

THE METHODIST CLASS-MEETING.

Mr. Editor.—The following extracts from the proceedings of the Methodist Lay and Clerical Convention, held in Montreal a few weeks since, are taken from the report published in the *Christian Guardian*, and will be found worthy of the consideration of your readers, as presenting the value of the class-meeting, and the best mode of conducting it.

Yours, &c.,
J. M. M.

After devotional exercises, Rev. B. Longley, B. A., was called upon to open the discussion of the first subject: The Class-Meeting—its relative value.

Mr. Longley began by describing what he considered to be the nature and design of the class-meeting, and then proceeded to consider its value. 1. In relation to our entire Church polity. 2. In relation to the spiritual life of our members.

Under the first of these heads may be grouped all those advantages which, as a legislative, and executive, and governing body, our Church secures from the mere mechanical subdivision of its members into small family groups, each under its own watchful leader. Of these advantages the speaker specified three, viz., The facilities afforded for presenting, and urging upon the individual member, if necessary, any of the more important financial interests of the Church; the facilities afforded also for presenting and explaining more fully than could otherwise be done any contemplated enterprise or any proposed change in the constitution of the Church; and the bringing more immediately under the Church's maternal supervision the spiritual life of her individual members. In dwelling upon this last point, the speaker referred to class-leaders as under-shepherds who are able to watch, more carefully than it is possible for the pastor to do, over the daily walk and conversation of all the members of a church, however large its membership may be. It is because the class-meeting becomes in this way so true an index to the spiritual life, that it has been made a test of membership. Every Church must have some test of membership, though the fact is not generally recognized, and no Church has a test which more fully meets all the requirements of the case. Every test is to some extent fallible, and against every test may be brought, however unreasonably, the charge that it is arbitrary and tyrannical; but the class-meeting is as nearly infallible and as little open to the charge of tyranny as any other that can be named.

With regard to the spiritual life of the individual member, the speaker said the class-meeting is valuable inasmuch as it induces self-examination. Very clear is the divine commandment, "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith." There is, of course, a danger of probing too much in one's own heart, but in this age of excitement and hurry the danger lies in the opposite direction. The world needs nothing to-day so much as to just stop and think. The class-meeting is one of the agencies which help to make men think—to think of their own spiritual condition in the sight of God.

Again, the class-meeting helps to promote brotherly love. Members are brought face to face; they learn each other's names; they become acquainted with each other's joys and sorrows; they pray with and for each other, and the natural result of it all is that they come to cherish for each other a tender Christian sympathy to which otherwise they might have remained strangers.

Again, the class-meeting becomes in many instances the open doorway to a more active and useful Christian life—a training ground whereon the youthful soldier acquires wisdom and strength for braver battle and more glorious victory. There are leading ministers and hundreds of the most active laymen of our Church whose own conviction is, that had they not been helped forward through the agency of the class-meeting they might never have been able publicly to witness or work for Christ.

The class-meeting leads to renewed consecration. Showing us our own need, causing us to review God's mercies, leading us to look out upon life's solemn work and forward to heaven's everlasting reward, sweeping from before our darkening mists of worldliness

until things "unseen and eternal" rise upon our view. It leads us, as its crowning benefit, to cast our souls afresh upon God and to consecrate our lives more fully to his work.

The speaker then reviewed and answered some of the more common objections urged against the value of class-meetings and concluded by vindicating the claims of the class-meeting to our people's more unswerving loyalty and heartier support.

Mr. Robert Irwin testified to the value of the class-meeting, but thought it should be made less like a gathering of undertakers. It should be cheerful and homelike.

Mr. George Young believed that to the Methodist Church the class-meeting was a necessity. The true Christian must have a desire to speak about the better things. The class-meeting afforded the desired opportunity. He had found that his own attachment to class had been strongest when he was living nearest to God. Rev. H. F. Bland was then asked to introduce the second topic: The Class-Meeting—Best mode of conducting it.

