

Contributed Articles.

IS THE GOSPEL FREE?

This seems a strange question in our Christian Canada, but we take it to be well urged, even in our "City of Churches." Recently a gentleman entered a church, was shown to a seat by an attentive usher, a moment afterwards the proprietor of the pew entered, and remarked in a scornful tone, "This is my seat sir!" The stranger immediately withdrew, while the other seated himself comfortably in the house of God, to drink in the spoken truths of a free Gospel. We hear a score of voices exclaim in one breath, "This is not the case in our church." We ask, can it not occur very easily in any church on any Lord's Day? If a person has rented or purchased a pew, has he not the right to insist that any intruder should vacate the position; whether he does so or not, will depend entirely on the quantity of Christian spirit with which he is actuated; for we find that the pews are obtained by the money of the just and the unjust alike. It is puerile to say that the exclusive spirit is not exhibited, in a greater or less degree every Sunday. Too often is a stranger shown to a place close to the door, where he may enjoy the refreshing drafts of wind as the door is being continually opened and shut, and very imperfectly hear the sermon; but of course, a stranger never takes cold, nor can he have any possible interest in the remarks of the faithful pastor. True, more desirable seats may be vacant, but they must be reserved that the owners may have an opportunity of occupying them. It is idle to say that this is not a real case, we have been there and experienced it. Perhaps it is not so apparent in this or that particular church, but it may occur in any church on the pew-letting principle. We doubt not that every reader can recall of his own knowledge like treatment—treatment, which has at least caused him to feel that he was not at home. Is this consistent with the principles of our common Christianity? We would like to have produced the new testamentary authority for such a course. Can a faithful bible reader hesitate to admit that the whole tenor of the Gospel is opposed to this spirit of exclusiveness? It is against this atmosphere of exclusion that we most strongly protest. Christ said, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." The great mission of all ambassadors of Christ is to preach the good news to perishing men and women. The Gospel was to be taken to the sinner, but at this day if the sinner comes to hear it he off-times finds himself excluded, so to speak. Who can estimate what effect a welcome or the want of it to a stranger entering a church may have on his future life! It may be the straw that changes his path to the brightness of hope or to the darkness of despair.

Many church members will so earnestly defend the system, on the ground of convenience, that one might imagine the proprietorship of a pew was indispensably necessary to an appreciation of the Gospel teachings. Strange enough we find that these very same people will much enjoy the week-night prayer meeting where perhaps they never occupy the same seat twice in succession. It is objected that to make the

pews free, the church would be without a sufficient income. Should it be found that the members are not fired with Christian liberality enough to provide for the support of the church work, then by all means let them move into a plainer and cheaper church edifice, and one more commensurate with their means. Be assured that church is too extravagant in every respect, which to raise money must hamper the freeness of the Gospel. The members of a particular church would urge that their church only allots the pews to contributors to the weekly offering fund. What practical difference? Possibly the evil exists in more modified degree. It is the same exclusive spirit however; and certainly that system has gone too far, when a person who is not a church member presumes to give the usher a "piece of his mind" for showing strangers into the pew allotted to him.

With free seats, the minister would not be discouraged each Sunday, in speaking to the same array of unmoved countenances and stony hearts, to many of whom he has preached without any apparent effect for a score of years, and who slumber as serenely in the same spot as they did during the first year of the pastorate. Each Sunday would bring its change of faces. No one would have the sense of an excuse in not attending for fear of being deemed an intruder. It would remove the strange anomaly now existing, in that an edifice is called a church of God, and at the same time proprietary interests therein should be vested in individuals who have raised divisions where all should be equal. The accident of birth or fortune should afford no distinction there.

The episcopacy, with so much that is objectionable, is coming rapidly to the front in this respect. In this city more than one church has free seats. Can Baptists, who contend so strongly for primitive practice, afford to drop behind? Let our denomination give no uncertain sound. "Freely ye have received, freely give." Let every restriction be removed. May the time come speedily, when all our churches shall be free churches, and the invitation shall be to all, "Seats free;" "Come and welcome," "whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

MEM.

Communications.

The Editors do not necessarily endorse the views of Contributors and Correspondents.

ARE OUR S. S. LIBRARIANS ALIVE?

To the Editor of the "CHRISTIAN HELPER."

DEAR SIR,—The communication of "F. W. W." in the September HELPER strikes the key-note of a grand movement. But how many Librarians' voices are in harmony with the whole tenor of that communication? Are our Librarians enthusiastically devoted to their work, and impressed with its importance? If not, a Librarians' Association such as that proposed would be of no use whatever, for its main purpose is the discussion of plans; and that implies that its members should have ideas. I have been listening in vain for the faintest response to the suggestion "F. W. W." has thrown out. I took up

the matter personally, and drafted a simple scheme which I think would prove sufficient and efficient for the carrying on of the work of an Association, and I shall be glad to give your readers my thoughts if I find that any of them are anxious,—or even curious,—to know them. Meantime, I wait for an indication of interest on the part of those who should be most deeply interested.

I might say, however, that a good work can be done by individual Librarians, in collecting religious literature which has been used, and sending it to a needy mission school. An appeal was made in the *Baptist* of the 10th ult., by Rev. John Gilmour, of Doe Lake, Muskoka, for old books and papers for the scholars in his school. The Superintendent of our school read the appeal to the scholars on Sunday, the 20th, and on the following Sunday I received two parcels of books and innumerable papers. I mention this as showing that the work lies at our own hands; that it only needs perseverance; and that the giving away of their illustrated papers would train our scholars up in unselfishness. Hoping to find that our Librarians are alive. I remain, yours, &c.

THOS. BENGOUGH,

Librarian Alexander St. S. S.

Toronto, Oct. 30, 1878.

THE "MEMORIAL HELPER."

Letter from Rev. Geo. Cooper, M. A., of Philadelphia.
My dear Brother,

The memorial number of your "Helper," in memory of Dr. Fyfe, has just come in. I read it through without stopping at any point; the interest being fully sustained till the last word. I am glad that you issued it. It is well done, and worthy of the man whom it commemorates and of the cause for which he toiled so long and faithfully. I have not seen the consecutive numbers of the *Baptist*, in which, notices of his work and life may have appeared. But I should think the denomination would be glad of the work you have done, and would recognize it heartily.

As I read it, I thought how have the Baptists of old Canada West grown, in numbers, influence and enterprise; now the denomination has swung into line of march, laid aside its differences, felt the joy of a common work and its success. From this, no backward step must now be taken. Much remains yet to be done; foundations have been laid on which worthy structures must be erected, and as good work done there as has been done in the foundation work. To no body of Christians did God ever give more diligent, self-sacrificing men than He has given to the denomination of Baptists in Ontario, and their successors must prove themselves worthy of it.

But I am rambling into a longer letter than I meant to write. It was my thought only to write you a note, thanking you for the paper, and the work done in it. It was a pleasure to me to read it.

I shall be glad to know that at its meeting in Brantford, the denomination has chosen one of its good and true men to take up the work laid down by him who loved it so well, and saw its success assured beyond a doubt.

With best regards,

Believe me yours very fraternally.

GEO. COOPER.

Philadelphia, Oct. 16th, '78.