

a spiritual as well as a musical note. As to its musical note of course there is no doubt. One finds out about this in studying physics, and it is also evident to anybody who will listen outside a building when music or singing is going on. Every now and again a note is struck to which the whole edifice vibrates down to its foundations. Its roof timbers tremble and its solid walls shake. In like manner some places seem to have a favourite grace, an attribute, a spiritual proclivity. As I sat in the church the caretaker moved about in a quiet way with his dusters and brooms and at last retired to the nether regions, where I heard him stirring up the furnace to a sense of its duties. It is no use talking about churches being left open on week days for people to meditate in and perhaps pray, because here we only believe in having them open, as a rule, for a few hours on Sunday. The clergy have, some of them, the notion that their presence is necessary to orderly worship, and that divine service can only begin at the regular hours on the first day of the week. The generality of church-goers have this notion quite as firmly rooted in them as some of their pastors. Nevertheless there is a worshipful influence about even an empty, quiet church on a week day. One sits in a deserted pew and takes up a prayer-book or a hymn-book and marks the signs of wear upon it with a reverent eye. Some fellow-traveller on life's road has found comfort and rest and peace in these pages. Here is the baptismal service that the happy, nervous, young parents turned to the day they brought their firstborn to be received into the arms of Him who "called a little child unto Him," and here the pages where they read "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord" when the old man passed to his long home. The whole human drama lies between, and as one looks over the well-thumbed pages of a time-worn prayer-book he cannot but be conscious of a thrill of human companionship even in an empty church. It is at such times, too, that the purpose for which the church was built is impressed most strongly on the mind. Then, too, one sees the fitness of ecclesiastical architecture and feels respectful to the architects who, in the course of long years, have been working towards an ideal of usefulness and reverence. For, to the initiated, even bricks and mortar may speak and the very stones cry out.

And then there are the associations of the place. To those who are not bothered with dreams and fancies, life is life and death is death; and when people have departed this life and had a respectable funeral, there is an end of them and they may be considered as living souls no longer, but volumes of dead memories to be put on the shelf and accumulate the dust of years. Sometimes, however, when one is quiet for half an hour in a lonely church, one is half inclined to wonder if down the ladder that devotion raises to heaven, angels may not descend, and among them some who were always angels to us even when they trod these weary ways.

A few hours afterwards I sat reading in my lonely eyrie, and having a book that interested me, I read on and on until the streets began to grow quiet and the noisy street cars fewer and farther between. The quiet of Sunday began to draw near. The hour of midnight struck and I extinguished my light, and drawing my window curtains my eyes soon became accustomed to the half light that pervaded the outside world—made up partly of star-light and partly of the rays of arc lamps that swung here and there in the wind. I could see, over the trees of the Horticultural Gardens, the dim outlines of the city horizon. High up above the world, in my lonely den, I could pick out some of the taller spires and the more lofty buildings. There was St. Michael's Cathedral, and the Confederation Life Building and the Metropolitan Methodist Church. While I was watching half in reverie, I saw a great silent white cloud rise from a spot to the right of the Confederation Life. It rose so suddenly and grew to such an enormous size as it unfurled its soft volumes of white vapour that I threw open the window in order that I might observe it better. Just as I did so the fire alarm clanged forth into the night and then I knew what it was I was looking at. In a few moments it spread across to the extreme eastern limits of the city. The gongs of hose carts began to beat the air and their rattle to be heard on the streets. Then like a rising sun on the horizon an angry flaming centre began to redden the lower part of the massive cloud. They brightened and grew and leaped and spread with a demoniac intensity, and through the silent night, though I was a mile and a half from the spot, came shouts, and the terrible sound of falling timbers and iron

beams. Dark against the brightness, the steeple of St. Michael's was a beautiful black silhouette; while the Confederation Life Building was brilliantly illuminated. To the right, also, the steeple of Knox Church stood up white and clear.

It was a wierd thing to be watching that conflagration in the dead of night, and through the silence to hear crash after crash reverberating across the silent city. Showers of sparks and burned fragments of timber rose into the air after each destructive, smashing fall, like the fireworks at the exhibition spectacles. Then after the fire had had its way for an hour, I saw a bright light appear on the steeple of Knox Church. It glowed there steadily like an electric light. I got a field glass and looked at it, and it appeared to burn steadily and white, till I wondered whether, for some purpose or other, a powerful lamp had been hauled up there. Otherwise the spire seemed to be untouched. But after ten minutes or a quarter of an hour the light was explained. It was evidently the burning of gas generated from the smouldering timbers of the spire, and as the furnace-like heat of the conflagration waxed hotter the carburetted hydrogen found its way to the aperture with greater velocity and volume. The metal-covered steeple was now a retort in which the timbers were being subjected to destructive distillation. Then little by little the flame spread till all the outlines of the tower and spire were picked out in brilliant light as for some triumphal illumination. I watched it till I saw the spire pitch down headlong, and as the fire seemed to break out again and again I began to wonder whether, at last, the negligence of our civic authorities had led to a blaze that was about to lay a great tract of the city in ruins. Gradually, however, the fire began to die down. I had by this time informed myself of the situation and limits of the holocaust I had been watching, and at four o'clock I went to bed wondering what the aldermen thought of it all, and whether, now, they would order some steam fire engines.

Although I was waked by church bells they failed to summon me to church, for a great fire unfortunately means immediate work for me as soon as it has done its destructive and devilish-seeming work. Accordingly I was soon in the midst of a swarming crowd of sight-seers, insurance agents, newspaper men, artists, people who had lost by the fire and the usual variety of riff-raff. There was no mistaking the fact that an undercurrent of satisfaction that something great had happened ran among this concourse of human beings. They commented on the dreadfulness of the disaster, but it was with a secretly jocund air, for we can always bear the misfortunes of others with equanimity. Even the burnt-out people seemed to be somewhat grateful for something that so distinctly varied the monotony of their lives. It is, after all, not the great catastrophes of life that are the hardest to bear. That which needs manly and womanly courage is "the daily round, the common task" under which so many of us fall into a deadly forgetfulness of all high aims and noble tendings. What contrasts life has for us sometimes. Saturday afternoon, the quiet and peaceful church. Sunday morning, the crowding, talkative people and the seething ruins of Toronto's biggest store.

\* J. R. N.

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### Queen's College Conferences.

IN this age of rush men require for anything like adequate dealing with life's problems seasons of "retreat." The basis of the practical is comprehensive, matured thinking. This is especially true in our day, since life is becoming constantly more and more complex. In no position in life is solid, well seasoned thinking more imperative than in the pulpit. Urged by this need the Association of the Theological Alumni of Queen's College, Kingston, resolved to hold annual Conferences to discuss great questions offering themselves for solution to every scribe who would be true to his vocation to bring out of his treasure things old and new.

Three Conferences have been held, in the month of February, in 1893, 1894, and 1895. In 1893 there were two courses for study. The first, under the leadership of Dr. Watson, Professor of Ethics at Queen's, consisted of "The Philosophy of Religion." This course has been continued during the last two years. "The Philosophy of Religion," as represented in Luther and the Reformation, was the study for 1893. A long list of books was given by Dr. Watson, to