

## Our Contributors.

### COMPARISONS THAT ARE NOT PROFITABLE.

BY KNOXONIAN.

It has become rather common of late to compare the spiritual condition of the churches thirty or forty years ago, with their spiritual condition at the present time. We are told that the churches were much more spiritual in the good old times; that there has been a marked decay in vital godliness; that the churches are becoming more and more like the world; that the people are not so spiritual as they once were; that divinity students are not so zealous, and that preachers are not as pious and devoted as they were in days gone by.

These are serious accusations, and the peculiar thing about them is that they are often intended as compliments to the last generation. It is assumed that the old pastor will take it as a compliment to be told the people among whom he laboured for many years are an unspiritual, worldly, trifling lot who don't even read their Bibles. Those who pay the old pastor this doubtful compliment, forget that the elderly and middle-aged are the same people that he preached to for years, and the younger ones grew up under his pastoral care. It is no compliment to the old pastor to say that they are very worldly and unspiritual.

Nor is it a compliment to the elder to say that the generation that has grown up under his care are devoid of spirituality. Level-headed men of the world who look all around questions, might ask both minister and elder—"What were you doing all these years if the generation that has grown up under your care are without spirituality?" It is a cruel thing to tell aged ministers, elders, class leaders, college professors, Sabbath school teachers and officers, and the entire body of Christian workers, that notwithstanding all their prayers and efforts, a generation has grown up under their care, almost totally devoid of spirituality. The man who can consider that a compliment must have a strangely constituted mind. Would it not be dealing more kindly with the workers of the last generation to allow them to die with the idea that they had done some good to the generation that is to follow them. He may be told that many of the men who say that the Church has lost its spirituality are the very men who trained the present generation. Well, if people will belittle and disparage the work which God gave them to do, we suppose there is no help for it.

The compliment becomes worse when we look at it from the parental standpoint. The present generation are the sons and daughters of the generation that is passing away. Is it a compliment to aged fathers and mothers to remind them that their children have turned out badly. Is it doing a kindness to a good old man to tell him that his sons and daughters are totally devoid of spirituality? People who believe what the Bible says about training children will have great difficulty in seeing how lack of spirituality in children is evidence of spirituality in their parents. Proving this generation bad is scarcely a Biblical way of proving the last generation good.

One hears and reads a good many stupid things in a twelve-month, but the most densely stupid thing one ever meets is the attempt to compliment the spirituality of the past generation by showing that the present generation are devoid of spirituality. Within certain limitations the present generation is exactly what the past generation has made it. No better, no worse, no other. If the young men are mere worldlings and the young women fools, there must have been something radically wrong about their home and church training, for be it remembered they were all trained at a time when it is said the Church was highly spiritual. Badly-trained families are not among the evidences of a high spiritual condition in the Church.

There is so much said in church circles about the decay of spirituality in the Church that the newspaper men are going to work on the decay question. Within the last few weeks we have read a couple of articles in leading secular journals in which it was gravely stated that spiritual religion is fast dying out, and that the Church is becoming "just like the world." And what do our readers think was the evidence given of this alarming fact? Now hold your sides and prepare for the worst. One of the writers proved the decay by the alleged fact that

#### THE OLD-TIME TEA MEETING

was a more serious affair than the modern one. The speakers were more solid! Now that was a most unfortunate line of evidence to go out on. Some of us remember the old-time tea-meeting. We remember the speeches of thirty years ago. Yes, we remember some of them right well. We remember some of the "jokes" and a good many of the "anecdotes." Some of the speeches were good, some were indifferent, and a few were—well, in bad taste, and that is exactly how they are at this very day. Some ministers of the olden time did occasionally turn the tail-end of an old sermon into a tea-meeting speech, but they usually tacked a few glad-to-be-here sentences to it for an introduction, and touched it off at the end with a story about an Irishman or some other man. Some do that same thing yet. But we submit that the tail-end of a sermon with a glad-to-be-here introduction and dotted here and there with pointless anecdotes is the poorest kind of platform speech. Men usually deliver that kind of a speech, not because they are spiritually minded, but because they are too busy, or too lazy, or too brainless to get up anything better. Spirituality has nothing to do with it.

But the case of our critic breaks down worse than ever when we test it by the following fact. Many of the old-time

orators who spoke the alleged "solid" things at tea meetings are yet in the flesh. Many of them still go to tea meetings and make speeches. Whatever solidity or spirituality the Church enjoyed from their presence and orating is enjoyed still. Where, then, does the decay come in?

