

Thoughts on the Church.

(Written for the Stouffville Ministerial Association.)

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THE Church of Christ may be likened to the strawberry plant. At the same time that it sinks its roots into the earth and bears blossoms and fruit, the little plant is sending out its tendrils all around to grasp the earth and make new centres of life and fruitfulness. These in turn bear fruit and send out their tendrils to do as they have done. So the Church, planted by Christ in Jerusalem, is to be fruitful in thousands of souls, and at the same time to reach out around through all Judea, unto Samaria, and in due time, conditioned on the activity of the laborers, it is intended to sink the roots of its tendrils in the uttermost parts of the earth. In accordance with this principle it should be emphatically stated and always remembered, that the Church cannot make progress in extending the Master's Kingdom in the various nations unless there is the tarrying in the "upper room" and the outpouring of power; and missionary aggression is always the direct outcome of a true awakening among any company of believers. Also, on the other hand, the best way to arouse a languid church is for its most devoted members to go forth to the perishing world, and in proportion as a church is interested in the evangelization of the heathen it will be blessed and prospered. But a church that is not actively interested in the heathen is stultified. The flow of power and grace is stopped, and the body which should have been quickened and developed is stifled. To bring the tithes into the storehouse that there may be meat in the Lord's house for the sustaining of reinforcements in distant lands is a sure way to fill a church with blessing. Whereas, so long as selfishness and the neglect of the heathen and the Master's command are allowed to prevail, no amount of exertion can secure the ingathering of souls into the fold of Christ.

By the neglect of this principle a great deal of energy has been and is wasted. The Master said: "I have chosen you and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit," and also, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth"; and unless a church is denying itself and going forth with such an earnestness that each member is influenced by the enthusiasm, we may strive by the use of lexicons, commentaries, magazines, and books of the most recent authors, by written sermons, or extempore discourses by the best trained choir, by the latest improvements and furnishings, by tea-meetings and festivals, by lectures and entertainments, by a full equipment in all the offices of the church, by every imaginable earthly means, and yet strive all in vain, for it is only on the condition that we love Him and keep His commandments (John xiv. 21, 23), that the Master has promised to manifest Himself unto us, and He and the Father abide with us.

In its mission the Church is to be the medium of the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." A dispensation has been committed unto us forbidding us to selfishly absorb the blessings of the covenant, and binding us to leave the centres where the Gospel has been preached and go unto the perishing millions who have never heard it. The seeking by the ambassadors of the cross for the old established centres and wealthy churches is therefore contrary to the mind of Christ, the spirit of the Gospel, the last command, and the practice of the apostles. Let us pray that God may baptize us with that love for His Son

and the perishing world, and that spirit of self-renunciation that will lead us each to say: "Send me to that charge, circuit, parish, or field to which no one else would wish to go, for I want to go, not to those who need me, but to those who need me most."

But in addition to its missionary work in foreign lands, or rather in order to give effect to the work of its missionaries, the Church is responsible for the maintaining of a high standard of practice among its members in the old centres, and it is to influence the world near and far, chiefly by the outworking of the truth in a strong, holy, loving life. It is the body of Christ, and as such is to grow by changing in the quality of its tissue as well as in size, and not to be made up artificially like a barn or a coral reef by the adding of piece to piece. It is to increase in quality as well as in quantity by the marvellously nourishing and developing power of the Word. In order, therefore, that the "body of Christ" may be vigorous, it must be kept free from disease and disorder by preventing the introduction of anything harmful, and the nutriment of "the pure milk of the Word" must have free course in all the tissues, arteries and capillaries. Because of the disregard of this many of our churches are cold and weak, are chilled by the influence of the world, and crippled by the presence in choirs, official boards, the staff of the Sabbath school, of the vain, the lustful and those greedy of lucre. These "wicked spirits in high places" cause a constant festering, irritation and lameness in the Church, and give a defiant resistance to the man of God and the Word of God. When we have learned so to preach the Word that none will feel comfortable with their names on the church roll who have not been "born again," when we have come to see that the cleansing of the temple is preparatory to the presence of the glory and power of God, that full allegiance to the truth by separation from the worldly practices and conduct of the unregenerate is necessary in order that the fear of God may be upon His enemies, and that the unsaved may tremble before His servants; when we have become valiant for the truth, knowing that it is mighty and must prevail, that it cuts to heal, that "God Himself is with us for our Captain" in the defence and the prospering of His message, then we shall "look forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

But failing to carry out the last command of the Master to "Go and make disciples of all the nations," and the exhortation, "Let the Word of God dwell in you richly," we have found that when we ask what we will it is not granted to us—the heaven over us is stayed from dew and the windows of heaven are shut. And though our Father owns the cattle upon a thousand hills, and the silver and the gold, and would take of His own fowls and (Psalm l. 12), but would not tell any one if He were hungry beasts for Himself and His family; yet we go a-begging for means to carry on His work, dishonoring Him by going to His enemies for help, by going "down to Egypt for horses and chariots." Merchandise, banqueting, surfeiting, and distrust come into the temple to take the place of fasting and prayer, and the fool's laugh and the idle song and anecdote of the proud pleaser of men take the place of the penitent's cry and the angel's song.

And amid it all some one cries out: "The shepherds feed themselves and feed not the flock." "The shepherds seek the meat and the wool," and do not "lay down" their lives for the sheep. They gather the products for themselves and their little ones, and do not rise early to go