

Our Contributors.

WHICH FOR THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN

CONCERNING THE MAN WHO IS NOT THERE.

BY KNOXONIAN.



HEN Brother Boanerges appeared in the pulpit to preach his annual Thanksgiving sermon he was not in a happy frame of mind. The empty pews worried him. Lumber is a good thing in its own place, but boards make a poor audience. They are not appreciative, nor responsive, nor retentive, nor do they give anything to help the collection. Brother Boanerges never did like an audience composed mainly of pine boards worked up by the carpenter into the form of pews. So this Thanksgiving morning he took occasion to give a somewhat severe dressing down to the congregation. That would have been well enough if his voice could have reached the people who were not in church but it didn't. The hot shot struck the empty seats and the few devout worshippers who were in their places to give thanks, and had not been absent from a Thanksgiving service for years. The absent parishioners were far out of range. Not a grain of shot went near them. It was a clear case of hitting the good man who was there while aiming at the man who was not there.

There is a vast amount of pulpit ammunition fired at the man who is not there. Usually, if it hits anybody, it hits the man who is there and who does not particularly need to be hit. Some preachers fire their ammunition about as gracefully and skillfully as an average woman throws a stone.

Brother Indiscreet worked faithfully during the week on his morning sermon. He thought he had something pretty good for the people and looked forward hopefully to Sabbath morning. Sabbath morning came and with it a North-east wind, a raw drizzling rain, stiff joints, digestive organs on strike and severe colds. The congregation was thin—of course we mean numerically thin. As Dr. Burns used to say, the people were "not well out." To tell the whole truth, Mr. Indiscreet himself was physically a "little off," and not in the right frame of mind to preach. So he went straight for the people who were not there, and punished the people who came miles through mud, rain, and sleet to worship! Beecher's recipe for wet Sabbaths was the right one—"preach so well to the people who come that you punish those who remain away." It requires a sound body and a miracle of grace, to work out that system under a raw drizzling November rain and a North-east wind.

Many a prayer meeting has been spoilt by scolding the man who is not there. A few devoted people meet to read the word, sing, praise and pray to their covenant God. Usually they are the choicest Christian people in the community. A coarse, thoughtless man, perhaps indeed a minister, looks upon the little band whose hearts God has touched and he launches out into a violent denunciation of the crowds who are on the streets, and in the hotels, and at public resorts, and contrasts their number with the number present. Now supposing that were a proper thing to do in some place and at some time, is it the right thing to do at the prayer meeting? The good people who are there came there to pray, not to listen to denunciation of those who are absent. Is it their fault that others did not come? Dr. Wardrope, perhaps the best prayer meeting minister in the Church, would not treat a few good people in that way. Not he. He would tell them some good helpful gospel truth, pray with them as few men can pray, and send them home happier, better, purer and much more likely to bring others to prayer meeting.

We have heard men denounce what they call "small meetings," in a spirit and manner which laid them fairly open to the suspicion that all they wanted was a "crowd" to pose before. They were thinking far more of the "crowd" than of the prayer. Provided the "crowd" was big enough and they were allowed to perch on the highest place on the platform, it would probably not have troubled them much if the prayer had gone no higher than the roof.

There is a lot of pulpit ammunition wasted on the infidel who is not there. He is very seldom in church, and if he does happen to drop in, any reference to his supposed views swells his head. The worst cases of swelled head generally arise in this way. When Dr. Stuart Robinson preached in Toronto thirty years ago, he used to handle certain kinds of sceptics rather roughly. It was all right enough for him to do so because he preached to a mixed multitude, and he was a master at the business. A would be sceptical student, whose mental equipment was as slender as the suggestion of a moustache traced on his lip, used to come out of the hall chuckling over the fact that the eloquent Doctor had made a personal attack on him!

Ordinary preachers rarely are honoured with the presence of a live infidel in church, and if they are so honoured, should the time of hundreds of Christian people be wasted in feeding the vanity of a creature whose only claim to notice is, that he tries to make his neighbours believe that he follows Bob Ingersoll or some other monster of impiety.

For firing at the man who is not there, and hitting him in the place where he was missed before, the General Assembly comes easily first, the Synod comes second, and the Presbyteries should have third honours. The whole business of issuing circulars, passing resolutions, and adopting recommendations, is radically, intrinsically, essentially, everlastingly defective, for the simple and all-sufficient reason that they never reach the men that need them most and want least to be reached.

This is a big subject and must have treatment by itself.

A THANKSGIVING TO GOD

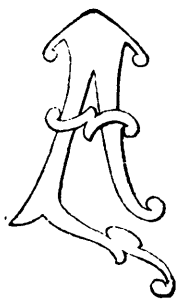
ROBERT HERRICK (1594-1674).

Lord, Thou hast given me a cell,
Wherein to dwell;
A little house whose humble roof
Is weather proof;
Under the spars of which I lie
Both soft and dry—
Where Thou, my chamber for to ward,
Hast sent a guard
Of harmless thoughts, to watch and keep
Me, while I sleep.
Low is my porch, as is my fate—
Both void of state,
And yet the threshold of my door
Is worn by poor
Who thither come, and freely get
Good words, or meat.
Like as my parlor, so my hall
And kitchen's small,
A little buttery, and therein
A little bin
Which keeps my little loaf of bread
Unchipt, unblead.
Some brittle sticks of thorn or briar
Make me a fire,
Close by whose living coal I sit,
And glow like it.
Lord, I confess, too, when I dine,
The pulse is Thine,
And all those other bits that be
There placed by Thee—
The worts, the purslane, and the mess
Of water-cress,
Which of Thy kindness Thou hast sent;
And my content
Makes these and my beloved beet
To be more sweet.
'Tis Thou that crown'st my glittering heart
With guiltless mirth,
And giv'st me wassail bowls to drink
Spiced to the brink.
Lord 'tis Thy plenty dropping hand
That soils my land,
And giv'st me from my bushel sown
Twice ten for one;
Thou mak'st my teeming hen to lay
Her egg each day;
Besides my healthful ewes to bear
The twins each year—
The while the conduits of my Rhine
Run cream for wine.
All these and better Thou do'st send
Me to this end—
That I should render, for my part,
A thankful heart;
Which, fired with incense, I resign
As wholly Thine;
But the acceptance, that must be,
My Christ, by Thee.

