

The Canadian Independent.

ONE IS YOUR MASTER, EVEN CHRIST, AND ALL YE ARE BRETHERN.

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CHURCH ENTERTAINMENTS.*

BY MR. JAMES MCDUNNOUGH.

The subject of church entertainments and their place as part of the Church's work is one of the questions of the day, as is evinced by its discussion at Conferences, Councils and Assemblies. A question, too, on which great diversity of opinion exists. Before the question proper can be taken up there are two points to be settled—first, What is a Church? Second, What is the true welfare of a Church? First, then, What is a Church? Good old Dr. Cruden's definition is at once scriptural and comprehensive; he says "a church is a religious assembly—selected and called out of the world by the doctrines of the Gospel, to worship God according to His word." There are two points in this definition worthy of notice; first, called out of the world; the idea is separation, and this truth is borne out by both Old and New Testament teachings. The chosen people of God, the Church in the Wilderness, were over and over again commanded to have no communication with the surrounding nations; not to inter-marry or form alliances, and the anti-type, the Church of the New Testament, is to be a church separated, see Paul's teachings, 1 Cor. vi. 14 to 17, where among other exhortations, we have this, "Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord;" in Rom. xii. 2, we read "Be not fashioned according to this world." John, in his first Epistle, chap. ii. 15, says "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Again, in 1st Peter, ii. 9, we read "Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, an holy race, a people for God's own possession," and James says, still more emphatically, "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God."

The second point is, "Called to serve God according to His word." What are His teachings, they must be our guide, we cannot quote one hundredth part, but take by way of example two passages, 1 Thess. v. 22. "Abstain from all appearance of evil." Titus ii. 12. "Denying all ungodliness and worldly lust, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world," and other passages bearing on the same subject are 1 Peter, ii. 12; 2 Tim. ii. 4; 1 Cor. vii. 29, 31.

The whole tenor of New Testament teachings is against church entertainments, and let any one who doubts this, carefully and prayerfully read for himself.

The second question is, What is the church's true welfare? It would seem almost as if the answer to this, (judging from what is seen all around,) was, fine buildings, large congregations, wealth, position, popularity—but when we appeal to the Law and the Testimony, and ask what is the Master's desire for his Bride, the Church, we find written in Eph. v. 25—"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water by the word; that He might present the Church to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." This then

we say is the Church's true welfare, this its aim, to be spotless, pure, undefiled.

Having thus seen what a Church is, and what its true welfare, we now present a few objections to entertainments being considered a part of its legitimate work.

First.—The true welfare of the Church being spiritual growth and increase in purity, and Christ likeness, these entertainments under its auspices and for its so-called benefit distract the mind from the great object in view, and give to young people especially the idea that the Church is a place where they can have a good time, rather than a place of a true service. You rarely find those frequenting and taking an active part in these entertainments active in the prayer-meetings, or taking part in Christian work. To prove this, announce an entertainment, and your place will be full; announce a special prayer-meeting and you will have a dozen or two at most. Straws show which way the wind blows.

Second.—The whole associations are worldly. Worldly people, because talented, are invited to assist, worldly songs, music, etc., form the programme. As a rule there is nothing elevating, nothing to lift the mind up, or to inspire noble thoughts and desires, but much that is frivolous, insipid, and even low. Read, too, the newspaper comments the day following, with accounts of "fashionable audience," applause, and encores, and this in buildings dedicated and set apart for the worship of God, for though all places should be holy, and God has no special dwelling place, yet church buildings are in an especial manner set apart for His service and for His worship, and should not be, as they too often are, desecrated by performances that savour of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Third.—The influence on the world itself is bad, whatever they may say to the contrary, worldly people do expect something different from the Church than they do from their fellow worldlings. They will come to your entertainments and enjoy them, and go away and sneer at your Christianity, and ask what better are you than we? and where is the difference? Just here we would say we are not condemning amusements or entertainments in their proper place. Recreation is necessary and beneficial, the bow must be unbent at times, but the church is not the proper place for it, nor is it part of the church's place to provide it. The Church's work is to save souls and to build up believers, and no one can point to a single soul converted, or an enquiring one who received benefit at one of these entertainments, but we can point to many who have been hindered, and whose convictions have been stilled.

The plea is sometimes urged that we must meet the world on its own ground, that, while all very well to picture an ideal church, we cannot expect to attain to this ideal, so must just take things as we find them and do the best we can. This is false logic. Are we to be content to grovel here below like the man with the muck-rake in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, while the crown hangs overhead waiting for us if we will only reach up and take it. There is too much of this spirit, and to its prevalence the Church owes much of her want of success. Our aim should be to uplift her and raise her nearer to the Master.

