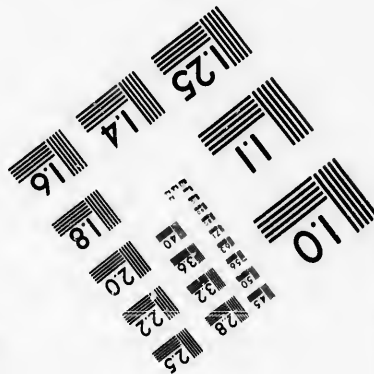
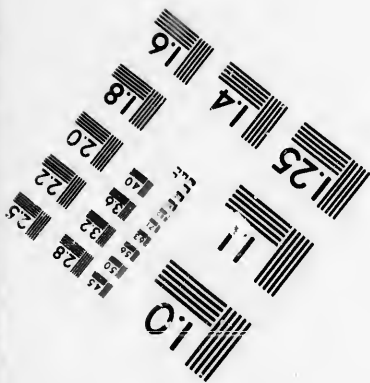
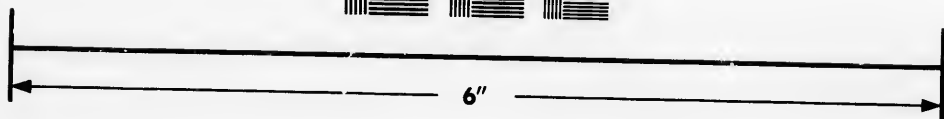
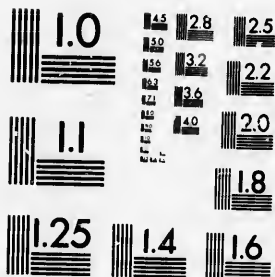


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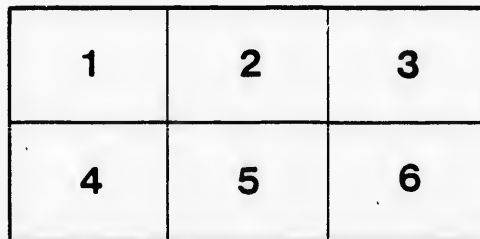
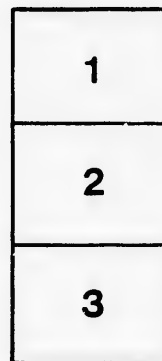
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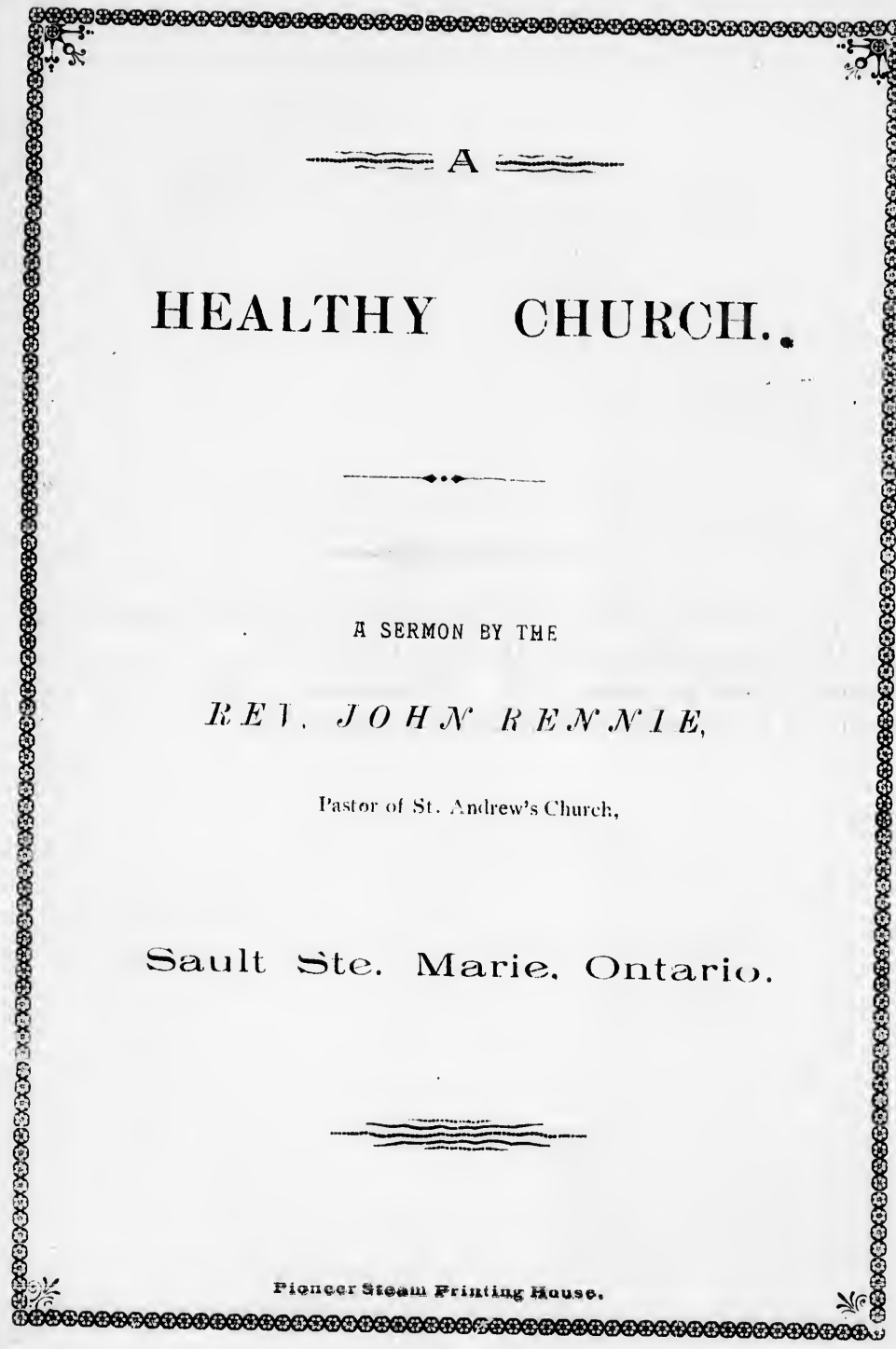
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— A —