He said: The class-meeting is a divine thing with a human name. He quoted numerous passages from the Word of God to prove the scripturalness of the class-meeting. The modern class-meeting grew out of the spiritual necessities of those who were convinced of sin by the preaching of the Wesleys and their coadjutors. As a prudential institution it is as much needed now as ever. As a soul stimulant it is needed. As an instrument of aggression it is needed. The late John Angell James said to a Methodist, "Class-meetings are your strength, the want of them is your weakness."

As to the method of conducting class-meetings, he would not speak dogmatically but would state what had been his own method. He did not go in rotation to the members of the class, but endeavored to make every one feel at home and at ease. After a brief hymn and prayer, he read a carefully selected passage of Scripture, interspersing the reading with expository remarks and questions addressed indiscriminately to different members of the class. A text of Scripture has been occasionally solicited from each. By this method monotony and repetition are avoided, conversation elicited, profitable thoughts stimulated, and details of experience unconsciously supplied. By this method, also, compulsoriness of speech is avoided; the Bible is placed before the eye as the great objective standard of Christian experience, character and life. Again, by this method the class-meeting instead of being a burden, becomes what it was originally designed to be, a privilege and object of desire. Further by this method, the young are attracted and influenced, and so are saved to Christ and our Church.

The sphere of the class-leader ought not to be confined to the class room. He ought to visit weekly, for spiritual purposes, those who may be prevented from attending the meeting. For this purpose the staff of leaders ought to be multiplied and the classes made more compact.

There ought to be, also, on every circuit a Normal class for the education of future leaders. This class might meet monthly under the direction of the pastor, and would form a corps of reserve from which leaders might at any time be supplied. The speaker concluded his terse and luminous paper by expressing the conviction that the class-meeting, rightly conducted, had in it elements of power such as had not yet been developed.

A very animated and somewhat lengthy discussion then followed, in which the idea presented in both papers were quite freely criticised. Mr. Jas. Patton objected to Rev. Mr. Bland's mode of conducting class on the ground that the class is an experience meeting rather than a Bible class. Rev. L. Gaetz replied that the element of experience is not eliminated from the class-meeting as conducted by Mr. Bland. Rev. John Armstrong also testified to the value of the class-meeting, and spoke of the necessity of throwing variety and interest into it.

The enthusiasm which pervaded this meeting from its commencement to its close was a striking evidence that, by the Methodists of Montreal, a deep interest is felt in this time-honoured institution of our Church.

O HOW SWEET! OR THE POWER OF PRAYER.

BY MRS. M. H. T. JORDAN.

"Sweet, sweet, O how sweet!" said one upon whose brow fifty-nine winters had left their seal—whose mind had been in "darkness that might be felt," while attempting to break from the bands of his soul's great enemy and fly to Christ; "this agony has been so terrible, I have not slept for a week; I can't live so; it does seem that I shall die; Oh do pray for me." A few lingered after the assembly was dismissed, and they told him, as best they could, of the love of Jesus; His promises, the power and simplicity of faith; while one who had just emerged from darkness into the glorious light of the gospel, with a beaming countenance said: "O my brother, it is so easy; just believing in Jesus, that's all; now trust him," and she knelt beside him, and poured out her soul in prayer with a fervency and simplicity of faith that moved the heart of Infinite love, and no doubt astonished angels, while blessings rich and full fell upon the believing group around the altar. And yet the struggle continued. We told him of "The Mighty to save"—in the present tense, and entreated him to give up his struggling, open the door of his heart, and accept Jesus as his Saviour now. Then in the arms of faith we carried him to the Cross, and asked him like the bitten Israelites, to "look and live." While holding him there by faith, beneath the flowing blood, he looked; the darkness fled, and he triumphantly sang:

"Hallelujah, 'tis done! I believe on the Son,
I am saved by the blood of the crucified One."
Then, closing his eyes, as though some new strange light shone upon him, he opened them again with joy inexpressible, saying: "Sweet, O how sweet!" The little colored boy when converted, with the same spiritual poetry and soul satisfaction, when he could think of nothing else with which to compare it, exclaimed, "This love is sweeter than molasses." And the Psalmist, moved by the Holy Ghost when speaking of this love and the Divine teachings, says: "More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb."