Another objection that might be urged, is Christian expediency. Even allowing that church entertainments might be

properly conducted the fact remains that in a majority of instances they are not, and are to many a cause of offence and stumbling, therefore it is not expedient to have them. The Apostle Paul's rule applies here, "All things are lawful, but all things are not expedient." 1 Cor. x. 23, and in carrying out this rule he says (Rom. xiv. 21): "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or made weak," and again (1 Cor. viii. 13) "If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."

Space will not permit of our enlarging on this and other points, but we trust enough has been said to stir up thought, and if our churches are set thinking and the resolve is formed to aim high, then the object of these few simple thoughts will have been accomplished.

News of the Churches.

MELBOURNE.—On Friday evening last a pleasant and most agreeable surprise was given to the occupants of the Congregational parsonage, Melbourne. About 6 o'clock between 60 and 70 of the pastor's friends took possession of the house, spread a sumptuous repast and invited him and Mrs. McIntosh to tea. A very agreeable evening was spent in music and conversation. A beautiful sewing machine, the "family singer," worth \$45, and a purse of \$17 were presented to Mrs. McIntosh in token of the esteem and confidence in which she as well as her husband is held. In replying to the kindness, Mr. McIntosh took occasion to refer to the many acts of kindness done him since he came to this place by the members of the church and his many friends of other communions. He spoke of the unity and harmony that now exist and the encouraging prospect that notwithstanding some losses and difficulties the church is in a better financial condition than in any period of its past history. At 10 o'clock the whole company bowed together before their common Father—the Father of all Mercies—in thanksgiving and praise for all His goodness, and then separated. A similar meeting took place in the same house some four weeks ago, when thirty of the young people of the Durham Congregational Church and their friends visited their pastor. Several teams loaded with provisions left the cellar, pantry, and oat bin well stored. Kind and earnest addresses were given by Messrs. Robertson and Skinner, students of theology, and a few words by Mr. McIntosh thanking the friends for their kindness and urging them to earnestness in the Master's work. Both of these visits were complete surprises and show the love and harmony existing between pastor and people. *Richmond Guardian, Nov. 4th.*

As that prisoner whom the French Revolution liberated from the Bastille, and who hung up his fetters in his English home, that, looking on them, he might bless the bitter discipline that taught him the sweetness of liberty; even so we, looking down and back on the quarries where we were hewn and sculptured, will thank God for every wound, and will bless Him for the sharp tools and stern blows that cut us loose from those coarse and selfish incrustations of the life of sin.

Obituary.

Another aged member of the Congregational Church has gone to his rest, in the person of the late John Fullbrook Howell, who died at his residence, 46 Maitland-street, Toronto, on Sunday morning, October 30, 1881, in his eighty-sixth year. Born at Southwark, London, England, in 1796, his parents were God-fearing people and led their only child in the paths of religion. At the age of seventeen he made a profession of faith, and united with the Independent Church, Silver-street, under the Rev. Wm. Jones. As a young man, it was his privilege to be connected with Surrey Chapel under Rev. Rowland Hill; and after marriage, he and his late wife were members of Grove Chapel, Camberwell, with Rev. Joseph Irons as pastor, and subsequently of Hanover Chapel, under Rev. Dr. Collyer.

In 1883 they came to Canada, with their family, and for a time took up their abode at Port Credit, then a promising settlement, where they lived until after the rebellion of 1837. The subject of this notice, with whom loyalty was a sacred principle, and the upholding of constituted authority a rule of life, was placed on military duty with others at the Credit, and rendered services to the Government in that eventful year. The only place of worship there was the Meeting house of the Methodist Church, in which Rev. Peter Jones, Indian missionary, ministered to his people. Here our departed father worshipped with his family, and gladly joined in the good work of disseminating the truths of Christianity among the Indians.

In 1845 he removed to Woodbridge, where the greater part of his life in Canada was spent. Keeping a general store and being postmaster of the place, he was widely known and highly respected for his strict integrity and consistent Christian life. Joining the Pine Grove Congregational Church near this place, with his late lamented wife, they gave their active sympathy and support to the cause of Christ, and did what they could to help on the good work, and are now held in kindly remembrance by the good people there.

Having a few years ago retired from business and come to Toronto, he has enjoyed the membership of Zion Church, where his place was seldom vacant. During an illness of about three weeks, notwithstanding severe bodily suffering, he was resigned and submissive to the will of his Heavenly Father, relying on the Divine Word and promises, which were very precious to him, and which he frequently quoted with great satisfaction and triumphant faith. His pastor, the Rev. H. D. Powis, improved the occasion in an impressive sermon on Sabbath last, upon the text—"Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season." The appropriate hymn was used before the sermon, commencing:—

"Behold the western evening sky,
It melts in deeper gloom,
To calm the righteous sink away,
Descending to the tomb."

11th, October. 1881.

—The Greek Testament in the ancient tongue is now, by order of the Greek government, read in its 1,200 schools that have 80,000 pupils.

*Read before the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society of the Northern Congregational Church, Toronto.