The other critic referred to undertakes to prove that the Church is "becoming like the world"—this old phrase must be getting tired—because congregations build large and expensive places of worship. This is a much larger point, and must be laid over till next week.

Meantime, we think it reasonably clear that decline in spirituality is not proved by the difference between ancient and modern tea meetings. A congregation may be in a good spiritual condition and have a good social meeting occasionally, and it may be as dead as Julius Caesar, and never have a meeting of that kind at all. For evidence of spirituality or the reverse we must go deeper than the various phases of tea-meeting oratory.

#### AMERICAN CONGREGATIONALISM.

The National Council was organized in 1871, and has met every third year since. At first, many of the Churches looked askance at it and fought shy of it, but now it appears to be generally regarded with favour, and accepted as the High Parliament of the denomination.

The following are the statistics of the body, according to its last year-book: Number of churches, 4,170; number of ministers, 4,043; number of church members, 418,564; number of additions by Confession of Faith, 21,789. Reports were given of the various institutions connected with the denomination, from which it appears that a large amount of work is being done, and that things wear a general aspect of life and prosperity. This is especially true of the missions, both home and foreign, and of the educational agencies in operation.

While deeply interested in the various forms of Christian activity, and the many schemes of benevolence brought before the council, the writer of this paper had his attention particularly directed, for reasons which it is not needful to recount here, to the nature and working of the organization itself, as part and parcel of a system of Church polity. The first and most striking feature of the assembly was its representative character. Membership was not individual, as in the Congregational Union of Scotland, but elective. The roll of Council gives a list of "constituted bodies and delegates." The constituent bodies are Associations, Conferences, Consociations, and Unions. These are not very unlike Presbyteries and Synods, while the Triennial National Council itself is a sort of Congregational General Assembly.

At its organization, in 1871, this Council disclaimed all but advisory functions, and pledged itself not to encroach on the rights and privileges of local churches. But, early in its history, it was confronted with the question of ministerial standing, and after wrestling with it long and patiently, a deliverance was arrived at during the recent meeting, which certainly does not harmonize with the historical teachings of congregational independency. The old-time doctrine of this denomination has been that the local church is an autonomous body, having all ecclesiastical power and functions within itself; that it is subject to no outside interference, and needs no outside help to make it complete; that it can elect, call, ordain, discipline and depose its ministers; and that its acts are not amenable to review or revision by any other body, prelate, prince, or potentate. All this was unceremoniously brushed aside, and at one fell swoop the supreme authority of the local church consigned to limbo. It was resolved: "That standing in the Congregational ministry is acquired by the fulfilment of these three conditions: (1) Membership in a Congregational Church. (2) Ordination to the Christian Ministry; and (3) Reception as an ordained minister into the fellowship of the Congregational churches, by means of membership in the Association, Conference, or whatever body may comprise the aggregation of local churches. In the course of the debates on this matter which occupied much time, more indeed, than any other subject considered by the Council, independency got many hard thrusts, the idea of churches possessing ordaining powers was pooh-poohed; it was asserted that ministers had a right to be tried by their "peers;" and finally, "that it was the duty of the Council to have knowledge and care of the churches, just the same as it was the duty of the individual church to have knowledge and care of the individual members."

Now this is Presbyterianism, not Congregationalism. It is legislation for the local church, and an exercise of authority over it. For, according to the position now taken, a local church can neither make nor unmake a minister. John Robinson, whose name occupied the central position of honour in a circlet of names, conspicuously emblazoned at the Council, distinctly affirms: "The ministry is the church's, and depends upon it as the adjunct upon the subject, so as if the church dissolve, the ministry ceaseth; which the same church that gives it may take away, and make that was a minister, no minister."

