

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

THE PRESBYTERIAN PULPIT.

THE REV. JOHN SMITH.

The branch of the Church known as United Presbyterian, and previous to 1847, the Secession Church, attempted their first organization in Toronto in 1837. The beginning was humble. Seven members and twenty-one adherents constituted the first congregation which met for worship in a carpenter's shop on what was then Newgate but now Adelaide street. The Rev. John Jennings, who came to Canada in 1838, undertook the charge of the congregation. It continued to grow. Soon afterwards a little Baptist church on Stanley street was rented, and this in 1840 had to be abandoned for the more commodious church belonging to the Episcopal Methodists on Richmond street. The congregation's increase was steady and so encouraging that a new, more solid and beautiful Gothic structure, erected at the corner of Bay and Richmond streets, was opened for public worship on the last Sabbath of 1848.

Dr. Jennings was a faithful, laborious and successful pastor. He took long and frequent missionary journeys into the regions beyond. In central and western Ontario his name is yet mentioned by many with affectionate respect. He was large-hearted and public-spirited, and a controversialist that no opponent could afford to treat indifferently. The agitation for the secularization of the clergy reserves found in Dr. Jennings a consistent and uncompromising advocate. He was much more than a mere ecclesiastical polemic. He had other and more valuable qualities. His generous, kindly and helpful interest in young men is gratefully remembered by many well-to-do middle-aged citizens of to-day. The Union of the Presbyterian family in Canada was a subject in which he took a cordial and active part. He lived to see, though from feeble health unable to take part in the consummation of a movement he had helped to advance. Surrounded by his family he passed peacefully away on the 25th February, 1876.

Dr. Jennings having resigned the pastorate, the Rev. John Smith, of Bowmanville, was called to be his successor. Several families in Bay Street congregation resolved on the erection of another congregation, and worshipped for a time in Shaftesbury Hall while the handsome building on Grosvenor street, known as the Central Church, was being erected. The Rev. David Mitchell, now of Belleville, was first pastor.

The Bay street congregation resolved on moving from a locality that had changed so much since their church was built. They found a favourable position on Caer-Howell street, facing Simcoe, where the imposing and graceful edifice known as Erskine Church now stands.

The architectural effect of Erskine Church is very pleasing, the style being modern Gothic. The material is white brick with Ohio cut-stone facings, and a happy absence of the parti-coloured vagaries of some recent styles. The front has an imposing appearance as seen from Simcoe street. There is a tastefully ornamented square tower at the south-east corner rising to a height of about 135 feet. There are five front entrances to the building, thus amply providing both for comfort and safety. The interior arrangements are tasteful, commodious and appropriate, the acoustic properties are all that can be desired. A fine organ of sufficient size, is placed in a recess in the north end of the church. Much attention is bestowed on the cultivation and rendering of sacred music.

In addition to the church building proper there are at the north end handsome and commodious lecture and class-rooms, vestry, etc. The seating capacity of the building is about 1,000.

The various organizations connected with Erskine Church are in vigorous and successful operation. There are Ladies' Aid, Missionary and Benevolent, and Young People's associations, all doing good work in their respective spheres. The Sabbath school under the energetic superintendence of Mr. John A. Patterson, is large and flourishing. It consists, according to last year's report, of 228 scholars who raised \$100 for missions, besides contributing to other objects.

The Rev. John Smith, ministers acceptably and profitably to a steadily increasing congregation. On a recent Sabbath evening after appropriate devotional exercises he took for his text—

"Restore unto me the joy of Thy Salvation."—Ps. li. 1.

It is one thing to possess blessings, another and a very different thing to be able to enjoy them. All the circumstances that surround us may be calculated to make us happy and yet we may be in the depth of misery. That sun may shine in all its glory and beauty, and yet our blindness may prevent us from seeing it, or a cloud may hide it from our view. A man may be rich and increased with goods, and so far as this world is concerned, have need of nothing, and yet he may be "wretched and poor and miserable and blind and naked." There is a feast such as should satisfy the most fastidious epicure, but these guests are not hungry, and therefore cannot partake of its delicacies. Such also may be the case with the believer—the Gospel feast may be rich, abundant and free, and yet sin may prevent us from enjoying it. Such was the experience of the Psalmist. He had once enjoyed the light of God's countenance, but sin had caused the hiding of His face. He now prays that that heavenly smile may again be restored.