HEALTHY CHURCH.

A SERMON BY THE
REV. JOHN RENNIE,

Pastor of St. Andrew's Church,

Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario.

— — — — —

Pioneer Steam Printing House.



The following discourse was preached in St. Andrew's Church, Sault Ste. Marie, on Sunday evening, May 25th, 1890, at the end of two years pastoral work in the congregation. I now present it, with kind regards, to all friends who may care to possess it in printed form

J. R.



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A Healthy Church.

TEXT.—Psalm 84: 4-7. "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house; they will be still praising Thee.

Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee; in whose heart is are the ways of them. Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God."

The original reference of these words was to the experience of God's ancient people as they journeyed towards Jerusalem to attend the great annual festivals. These pilgrimages to Mount Zion, the place of God's House, where a great feature of ancient Jewish life. From Galilee, from beyond Jordan, and from all parts of the land the people came. Families from the same neighbourhood generally travelled together in bands or companies that grew larger in numbers as friends joined them at each halting place. As they went on they toiled together over hill and dale, they sang together the songs of Zion, and stored up happy memories which would never be forgotten.

Observe the language of David's beautiful description, "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, they will be still praising thee," referring to the priests and the Levites who had their residence close by the tabernacle and and who could be almost constantly engaged in its services. "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee, in whose heart are the ways of Them," or as it reads in the revised version, "in whose heart are the highways to Zion." Not only were they to be counted happy who had the privilege of dwelling at Zion but also those who were favored to visit it at the appointed seasons and had the ways to Zion in their hearts. "Who passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well, the rain also filleth the pools." The revised version makes this verse read, "passing through the valley of Weeping they make it a place of springs, yea the early rain covereth it with blessings." The idea is that these pious pilgrims were cheered and refreshed with blessings from heaven even in the most desolate places, and the result was that "they went on from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeared before God." Instead of becoming fatigu-

ed and worn out with their long journey they increased in strength as they went on till they all arrived a happy and grateful throng before God in Zion.