"You all look so good," said our aged brother, as he grasped the hand of one, then another, praising God for salvation by faith. "Oh, the wonderful power of prayer!" he continued. Then said: "I thank you all, dear brethren and sisters, for helping me, and I thank God for saving me." To one who helped to carry him to the Cross, he said: "Your face shines like a bright star. Oh, this is so precious; the rest of my days I'm going to work for Christ. Glory be to his name." His testimony was as clear and positive as King George the Third, of the Friendly Islands, of whom Mr. Taylor tells us. After getting down in the dust, at Jesus' feet, and accepting Him as a perfect Saviour, he said to his people: "Do you see that post in the corner?" pointing to a post in the chapel; "just as certainly as you know you see that post, just so certain am I that Jesus saves me." And like the blind man in the Gospel, whose sight was restored, the glorious light shone so brightly, this new-born soul could say: "I know that whereas I was once blind, I now see." How true it is, as the beloved disciple said: "And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us."—*Ch. Adv.*

LET MINISTERS VISIT THE SUNDAY SCHOOLS.

The occasional presence of the minister in the Sunday-school is a great encouragement to both teachers and taught. When it is at all practicable they should manifest their interest by their presence as often as possible. On many of our circuits this is difficult. The example of an energetic minister who is also one of our most effective Sunday-school workers might, however, in this respect be successfully imitated. In order that he may visit the schools on his circuit he has his preaching appointments occasionally filled by a local preacher, and devotes the time to the illustration of the lesson in the Sunday-school by means of his portable black-board, believing that he thus accomplishes greater good than by exclusive

attention to preaching, to the neglect of the schools. We have pleasure in quoting here the following important advice to young ministers by the Rev. Dr. Pope, President of the English Wesleyan Conference.

"While you are yourself yet young, care very diligently for the young of your flock. In this department of ministerial service there are tokens that the Saviour's joy is being fulfilled in us. There never was a time when so much attention was paid to our Catechumens, our Bible-classes, our select Sunday-schools, our teachers' preparations, and the care of children generally. The pastoral oversight of the young has been gently but irresistibly brought before the mind of the Conference; and the result is already felt. Let me affectionately urge you to take your full share in this movement. It has an obvious claim upon you; you are supposed 'naturally' to care for young people. They will repay your toil and assiduous love. And He who loves them that we may vary His well-known title, and call him 'the friend of children,' will take care that you feed his lambs. You will never be nearer to him, nor will He ever be nearer to you, than when you are devising the most liberal things possible on their behalf. You know where to find them. There are many homes whose little ones would very soon learn to hang on your looks and words as they hang on no other. Do your best to make your visits felt in the Sunday-school, where in my judgment you ought to be the permanent catechist."—*S. S. Banner.*

NOW.

Now! A short word; a shorter thing soon uttered.
Oh, listen to the voice of warning now!
"Seek the Lord while He may be found!"
See Him now! "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved!"
Believe now! Offer the prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner" now! Too much time has been wasted already. Lose no more. This may be your only opportunity! Seize it now!
Now! for time is short, and death is near, and judgment threatens! Now! for in eternity it will be too late, and the next step may land you there!
The purpose may not last till to-morrow; fulfil it now!
Fresh difficulties will flood the channel to-morrow—wade it now!
The chain of evil habit will bind you more tightly to-morrow; snap it now!
Living to God is a work of every day; begin it now!
Sin exposes to present miseries; escape them now!
Holiness confers present joys; seize them now!
Your Creator commands; obey Him now!
A God of love entreats; be reconciled now!
The Father from his throne invites; return now!
The Saviour from His cross beseeches; trust Him now!
"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation!"

THE BIBLE IN SWITZERLAND.

One day a gentleman in Byrne passed our depot, and stopped to look at the open Bibles exhibited in the window. His eyes lit on the passage in the Sermon on the Mount, "Agree with thine adversary quickly, whilst thou art in the way with him." He read what went before and what came after. It was a voice to him. He had just commenced a lawsuit with another gentleman. Without a moment's delay he went from the window of the depot to his "adversary," told him what had happened; the "adversaries" agreed with each other, and the lawsuit was quashed. Then he returned to the depot, and said that he wanted to buy that Bible he saw in the window. The depository offered him a clean copy of the same edition, for, naturally, the book in the window was soiled by exposure to the sun. But he said, "No; I want that Bible and none other; and then told the depository what she told me and what I have just related.