American Congregationalism has always differed greatly from British Congregationalism, and especially in its practical limitations of the powers and prerogatives of the local church. Yet all along the course of its history, there has been a constant rebellion on the part of the people against these limitations. Thus, the Council system has been insisted upon as essential to the ordination and settlement of ministers. But it has fallen more and more into disuse, until, as stated at the last Council, three-fourths of the ministers have been settled without instalment. The attempt to enforce instalment by Council has failed. Now there is an endeavour, as Dr. Washington Gladden expressed it, "to enforce membership in asso-

ciations at the point of the ecclesiastical bayonet," which, no doubt, will fail also. Congregationalism, not only in the United States, but the world over, is like the womb of Rebecca. There are two manners of people in it, one holding the essential principles of Presbyterianism, and the other going for independency pure and simple. In the United States, the New Englanders lean to Presbyterianism, while the newer and freer west inclines, as might be expected, to old-style independency. This division of opinion and practice is a source of weakness, if only in the amount of time which is consumed by the two factions in contending with each other. All ecclesiastical systems are but platforms for workmen to stand upon while building the temple of the Lord. When too much time is spent in platform building, it will necessarily retard the progress of the main structure. This has always been one of the greatest hindrances of the growth of Canadian Congregationalism. There has been a constant tinkering of the machinery, instead of keeping it busily at work. A. B. C.

#### TE DEAM LAUDAMUS.

In "The Psalter of the Blessed Virgin," the publication of which has, more than once, been authorized by the Vatican, that grand old hymn, commonly called the "Te Deum," is altered so as to make it apply to the mother of Jesus. For this form of it, the title this article receives, "We praise thee O Goddess," is a very suitable one. The following is a translation of it from the Italian:

We cause our praises to ascend to Thee, O Mother of God; we extol Thee, O Mary the Virgin.  
All the earth worships Thee, the Spouse of the Eternal Father.  
To Thee, all Angels and Archangels, to Thee all Thrones and Principalities humbly bow down themselves.  
To Thee, all the Powers and the highest Intelligences in the heavens, and all Dominions yield obedience.  
To Thee, all Choirs, to Thee, Cherubim and Seraphim joyously minister.  
To Thee, all angelic creatures continually sing with the voice of praise.  
Holy, Holy, Holy Mary, Mother of God, Virgin and also Mother.  
The heavens and the earth are full of the glorious majesty of the fruit of thy womb.  
The glorious choir of the Apostles unitedly praise Thee, the Mother of its Creator.  
The pure assembly of the blessed Martyrs in concert extol Thee, the Mother of Christ.  
The glorious army of the Confessors calls Thee the holy temple of the Trinity.  
The lovely choir of the holy Virgins joyously praise Thee, the example of humility and of Virgin purity.  
The whole heavenly choir honours Thee as Queen.  
The Church throughout all the world acknowledges Thee, and calls on Thee.  
Mother of the Divine Majesty.  
The venerable, the true Spouse of the King of heaven, holy, loving and pious.  
Thou art the Mistress of the Angels, Thou art the gate of Paradise.  
Thou art the ladder to the kingdom and the glory of heaven.  
Thou art the marriage bed, Thou art the ark of piety and of grace.  
Thou art the source and spring of mercy; Thou art the Spouse and Mother of the King of eternal ages.  
Thou art the temple and sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, and the noble dining hall of the most holy Trinity.  
Thou art the mediatrix between men and God, kind to us mortals and the light of heaven.  
Thou art boldness to those fighting, an advocate to sinners; Thou art a compassionate refuge to the wretched.  
Thou art the dispenser of heavenly gifts, the destroyer of devils and of the proud.  
Thou art the Mistress of the world, the Queen of Heaven, and, after God, our only hope.  
Thou art salvation to every one who seeks thee, a haven to the shipwrecked, comfort to the wretched, and a refuge to those in peril.  
Thou art the Mother of all the Blessed, after God, their full joy, the joy of all the inhabitants of heaven.  
Thou art the promoter of the righteous, the receiver of the strayed, Thou art the promise of old to the Patriarchs.  
Thou wert the light of truth to the Prophets; Thou wert the praise of the Apostles and their wisdom: Thou wert the teacher of the Evangelists.  
Thou wert boldness to the Martyrs, an example to the Confessors, the boast, the glory and joy of the Virgins.  
To free man from the exile of death, Thou didst receive the Son of God into thy womb.  
When Thou hadst vanquished our old Foe, the kingdom of heaven was opened again to the faithful.  
Thou, with thy Son, art seated at the right hand of the Father.  
O, Virgin Mary, Thou intercedest for us with Him whom we believe will one day be our Judge.  
We, therefore, pray Thee that Thou wouldst come to the help of thy servants; to us redeemed with the precious blood of thy Son.  
O, pious Virgin Mary, hear us! cause us to be rewarded with eternal joy with thy Saints.  
Save thy people, O Lady, that we may be made partakers of the inheritance of thy Son.  
Be our guide, our support and defence for ever.  
Every day, O Mary, our Lady, we salute Thee. T. F.