But this language is applicable also to the christian church, and is descriptive of God's people still. There is no society on earth so grand and illustrious in its history as the church of Christ, and there are no experiences so rich and deep as the experiences of christian men and women who belong to this happy family circle. Having the same solemn vows resting upon them, having their faith anchored to the same Divine promises, having the same heaven in view and the same Lord as their guide, the people of God now clasp hands in the church in the sweet fellowship of christian love. They meet within the same hallowed walls, they bow before the same mercy-seat, they gather around the same table of the Lord, and, with their pastor at their head, they journey on towards the new Jerusalem, a band of brothers and sisters in Christ, singing as they go. Every christian can therefore joyfully echo the sentiments of David's psalm and say "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house, they will be still praising Thee. Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. Passing through the valley of weeping make it a place of springs, yea the early rain covereth it with blessings. They go from strength to strength, every one of them appeareth before God in Zion."

Here is a delightful picture of a healthy, vigorous and earnest church. All churches and congregations are not equally strong and fruitfull. Some are like a compact and well organized army doing good work for Christ. Others are simply crowds of people who meet once a week in a church edifice, but who put forth no united, organized, aggressive efforts to extend and build up the kingdom of God. Now in order to make a church healthy, strong and successful there are certain essentials which must always be found in her. Let me refer to some of these essentials. I bless God that they have not been altogether wanting, but have been realized to a considerable degree in this congregation of St. Andrew's. It is with the view of promoting their growth still more in this dear church that I ask your attention to them to-night.

1. In order to have a healthy and successful church there must be *mutual acquaintance and friendly feeling* among the members. An un-social church is never a growing church, nor ever a harmonious one, un-

less it be with the harmony of spiritual deadness. Yet there are unsocial churches. I have heard a congregation sing with apparent fervor

"Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in christian love"

and yet the members came in and went out without a word or a look of recognition except for those of their own social set. They literally froze out the stranger who had crossed their threshold thinking he was going into a family circle, but who had stepped into a refrigerator instead. Such a church may have eminent respectability, but it can have no spiritual power. When our Lord prayed "that they all may be one as Thou Father art in Me and I in Thee," He meant more that they should be one merely in doctrine or one in ecclesiastical profession, He meant that they should be one also in christian fellowship. But evidently there can be no fellowship where there is no acquaintance and kindly feeling. I rejoice that this church has been indeed a "household of faith" and that here we have had a large amount of happy christian fellowship. It has been my continued desire that you might all know one another as members of the living body of which Christ is the Head and so would not need to be introduced to each other after you get to heaven. Let there be here always a cordial welcome for the stranger, a home feeling among the worshippers, and a spirit of loving co-operation in every good work.

2, Another essential of a healthy and successful church is *christian activity*. When all activity ceases in a human body that body dies, and when there is no activity among the members of a church that church is spiritually dead. A healthy body is one in which every drop of blood, from the brain to the feet, is busy fulfilling its mission. If even one of the myriads of drops becomes stagnant it tends to derange the whole system and cause health and vigor to disappear. So a church can be healthy and strong only as it is full of vigorous life and only as each member is busy doing his or her part toward the efficiency of the whole body, thus leaving no time for fault finding or seeing notes in each others eyes. All have not the same work to do, for the gifts in a church are as varied as human countenances. But to every one God has given some mission. He has no place in his vineyard for idlers. Let this church then become a bee-hive of united activity, each man, woman and child doing something to help on the work, and then its continued success will be assured.

