

## Our Contributors.

### DO OLD CHURCHES PROMOTE SPIRITUALITY?

BY KNOXONIAN.

One of the journals referred to in a former contribution bewails the decay of spirituality, and tries to prove the existence of the decay by the fact that people build new churches. It is alleged that "the world is conquering the Church;" that the ways of the Church are "becoming more and more the ways of mammon;" and that the "general earthward tendency" of the Church shows itself in anxiety for new church buildings.

This is a serious indictment. For many years back no small part of the consecrated effort of ministers, office-bearers, and Christian people has been expended in the way of providing suitable places in which they and their children might worship their covenant God. The heart of many a devoted man, yea, and of many a noble woman, too, has leaped with joy when the new church was finished and consecrated to the service of God. Every new church in the country represents the labours, the prayers and the self-denial of those who built it. Now we are told that these churches represent an earthward tendency, and furnish standing proof that piety is decaying and the world conquering the Church.

Let us prick these pessimistic generalities a little, and ask what there is in or about old church buildings that promotes spirituality. There stands the old church of thirty, or forty, or fifty years ago. What part of it is the efficient agent in making men pious? Is it the old box-stove with the zig zag lines of pipes running through the church? Putting up those pipes has tried the patience of many a good man, and may have made some of them look anxiously around to see if the children were near. Old Adam often expresses himself vigorously if the whole line of pipes fall for the tenth time as you are adjusting the last one. Is it the high, old-fashioned pew, the back of which catches you in the back of the neck? Many a good snooze has been taken in these old pews. Is it the old egg-shell pulpit fastened high up on the gable like a barn-swallow's nest? Is it the foul air that has been carefully preserved in the building for months? What is there in or about a church of that kind that promotes spirituality? It is all very well to use general terms, and say the old church made men spiritually minded, and the new one has an earthward tendency. Those who say so should come to particulars and tell us just what it was in the old church that had sanctifying power. Some of us have been labouring under the impression that sanctification is the work of the Spirit, the Word, prayer, and the sacraments being the usual means.

It may be said that the services of the old church were better adapted to promote spirituality than the services of the new ones. Let it be assumed that all the ministers who preached in the old churches preached much better than any of the younger men. Let that be assumed, and yet the "decay" cannot have affected the pulpit much for a large number of the men who preached in the old churches preached in the new ones. They preach still, and therefore the alleged decay cannot come from the pulpit. The principal difference must be in the service of song. The lone precentor who led slow music sometimes with his nasal organ, has in many instances given way to the choir. The choir, then, must be responsible for the alleged spiritual decay, that is, if there is any decay, and the service has had anything to do in producing it.

There are two ways of settling this point. The one is abstract and the other concrete. The abstract way is to find out if slow praise, led by one man in an old church, sometimes through the nasal organ, is more acceptable than praise in a new church in correct time, led by several singers who use mainly their vocal organs.

The other way is to make a list of, say a dozen congregations, that worship in old churches and sing as congregations did forty years ago, and a list of a dozen who worship in new churches and sing in more modern style, and ask, Do the new church people do less for the cause of Christ than the old church people? Do they contribute less, man for man, to the cause of Christ? Have they smaller prayer meetings? Have they less interest in mission work? Have they a less vigorous Sabbath school? If a new church gives a congregation an earthward tendency, and old churches lift them heavenward, the people who worship in the old churches should far surpass the people of the new churches in Christian enterprise. Do they? Let any man who knows anything about Canadian churches lay his hand on his heart and answer this question.

But there is another and a crushing way of dealing with the proposition that new and expensive churches are evidence of declining piety. The best church that is built now is not as much superior to its surroundings as the churches of thirty or forty years ago were superior to their surroundings. The old original Presbyterian Church was nearly always the best building in the neighbourhood. It was usually a much better building than the houses of the people who erected it and worshipped in it. If the settlers lived in shanties, the House of God was usually a frame building. If they had log houses the church was often brick. The old stone church was often the only stone building in the neighbourhood for years. We could, from personal knowledge, name many localities in which the original Presbyterian Church was for many years the best building in the neighbourhood, and we believe nearly every Canadian reader of THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN could do the same thing. Considering the amount of money and property they had, and the quality of their other buildings, the early settlers actually built more expensive churches

than any that are built now. How many of the churches erected at the present time are the best buildings in the locality in which they stand? Is there one? Scores of the original churches were for years the best buildings in the neighbourhood in which they stood. If the new church argument proves anything about our piety it proves that we have not as much as our fathers had, for, all things considered, we don't build as good churches as they did.