I. What is meant by the joy of salvation?

It is not mere cheerfulness, it is not the joy of animal feeling; it is pleasant to see the merry, gleesome, contented child; but it scarcely needs even a soul to make a creature cheerful. The lambs as they skip upon yonder hill, or the bee as it sucks the nectar from the opening flower, or the cloud of insects dancing merrily in the field of balmy air have each and all their feeling of gladness and joy. The overflow of the same animal feeling may be seen in the cheerful sports by the cottage fires or in the loud laughter on the village greens. But the joy of the text is something essentially different from this. "It is the joy of salvation." It is a joy resulting from pardon and a conscious interest in the Lord Jesus Christ and his finished work; it is not the joy of the ball-room or the worldly feast; it is not the joy of Belshazzar, when he made a feast to a thousand of his lords and drank wine before the thousand; it is not the joy spoken of by the wise man when he said: "Whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy." "Rejoice oh young man in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth." But it is rather the joy of Paul and Silas, when at "midnight they prayed and sang praises to God," or the joy of the Philippian jailer, "when he rejoiced believing in God with all his house;" or the joy of the Primitive Christians of whom it is said: "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart."

Dr. Payson said when dying: "The celestial city is full in view, its glories beam upon me, its breezes fan me, its odours are wafted to me, its music strikes upon my ear, and its spirit breathes with my heart; nothing separates me from it, but the river of death, which now appears as a narrow rill, which may be crossed at a single step, whenever God shall give permission."

This is the joy of salvation.

II. This joy of salvation may be lost.

Salvation itself or the believer's hold upon Christ and Christ's hold upon the believer never can be lost: "Whom the Father loves He loves unto the end." "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." "Being confident of this very thing that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

But the joy of salvation may be lost. It is one thing to possess an interest in Christ, and another thing to have such assurance as will give great peace and joy. Bunyan's Christian travelled far after he entered the gate before he lost his burden. The gate means Christ, and surely when he believed in Christ he did really lose his burden, but he was not fully conscious of this great blessing until he got a more full view of the cross. Then when Christian and his companion got into the hands of giant Despair they lost salvation, but the joy of salvation; and when at last he is sinking in Jordan's water he is losing for the moment the joy of salvation.

A sailor boy on his first voyage to the tropics is full of the prospects of crossing the equator. He expects to find there a black line drawn round the earth over land and ocean. He will know the exact moment when the ship's bow cuts clean through it. But looking out for this great sight he finds nothing except that the air grows milder, and the skies more genial, the sea becomes warmer with perpetual summer, and along the coast he is charmed by the bloom of the fields and the singing of the birds. But where is the line; and what means this mildness in the air and ocean? It means, some old shipmate tells him, that you have already crossed the line. So a young seaman after Christ expects to know the very moment of his passing from death to life. But when some day he asks why do all things seem so new—Christ so glorious, and Christians so dear, and the Bible so full of meaning, it is as some older brother perceives, because he has passed the great crisis. He saw no line—He remembers no sudden wonderful change—He finds only that he has arrived like Bunyan's Christian entering Beulah as a region of sweetness and peace. But the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land. He is not only saved but he fully realizes that this is the joy of salvation. But alas this joy may be lost;—What are the causes of this loss of the joy of salvation?

1st. God in His sovereign pleasure may for a time withdraw the light of his countenance—He may do this to humble the believer, and lead him to lean less on himself and more on the Lord Jesus Christ.

2nd. It may be caused by bodily infirmity—the body and mind are mutually connected—they mutually influence each other—hence the physician may sometimes give more peace of mind than the spiritual adviser.

