consequence. Was the writer thinking of Him who made a stable the birthplace of the Messiah? Not at all. M. Daudet was merely writing a little Socialist story, such as would please the *habitués* of the public reunions. He was preaching the Socialism of divine regret, without any strong conviction, simply as an artist amusing himself by touching all hearts, in fact he was writing a fancy sketch.

M. ANATOLE FRANCE,

is a philosopher, and so he writes a story of philosophical mythology, "The Daughter of Lilith." This daughter of Lilith is a woman, the daughter of nature alone. Having beauty to delight, she is yet lawless and heartless. She had never sinned because she never possessed a conscience, was therefore immortal and consecrated to a weariness more insupportable than all the evils which afflict real humanity. The philosopher makes her utter a prayer which he thinks is destined to reconcile his readers to the conditions and painful contradictions of their destiny: "My God, promise me death that I may taste life; give me remorse that I may find repentance; make me the equal of the daughters of Eve." It is thus seen that Mons. France writes not for common people—his story containing a meaning quite indirect and difficult to be discovered at Christmas time.

THE "JOURNAL DES DEBATS,"

had a story making the cardinal virtue to be Tolerance. Illustrative of this the writer tells of an old priest, who, having found on the way a poor abandoned child, enters the house of a Protestant pastor, and confides to him the duty of bringing up this poor orphan. The priest is pious and strict, and the pastor holds equally firm to his faith. But charity worketh miracles. The priest feels remorse, but this all vanishes, as in the evening he reads the passage in which St. Paul declares that God is no respecter of persons.

"LA REVUE BLEUE,"

which lately lost its eminent director, Eugène Yung, had two stories. One was thoroughly Catholic, in fact the doctrine of Indulgences put into deed. Two children of a good family went into a forest and cut a young fir tree to give as a Christmas gift to the poor children of the village. The intention was good, but the act of stealing was, of course, bad. How is the guilty deed to be reconciled with the good intention, especially as the forester had discovered the act,