### FRAGMENTARY NOTES.

#### PROGRESS OF PRESBYTERIANISM IN TORONTO—ERSKINE CHURCH—COUNTRY CLERGYMEN TRANSFERRED TO THE CITY.

The wise man has said that "the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth," and this correspondent has been giving you news about the Pacific Slope, Atlantic Coast, and other places, and could not find time to give a line about our city churches.

The growth of Presbyterianism in Toronto has not only been steady but rapid within the last few years, and without any attempt on the part of ministers at sensational preaching with the object of "drawing." The churches are all well filled and the average attendance highly satisfactory. In a number of the congregations it is difficult to obtain pews, and newcomers have to be satisfied with odd sittings here and there through the church until a whole pew offers. These facts speak much for the city pastors who seem unwearied in the discharge of their regular duties, and a most desirable state of matters is that every congregation thinks that it has the best minister in the city.

Noticeable of late has been the heavy draft made upon country pastors to fill vacancies in the city. It would appear that nearly all our ablest men have been nursed and raised in rural districts. The advice once given to a minister that when he went to preach in the country to put his best sermon in his pocket, would seem to be timely still. It is unnecessary to go into particulars here, but each one of your readers can call up a number of names of not a few professors and ministers who were called from country charges throughout the bounds of our church, and who are at this moment adorning high positions in our leading cities.

During the past year three prominent churches have been filled by young brethren from country towns, and judging from the reputation which preceded them, and the high position which they have taken since their advent to the city, one is the better able to form an opinion of the preaching which is supplied in country towns and villages, which I claim is of a high standard generally.

The three churches referred to are Erskine, which was rendered vacant by the lamented death of the Rev. John Smith, one of Toronto's most faithful pastors; the Central rendered vacant by the removal of the Rev. P. McF. McLeod, who was called to St. Andrew's Church, Victoria, B.C., where he is meeting with well-merited success, and the third is the new church on Bloor Street which promises ere long to be one of the leading churches in the city.

#### ERSKINE CHURCH,

a handsome edifice, stands in a fine situation on Caer Howell Street, and is cosy and comfortable inside. The ushers at the door are polite and attentive. Strangers do not feel awkward at all, or think they are intruding when they enter the church. It was Children's Sunday when we visited it, and the appearance of the young folks and their friends was not only encouraging to the pastor, but creditable to the congregation. The church was well filled and the best of order prevailed. The service was well adapted to the occasion, the singing was excellent, and the tunes such as the entire congregation could join in, a fact which some of our city congregations seem to lose sight of, as they think it sufficient if the choir know the tunes, and who forget that the congregation might like to join in this part of the service.

The Rev. W. A. Hunter, the new pastor of the church, conducted the service, which was both interesting and instructive throughout. The sermon was an eloquent exposition, in plain, intelligible language, of gospel truth, and it abounded with telling illustrations to which the large audience listened with the closest attention, evidently being deeply impressed with the speaker's utterances.

Mr. Hunter will be a valuable addition to the pulpit power of this city, and if spared is likely to take no inconsiderable share in the building up of Presbyterianism in Toronto. He was the first minister of the church in Parkdale, where the fruits of his labours are now to be seen in one of the largest churches in the neighbourhood, indeed, it may be said in Toronto, as this suburban town is virtually annexed. His next church was in Orangeville, whence in response to an urgent call he transferred his services to Erskine Church in this city. Like his predecessor Mr. Hunter is of north of Ireland parentage, and was born at Millbrook, Ontario, and from appearances is yet on the sunny side of thirty. He is a graduate of Knox College, Toronto, from which school of the prophets there have come many who may be said to be "mighty in the Scriptures and wise to win souls."

What is now called Erskine Church is one of the oldest congregations in the city. It was established in 1837 and was originally known as a U.P. Church, worshipping in a building on Adelaide Street. In 1838 Dr. Jennings came to Canada and was settled over the congregation as pastor the following year. In 1845 a new church was built on the corner of Bay and Richmond Streets. For many years he discharged his pastoral duties with great faithfulness. He was a thoughtful, scholarly preacher, and much beloved by his congregation. Dr. Jennings was succeeded by the Rev. John Smith, who

was called from St. Paul's Church, Bowmanville, where he had gathered a large and influential congregation.