3. Another essential of a healthy church is **SPIRITUAL GROWTH**, as natural growth is a sign of healthiness in a plant or tree. When the trunk and branches of a tree are growing upward and its living roots are striking downward it may be regarded as in a healthy condition. So when the graces of the spirit are developing in the hearts and lives of the members, the church may be said to be spiritually healthful. When I see the members of a church growing more benevolent in their liberality, purer in their characters, warmer in their love, more unselfish in seeking the good of others, nobler in every thought and purpose, then I see sure signs of spiritual health and strength. It is not the elegance of the sanctuary that makes a church strong, nor the wealth of its members, nor the soundness of its creed, nor the beauty of its ritual, but it is the Christ-like lives of its people, lives whose shining is steadfast and inextinguishable, shining in love and good works at all seasons and in all circumstances. I thank God that this beloved church has been a shining light in Sault Ste. Marie, a light whose radiance has been growing brighter as we have walked together with the light of the world. True we are yet far from perfection but we have been advancing towards it. We have been learning, I hope, to lean less on self and more on Jesus as we have studied Sabbath after Sabbath His blessed teachings, and have mingled together our prayers and praises within these walls. In this developing experience there has been one agency that deserves to be specially mentioned and that is our Young People's Society and its Monday evening prayer meetings. This instrumentality has exerted a most beneficial influence. It has drawn our young people together at the foot-stool of the heavenly grace. It has helped to inspire them to live nobler lives. It has helped them "to go on from a strength," in loving fellowship and renewed consecration. May its influence for good still increase.

4. There is one other, and it is the chiefest essential of a healthy church and it is *the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit*, whose name is given in the Old Testament as "The Breath of the Almighty." Without his presence a church is barren like the field without dew or rain, yea dead, like a branch through which the sap does not circulate. I believe we have had the presence and power of the Holy Spirit with us in this little church. It has been my joyful privilege to receive to our number

during these two years, 77 new members, and it is a very noticeable fact that there has been additional members received at every communion season which we have held. It seems as if the Lord has given us steady and uninterrupted showers of blessing. The tree of life has yielded her fruit at every communion, and the fields have been all along white for the harvesting. It is indeed a joyful thing to a pastor and a congregation to receive a large fruitage as the result of special revival services. But it is to my mind still more gratifying when the increase comes as the result of the regular services and uniform labours of the church. I do not for a moment undervalue the importance of special services, but I thank God still more when he has never withheld from us the heavenly dew, but has kept watering the vineyard and making it fruitful all the year round.

There are other things that might be pointed out as essential to a healthy and successful church, on which, however, time does not permit now to dwell. How important, for example, are peace and harmony and mutual forbearance. "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." How disastrous are the evils of church strifes. Let us carefully guard against them, let us in everything be perfectly fair and honorable. Let no one indulge in the exasperating practice of constant fault-finding. Let no one be bound to have his own way irrespective of the feelings and wishes of others. As the apostle urges let us "follow the things which make for peace." "Peace be within thy walls and prosperity within thy palaces." How important also for the prosperity of a church is the earnest and faithful preaching of the simple gospel of Christ. The city of Glasgow used to have for its motto "Let Glasgow flourish by the word of God." So I say let this church flourish. I believe that this is the way to the best results. The history of religion abundantly shows that it is not by worldly patronage, nor by grand ritual, nor by keen controversy that the church does most to save souls and benefit humanity. It is by the lifting up of Christ as the Savior of men; Christ in His love, in His teachings, in His example, and in His sufferings and death. When the apostle Paul went to Corinth his resolution was "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." Many years ago, when beginning my ministerial labors, I was struck with the excellence of Paul's reso-

lution, and I resolved as far as I could to make it my own. I have never seen cause to regret that purpose. As I have read my bible I have understood the divine commission to be "Preach the gospel of Christ," and as the promise of the Spirit's saving power is given only to this gospel proclamation, I have sought to put myself in the line of the Spirit's influence. This is still my desire. It matters but little whether I have human applause or human censure if I only receive the Master's approval and hear him say "Well done" when the work is ended. I say nothing about the eloquence or the intellectual weight of the preaching to which you have here listened, but only of its aim. Many of you are my witnesses that here I have lifted up the cross of Jesus as the sinner's only hope, I have tried to open before your vision the beauties and the riches that are in Christ Jesus, that so I might, if possible, draw you by the magnetism of redeeming love into the green pastures and beside the still waters of God's grace. I thank God that, notwithstanding many imperfections, He has used my endeavors for some good. My prayer is that he may still water the seed that has been sown and may yet more abundantly bless and prosper this dear church



