

THE
CANADIAN INDEPENDENT.

TORONTO, THURSDAY, JULY 31st, 1879.

WISE ABOVE WHAT IS WRITTEN.

A CORRESPONDENT of the Montreal "Daily Witness," signing himself *RATIO*, is much exercised over the "false position" in which he thinks another correspondent has placed himself, by suggesting that Christians should "ask the God of the harvest, their Heavenly Father, that in His infinite mercy He may give us favourable weather for the ingathering of the crops." "Does he really believe," he says, "that any number of such petitions will alter in the slightest degree the sort of weather we shall have for the next two weeks? And if he does not believe they would have that effect (and I do not think he does) what object is to be gained by pretending to such a belief? Indeed I contend that to ask the Almighty for a thing when one knows perfectly well that it is not rational to do so is simply putting prayer to an unworthy use, and calculated, too, to bring it into contempt."

We have not seen anything for a long time so baldly deistical as the letter from which we quote, notwithstanding the pious phrases which the writer proposes to substitute for the prayer to which he objects.

We are not informed as to where the insuperable difficulty lies that makes it so irrational to believe in the efficacy of such a prayer. Does *RATIO* "really believe" that the Divine Being has so tied up His own hands by the laws which He has established, that He *cannot* hear His children's cry? If not, then the difficulty must be that He *will not* do so,—a point that is to be settled, not by the *dictum* of reason, as *RATIO* evidently supposes, but by the teachings of God's Word. The question is, "what saith the Scriptures?" In our judgment, it is far more "rational" to enquire *what the Lord has said* He will do about the prayer of His people, than to pronounce upon it in the self-confident spirit of the "Witness" correspondent.

Now it so happens, that when the Apostle James wanted to confirm the faith of his fellow-disciples in the efficacy of prayer, he did this very irrational thing which *RATIO* is so much afraid will "bring it into contempt." He urges prayer for the recovery of the sick—a very "unscientific" thing to do, according to Professor Tyndall—and points, as an illustration of the power of prayer to this very case which *RATIO* tries to ridicule—prayer for rain! "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," the proof he offers is, that "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, &c. (James v. 16-18.)"

It is of no use for any one to try to evade the force of this argument by saying that that was an age of miracles. *RATIO* probably does not believe in miracles—at least, he cannot consistently do so, since it would be "irrational" to suppose the prayer of the prophet to "alter in the slightest degree the sort of weather" that was burning up the plain of Esdraclon! But whichever way he views it, the reasoning of the Apostle is the same; for he appeals to the example of Elijah to show, not what prayer *could once* accomplish, but what *we* may expect it to secure for us *now*. Either, then, this inspired Apostle was all astray in his philosophy, or, if not, he was guilty of deluding his followers by "pretending to such a belief" as that prayer could bring rain; in other words, if *RATIO* be right, the Apostle was either a fool or a knave! We leave him to say which. We may return to this subject again.

FACT OR THEORY.

STRENUOUS endeavours are being made to discover a satisfactory basis of fellowship for Christian men. The advantages of a better understanding and closer union among disciples of the one Lord are felt by an ever-increasing multitude. Yet insuperable difficulties appear to stand in the way of this wider fellowship, this broader unification of the children of God. But might not these difficulties almost if not altogether disappear, were Christian men to reflect upon the respective merits of facts and theories, and assign to them their true position?

At present nearly all the various Christian communions are founded upon agreement in theories. The Presbyterian Church bases its fellowship on the theories advanced in the Westminster Confession. The Methodists find their link of union in the theories of Arminius and Wesley. The Baptists rally around their theory of Christian baptism. The Adventists are held together by their theory of the Second Advent. The Episcopalians are united by their strong confidence in the theory of Episcopacy. Look where one will, he finds great stress laid upon theories, and these are made a rallying-cry. Fellowship generally is founded upon agreement about certain explanations of Divine truths. And must not the effect of such a course necessarily be the division of the hosts of God into a number of larger or smaller circles, whose members see eye to eye?

Can there ever be the wider union which so many earnestly desire until men learn to put things in their right place? Facts are always greater than theories about the facts. Theories are no more than explanations of facts, and so must ever be secondary and subordinate to the facts they seek to explain. God made the world on which we tread. But the fact of the Divine origination of the world is greater than the explanations whether it was made in six literal days or in six long

epochs of time. Christ died for men, and because of that wondrous death God can pardon all human sin. But the fact of that atonement is greater than either the "expiatory," "representative," or "moral" theory about it. The Holy Ghost is the necessary agent of human light and recovery, but that truth is transcendent over the explanation of "mediate" or "immediate" working. Christ will appear the second time, but the fact of the Second Advent must ever have precedence over either Pre-Millennial or Post-Millennial notions about it.

If then there is to be a closer fellowship between Christian men, it must be through keeping the great scriptural facts in a primary place, and our human explanations of them in the secondary place. That will introduce a centripetal force into our Christian circles, by which men will come nearer, rather than the present centrifugal force by which men tend to fly off from one another. That will make frequently possible the occurrence of such scenes as that recently witnessed in Kingston, when the Rev. Dr. Grant—the Principal of a Presbyterian College—sat at the Lord's supper at the meeting of the Methodist Conference. On the fact of the Lord's death Calvinist and Arminian were one, however divergent their theories concerning it might have been. For the advent of that day of broader fellowship on the facts of Christianity every true heart prays. And the prayer will yet be answered.

Correspondence.

To the Editor of the CANADIAN INDEPENDENT.

DEAR SIR,—Have we as a denomination a work to do in Manitoba?

Daily trains and steamboats come to this province freighted with precious souls; most of them seeking new homes and new associations in this great and fertile North-west.

Most of the evangelical denominations are striving with great Christian generosity and commendable zeal to supply their spiritual need. Nevertheless, from want of men and means there are many places which have not yet been reached. And these places are multiplying daily. Is it right that we as Christians leave all this work to others?

Again, those to whom we have taught principles, which we believe to be scriptural truth, are here. They do not find homes where they can worship according to the dictates of their own conscience.

Some are working and worshipping where they are excluded from the table of the Lord. Others find a temporary home where they are not fully in sympathy and do not engage in work.

And here every Christian effort is needed. In this city, although the churches for the most part are well filled, yet there are hundreds who never attend any place of worship. Many of these could be reached by the efforts of an earnest spiritual church. It is felt by nearly all that there is more work here than can be done by the existing churches. Our denomination is respected, and the only reasonable apology we can give in coming, is that we have not come before.

There is plenty of scope for us here, but the work cannot be carried on without a strong self-denying effort on the part of our Canadian brethren. Already the efforts put forth have been enfeebled for want of means.

I have no thought of deserting so needful and