Written for THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN

AN AUTUMN HOMILY.

BY FIDELIS.



ALTHOUGH this year we have not had summer protracted into autumn so lingeringly as in some seasons, yet we perhaps welcomed the more heartily, when they came, our few Indian summer days, full of the warmth, light and dreamy pathetic beauty of this exquisite season, which seems like the last expiring flash of Nature's life before it is apparently quenched in the seeming death of winter.

But now, the seeming death has come. Outdoor life is no longer the delightful thing it was,—in the country. There is no more pleasant floating over still waters; no more wanderings in summer woods; no more long evenings on piazzas, spent in watching the sunset hues fade gradually into purple twilight over winding river or placid lake; no more moonlight strolls amid the shadows of the woods or on the moonlit sward; no more fragrance of roses or gleaming whiteness of water lilies; only the bare boughs and sodden leaves that seem the symbols of winter's desolation. Even October with its bluster and blow, and its keen bracing air, seems to put us on a more

distant footing with Nature, although those who still cling to the country life, during that glorious month, till all its glory is over, have many a rich feast of light and colour to reward their constancy. But November comes at last, stern and uncompromising! She quickly strips the trees of their last bright leaves, while the bare boughs or the dark branches of the evergreens toss to and fro, as it would seem, in wild remonstrance against Her cruelty. She shrouds the blue sky in masses of heavy dark cloud that soon descend in freezing rain or stinging sleet. She lashes the waves of our lakes, till, in their fury, they remorselessly swallow up helpless barks and precious lives. Looking at the havoc She makes of all the summer beauty we loved, we feel as if we could no longer rejoice in Nature as the revelation of God, and are inclined to echo Bryant's sigh:

"The melancholy days are come, the saddest of the year,
Of wailing winds and naked woods, and meadows brown and sere."

And to those who love the free and open summer life of the country, with all the shy happy creatures that flit through the shadowy recesses of the summer woods; and who seem to hold a closer communion with the Divine Spirit, under the brilliant many-coloured veil which we call Nature, this destroying approach of winter brings real deprivation.

But there are other lights in which we may look at the coming winter and find that even the dreary days of closing autumn are in their way a revelation of God to our spirits in a still deeper degree than the more joyous beauty of spring. While He reveals Himself undoubtedly to the seeing eye in the material world, which is the hem of His garment. He chooses that such material revelations shall always be changing and transitory, and that the fleeting, unpermanent character of material objects shall always be forced upon us. To the thoughtless or superficial observer,—to what Scripture calls the "the carnal mind,"—material things are the only realities. To the eye which has once seen the beauty of the spiritual, they are but shifting and temporary manifestations. The artist is greater than his works and parts lightly with that which he can reproduce at pleasure. He who is the source of beauty lives—though every temporary and visible manifestation of it should be swept away. And He can restore without effort that which we mourn to see laid waste! It is because we are so straitened in our powers, so limited in our resources, that we mourn for the dying summer, and see with sorrow the fresh green leaves of spring lying crumpled and brown, and almost unrecognizable, beneath our feet! But to the eye which can see Him whose laws are even now at work forming and nourishing the young buds which in the spring are to clothe the woods anew in exquisite green, this fall of the leaves and seeming death is but one beat in the perpetual rhythmic ebb and flow of that succession of natural phenomena which we call Nature. It is no more really death than it is death in the body, when the blood is sent from the heart to the lungs, to be purified and fitted for resuming its vital functions.

But notwithstanding that this deeper look into the mysteries of life forbids us to regard the falling leaves and the purifying winds as really gloomy and destructive processes, still the season carries a needed discipline to those who intensely love communion with Nature, and are proportionately sensitive to her varied aspects. To these, especially to the yearly increasing class who sojourn in the country in summer, and return to town for the winter, the closing of the season and shortening days bring a separation almost complete, from the face of Nature, which seems like that from a dearly loved friend. The skies are left them, certainly; but the familiar fields and woods are either far away, or, in our northern climate, so transformed by the icy touch of winter, that they are almost as far removed from close and familiar intercourse as if it were by thousands of miles between.

Yet even this deprivation carries with it a needed lesson. It is a yearly reminder that the fashion of this world passeth away; that in the spiritual, not in the material, our true joy is to be; that God is greater than His works, richer than His gifts, and that only the Infinite and the Eternal—not the limited and the transitory—can ever satisfy the longings of an immortal spirit. It is only as we see God in and behind His works, that they really minister to our highest life; it is only as we see Him outreaching and infinitely surpassing His gifts, that they can really be safe to us. Just in so far as we are satisfied to rest in them without looking beyond, we are idolaters.

One thought more. The enjoyment of natural beauty often becomes a purely selfish pleasure, resulting in a dreamy indolence and passivity.

"To sit on rocks, to muse o'er flood and fell" is to some natures a sort of lotus-eating. If too long indulged in, it almost effaces the claims of active life and social sympathy, in a delicious dream of