The depository turns the leaves of her Bible every day. One day a plain woman entered her depot and said: "Madam, you have forgotten to turn the pages of your books, to-day." It turned out that the old woman was in the habit of doing her daily Scripture reading in the large print Bible in our depot window.—*From the Bible Society's "Monthly Reporter."*

OBITUARY.

MRS. JANE C. BARKER, OF HANTSPOBT, NOVA SCOTIA.

Died on 13th of October last, aged 76 years, having been a member of the Methodist Church for nearly half a century.

Mrs. Barker, whose maiden name was Cowan, was a native of Prince Edward Island, where she came in early life to Windsor, with her sister, Mrs. Evans. About the year 1828, under the ministry of the Rev. Robt. Young, the Methodist Church at Windsor was favoured with a time of gracious visitation, and Miss Cowan was among those who then gave themselves to the Lord and to His church. Her Christian life was marked by golly consistency, and by earnestness of purpose, yet she did not at once enter into that clearness of religious experience, which, as a Methodist, she knew to be her privilege. She walked in the fear of the Lord, though without the comfort of the Holy Ghost. There were others then in the church at Windsor, who were then in the same state of mind—servants of God, but without the privilege of adoption as children of God—but their church connection was marked by the divine approval; for in the memorable revival in that town, which commenced in the early part of January, 1833, these were the first fruits of that blessed outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Miss Cowan's enjoyment of acceptance with God then became satisfactory, and her testimony was distinct as to the attainment of the righteousness, the peace, and the joy of the kingdom of God.

In 1834, Miss Cowan was united in marriage with Mr. Michael Barker, of Hantsport, a faithful, God-fearing man, and one who, with a few others in that village, held forth, as they had opportunity, the Methodist doctrine of present and free salvation. Religious privileges in that immediate neighbourhood were not then as abundant as they now are but Mrs. Barker maintained her confidence in God, and steadily pursued her Christian course. The death of some of her children and of her husband tried her sorely, but the Lord was her stay. In later years, by the increase of bodily infirmities, she was seldom able to attend the house of the Lord, and she felt this to be a great privation; but she knew whom she had believed, and held fast her confidence to the end. Her last affliction was not severe, and her removal was unexpected; but her sudden separation from children and friends on earth, was her entrance upon the joys of a brighter sphere, and her re-union with loved ones gone before. The writer preached on the occasion of her funeral upon the strong consolation of those who have fled to Jesus the sinners refuge. Her three daughters, living at Hantsport, we hope will follow in the footsteps of their sainted father and mother, and be found pillars in the temple of God, to go no more out for ever.

J. M. M.

Windsor, March 26, 1878.

CHRISTIANA BUFFETT.

At the ripe age of ninety-three, peacefully fell asleep in Jesus, on Sunday, February 17th. Sister Buffett who was the oldest inhabitant and the first convert in the place was highly esteemed by the whole community. For more than sixty years her beautiful Christian life has testified her fidelity to Christ and has been a living witness of the power of God's renewing grace. Her tribulations were often most severe but by divine grace she was always determined to overcome them and would suffer nothing to turn her either to the right hand or to the left; consequently she witnessed a good profession from the time she decided for Christ till the day of her death. She was a faithful visitor of the sick who were often cheered by her words of consolation. The house of God she loved, faithfully attended its services and was strongly attached to her ministers. She had a remarkably strong constitution; though so old she generally attended the house of God twice on the Sabbath until one Sabbath before her death. She often took part in the public prayer meeting and frequently has the writer been cheered and blessed while the dear old saint has been pleading so earnestly with God for His blessing on her pastor.

When her end came she felt that her work was done. Exulting she told us that she was ready, waiting her Masters call, and that she was going home to be forever at rest with Christ her Redeemer. May her children, and may we all meet her in our Father's home.

Sister B. had eleven children seven of whom are now living and forty grand children and eighty seven great grand children. Her funeral was largely attended.

S. M.

Grand Bank, N.F., March 1st, 1878.