Cowper is a remarkable illustration of the effect that a diseased body may have on the mind. One evening being terribly depressed in spirits, he employed a man to drive him to a certain water where he intended to drown himself. The man drove on for some time but at last said he could not find the place. Take me home, says Cowper, I understand it all, and then he wrote that beautiful hymn:—

God moves in a mysterious way,

His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

In view of these facts, how precious are the words of the hymn.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

3rd. It may be caused by sin, either of omission or commission. It was the great sin in the matter of Uriah that caused the hiding complained of in the text—men sin and that sin separates between the believer and God. Let there be neglect of secret prayer, regular attendance at the house of God and daily reading of the Scriptures, and the loss of the joy of salvation will be the result.

4th. Inactivity in the Lord's work is another cause of the loss of the joy of salvation. The mind as well as the body can only be healthy by exercise. Labour is the great law of the universe. Every atom and every world proclaim this. The muscle shrinks that is never strong, the joint stiffens that is never moved, and the limb becomes powerless that is never taxed. So with all the faculties of the mind and every Christian grace, they increase in strength in proportion as they are exercised.

III. The Psalmist's prayer—"Restore unto me."

1st. David believed that this joy is attainable. The sensible assurance of God's love and consequent joy may be attained. Job said: "I know that my Redeemer liveth." Paul had this assurance: "I am crucified with Christ." David once enjoyed this heavenly smile and now he prays that it may be restored.

2nd. It is attainable under the most adverse outward circumstances. Paul while in a lonely Roman prison said: "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." Paul and Silas are thrust into the inner prison and their feet made fast in the stocks, and at midnight they prayed and sang praises to God. The Marquis of Argyle on the morning of his martyrdom, while busy settling some worldly affairs stopped and said, "I am now ordering my affairs, but God is sealing my charter to my heavenly inheritance, and is just now saying unto me: 'son be of good cheer thy sins are forgiven thee. I could die as a Roman, but I choose rather to die as a Christian.'" John Welsh died in exile in France. Having preached his last sermon, he seemed to be filled with the sensible manifestation of God's love. His last words were—"It is enough, oh Lord, it is enough; hold thy hand, thy servant is a clay vessel and can hold no more."

3rd. This joy was something that was very desirable to possess. He knew what it was and therefore he prays to have it restored. This was the legacy that Christ left to His disciples—"Peace I leave with you." The Psalmist knew that that joy which he had lost by his sin, could only be restored by Divine grace and hence the prayer in the text.

We have been speaking of the joy of the believer, but the Bible speaks of another class who will never have any joy or peace in time or eternity: "There is no peace saith my God to the wicked."

The Rev. John Smith was born in the county of Armagh, Ireland. His father and family came to Canada and settled on a farm in the township of Chinguacousy, John then being in his third year. After leaving the common school he took private lessons in the classics and then completed his literary course in the Toronto Academy, taking classes in the Toronto University. He graduated in Knox College in the spring of 1851. The late Dr. Black, of Kildonan, the late James Nesbitt, of Prince Albert mission, Dr. William McLaren, of Knox College, and Dr. Donald Fraser, now in London, England, were some of his fellow students. After receiving license to preach, he was ordained and inducted into the pastoral charge of Bowmanville and Enniskillen, on the 2nd September, 1851. He laboured with fidelity and acceptance for eighteen years in this united charge. When the two congregations became sufficiently strong to stand alone he resigned in the hands of the Presbytery that portion of the congregation meeting at Enniskillen. He continued to minister to the people at Bowmanville until the summer of 1875, when he removed to Toronto, to take charge of the Bay Street congregation. After preaching in the Bay Street Church for four years, the congregation erected the new and handsome church at the head of Simcoe street. This building was opened for divine service on 27th July, 1879. When Mr. Smith took charge of the Bay Street Church, the congregation numbered 130 members, now there are 385. The Sabbath school and Young People's Association and every department of church work is now in a growing and vigorous state.

The pastor of Erskine Church is laborious, faithful, and punctual in the discharge of his various duties. His pulpit ministrations are characterized by fervour and solemnity. His discourses are attractive, instructive and persuasive. In all departments of Christian and benevolent effort, Mr. Smith is an active and energetic worker. He is a popular lecturer and his services in this capacity have been much in request. For many years he has taken an intelligent part in the promotion of temperance. He has not only given his eloquence in aid of the movement, but much of