The Central Church is a split off the old Bay Street Church, and the consequence is that we have now two flourishing congregations.

Shortly after Mr. Smith's settlement the congregation became infected with the up-town movement and erected the present edifice, which is an ornament to the part of the city in which it is placed, besides doing a great work on behalf of Christ and his gospel.

Toronto, Jan. 1889.

K.

### WALKS AROUND FLORENCE.\*

SOME SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES.

My last letter gave a brief but imperfect account of a visit I made to the Protestant Cemetery, and to the Public Cemetery at San Miniato. To-day I add some notes of a supplementary kind which may interest at least a few. And first as regards

#### THE PROTESTANT CEMETERY.

In addition to Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Mrs. Holman Hunt and others whose monuments I found covered with wreaths on All Saints' Day, there are several other English and Americans who sleep in this pretty spot. Amongst these I mention only the best known, such as Walter Savage Landor, Mrs. Trollope, and her accomplished daughter-in-law, Thendosia, whose letters to a London periodical contained the most accurate account of the art revolution in Tuscany, which led to the formation of the present Italian Kingdom. Here, too, repose the poet Arthur Clough, and the well-known American, Theodore Parker.

#### SAN MINIATO.

The hill on which the church and cemetery now stand, was covered in ancient times with a forest which gave shelter to some of the first converts to Christianity, who secretly built a small oratory on the spot on which the church now stands. Amongst these was an Armenian prince, named Miniato, who served in the army of the Roman Emperor Decius. Accused of belonging to the new faith, he was thrown to the wild beasts in the Amphitheatre outside the walls where the Emperor had his camp.

Legend says that the fervency of his prayers preserved him from death on that occasion, but he was afterwards beheaded in A.D. 254, at the weir of the Arno, which I can see from the window at which I write. The holy man forded the river with his head in his hand, and ascended the hill of San Miniato, by the only way then existing. He was buried on the site of the present church to which his name was given. In course of time thirty-six churches were dedicated to his memory in Tuscany, and his name was associated with that of John the Baptist, as patron saint of Florence.

#### THE VIA CRUCIS.

A steep path leads up from the Arno to the hill on which the church now stands. It is composed of a series of stone steps, and is bordered by cypress trees, and at intervals are emblems of the cross. It is very picturesque though steep, and before the present winding path, and carriage road were constructed, it was the only way which led to the summit above. Dante alludes to it in the following lines translated by Longfellow:

As on the right hand, to ascend the mount  
Where, seated is the church, that lordeth it  
O'er the well-guided above Rubaconte,  
The bold abruptness of the ascent is broken  
By stairways that were made there in the age  
When still were safe the ledger and the stove.

The Rubaconte referred to above was the old name of the Ponte Alla Grazie, a bridge by which passengers and carriages now cross the Arno, just beneath the hill.

Ten minutes' walk above San Miniato is placed the tower of San Gallo, and farther on a few minutes, is the country house in which

#### GALILEO GALILEI (1564-1642)

resided while making his observations on the moon. He was born in Pisa, the son of a Florentine noble. The vibrations of a lamp in the Cathedral of Pisa led to the discovery and use of the pendulum, and in 1589 he accepted the chair of Mathematics in Pisa. He then began to examine the accepted systems of astronomy, and finding them incorrect, he adopted that of the Prussian philosopher, Copernicus. His views were at once denounced as heretical, as opposed both to the teaching of the Bible and of the Fathers of the Church. He therefore resigned his chair at Pisa and accepted a Professorship at Padua.

He invented the telescope in 1609, by which he first examined the surface of the moon. Having joined a party in the University which was resolved to expel the Jesuits, he was again denounced as dangerous to the church. He went to Rome when Paul V. granted him an audience, and was so well pleased with him as to promise him protection from the Inquisition, on condition he should cease to teach the Copernican theory of the earth's motion. Galileo returned to Florence and soon after went to reside at a country villa, "Giollo," The Gem, making use of the

#### TOWER OF SAN GALLO

and occasionally also of Fiesole for his observations of the heavenly bodies. I have again visited both the tower and the villa, the latter of which has his bust in marble and a long

\* This, the last of T. H.'s communications to THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN, received only a short time before the announcement of Mr. Henning's sudden death at Florence, Italy, will be read with melancholy interest by many of his friends. He was a man whom to know was to love.