

## CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS.

(By Knoxonian.)

"Never go to congregational meetings. Haven't attended one for years. Can't endure such gatherings." Indeed! Why not? "Oh, congregational meetings are dry, tedious, uninteresting. They are not attractive, not entertaining, not enjoyable. Every thing about them is as dry as a lime-burner's shoe." Yes, that is just where the trouble comes in. A large number of professing Christian people won't go to any kind of meeting now unless some one takes a contract to interest them. Everything must be lively and spicy and racy and entertaining or they won't attend. The desire to be entertained is stronger than the sense of duty in such people. That is the real trouble. The good old word Duty, that once had such magical power seems to have lost its potency with these people. With them the main thing is to be entertained, pleased, interested, and unless some extraordinary means are used to interest and entertain at any given meeting, their sense of duty is not strong enough to induce them to attend. This growing desire for entertainment, accompanied as it always is by a lax sense of duty, accounts for many of the empty pews that are seen in too many churches on Sabbath. The people think there should be a fresh attempt made every Sabbath to entertain them. Of course it never occurs to them that they have souls to save, or that it is their duty to attend the house of God. The only question asked is—would it be pleasant and entertaining to go?

Now why should any rational man expect to be entertained at a congregational meeting? Why should any one expect the reports to be spicy, and the speeches racy, and the whole meeting very lively? There have been congregational meetings that were lively enough to please anybody, but these are just the worst church meetings ever held. They make good men hang their heads with shame, injure the cause of Christ, bring religion into contempt, grieve the Holy Spirit, and wound the Saviour in the house of His professed friends. The worst ecclesiastical meetings ever held, are, as a rule, the meetings that produce great excitement. A church court or congregational meeting is at its very worst when it pleases the people who love to see a fight. The people who attend simply to enjoy the fight would enjoy seeing a race between two horses, or a contest between two sluggers, or a fight between two dogs.

A meeting, say of the General Assembly is being held. The spirit of the Assembly is good. The opening exercises are well attended, and the Moderator's sermon has made a fine devotional impression. Business runs along smoothly. There is no friction and no fight. The reports are read, showing that the finances are in good shape, the colleges doing good work, and that the missions at home and abroad are prospering. The members are in good humour. The tone of the meeting is spiritual rather than ecclesiastical. At all events it is not belligerent. The best side of the individual

members and of the court as a whole is seen—alas, that the other side should be so often seen in church courts!

Now what follows? That meeting is a dead failure in the estimation of several classes of people. The Bohemian reporter on the look-out for a "scene" to spread out his columns under sensational headings, finds nothing. The ecclesiastical lawyer who hopes to make a reputation by nibbling at points of order, raising objections, and general pettifoggery, who aspires to be a pettifogger, rather than a preacher, declares the meeting dull, irredeemably dull. The belligerent Christians who dropped into the gallery hoping to see a fight or a "scene" of some kind, are disgusted, and sigh for the good old days when there were annual fights over the organ question, and the hymn question, and other burning issues of that kind. They are disgusted, of course, and vote the meeting a bore. And yet it is perhaps the very best meeting the Assembly ever held.

All that is true in this regard of a meeting of the Supreme Court is true of meetings of Synod, Presbyteries and also of congregational meetings. As a rule the business that makes the least excitement is the real business of the church, and when that business is most prosperous there is the least noise. Burning questions often burn the fingers of those who handle them. Too much "liveliness" too often indicates that men's passions are not under proper control and that the evil spirit has taken the place of the Spirit of God. If a congregational meeting furnishes entertainment for those people who love to see a fight, it is high time that congregation had mended its ways or ceased to hold meetings.

But after all can a congregational meeting, conducted with anything like business tact, be uninteresting to a fairly good Christian? The session usually presents a report or address giving some account of the spiritual work done during the year. How can a Christian man fail to be interested in that work? If he feels no interest in it does this fact not raise a question as to his own spiritual condition? The managers submit a report of the financial condition of the congregation. To say that any good loyal member of the Church feels no interest in that report seems like a libel on common sense. The report of the Sabbath-school is submitted. Are we asked to believe that Christian men may feel no interest in the teaching of their own children? A proposal is made to build a new church or repair an old one; to build a new manse or improve an old one; to pay off a long standing debt; to take additional measures to increase the contributions to the Schemes of the Church, or do any one of a hundred things, and if a man's heart is really in his Master's work, he cannot help feeling an interest in these proposals.

Many reports, or rather abstracts of congregational reports are being published just now. As a rule the best reports come from the congregations that have the most efficient staff of officials. It is a dream to think as some good, easy people do, that in large congregations the pastor does nearly all the work. The better the organization and the more efficient the office-bearers the less the pastor has to do, and he has the more time to do it. Now good organization is an impossibility unless people take an interest in the congregational meeting. At this meeting the office-bearers are appointed. Efficient office-bearers are indispensable to success. Therefore, if you would have a successful congregation you should go to the congregational meeting. And not only go but take a hearty interest in its business without the prospect of being entertained by tea, music, spicy speeches or a fight.

## THE FINANCIAL OUTLOOK FOR HOME MISSIONS.

Rev. E. D. MacLaren, D.D., General Secretary of Home Missions, asks us to make room for the following:

We are within seven weeks of the close of our financial year, and if the Home Mission Committee is to be able to meet its liabilities in full, we must receive, before the 29th of February, \$134,000. The committee's expenditure this year is much heavier than it has ever been, owing to the rapid development that has been taking place all through the Northwest; and the danger of a deficit, in view of that heavier expenditure, has been increased by the partial crop failure in the Northwest, which means, in many localities, not only smaller contributions to the Home Mission Fund, but also larger demands upon it by Home Mission fields.

The seriousness of the situation lies in the effect that a deficit would have upon the future operations of the committee. A deficit of any considerable amount would probably be interpreted by the committee as a mandate from the Church at large to adopt a policy of retrenchment. Is it conceivable that the Church which opened up the trails of Home Mission enterprise in the early days of the Northwest, whose work was prosecuted with a brave heart in spite of the annually recurring discouragement and apparent defeats that marked the earlier years of Home Mission effort, which has left her impress upon the life of almost every community between Lake Superior and the Pacific Ocean, and whose labors during the last thirty years have been so richly blessed of God, shall, in these days of increasing prosperity and rapidly widening opportunity, confess her inability to maintain her splendid reputation as one of the great spiritual forces on our Canadian frontier, turn a deaf ear to all appeals for the opening up of new fields and contenting herself with a lower place and an easier task, relinquish forever the proud position she has held so long in the very thickest of the fight? Is the Church prepared to sound the order to retreat when every throbbing pulsation of our national life is calling upon us to advance? If the policy of retrenchment is not to be adopted, large and liberal contributions to the Home Mission Fund must be forwarded to the Church Treasurer before the end of February.

February 2nd will be observed as Young People's Day and the subject assigned for that occasion is "The Young People and the Missionary Movement." Many pastors will speak on that subject, but some congregations have no pastor, and the societies in them may find it necessary to conduct the meeting themselves. For the sake of that class Rev. Dr. MacTavish elsewhere in this issue gives a few hints on the topic for the day, which we trust may prove useful to many.

The streets of London placed end to end would stretch from Halifax to Vancouver.