

MINISTERIAL RECOLLECTIONS.

[BY THE RECTOR.]

A very great authority on literature has warned us that he who aims at brevity often becomes obscure, and the writer of these reminiscences finds that this penalty has fallen upon himself on account of a too brief reference to the subject of many talks in that 'Shoemakers' Studio' on secularism. Perhaps I should have stated that my original visit was not the first that had been made, but the first that had led to amicable relations. My friend the City Missionary had endeavoured to obtain entry, but although no incivility had been encountered, yet he had failed. He knew but one method, - indeed a very good one, but not always suitable, and he was too honest a man to charge his failure upon the wickedness of his hearers. His simple Gospel, true and beautiful as it was and will be forever, needed ears prepared, and needed that method which St. Paul so well knew and practised.-(1 Corinth. IX: 20-23.) And so he rejoiced at my success, as he had on his side taught me many things from his own experience. Now my Shoemakers had learned to regard Christianity as a matter which concerns the future alone. It is a mistake to consider such men victims of an atheistical propaganda: their errors are more often the logical result of mistaken teachings of Christianity. If we present it merely as a guide to Heaven—

"Where congregations ne'er break up,

And Sabbaths never end,"

we leave the field open to any rival scheme which confines its functions to teaching our duty in the world. Now Christianity *does* teach, and most emphatically, our duty in this world; and it proclaims blessings, not merely in a future state, though not always tangible and physical. Yet even these are not excluded. (Mark x. 29, 30.) So I declared Christianity to be the "true Secularism," and though not going so far as the late Mr. Binney in his famous tract—"How to make the best of both worlds," yet I could declare that no state, family, or individual, had ever been the less happy or prosperous on account of Christianity, and indeed that the converse was true, except only for such sufferings sometimes to be endured for conscience sake, and which finally become their own exceeding great reward. How I remember persuading some of the keenest minds to go to Westminster Abbey and listen to a magnificent sermon delivered by Bishop Fraser of Manchester in that year (1878). I could not of course be with them, having my own church, but I can see their faces when I called at the workshop next morning with the question: 'How did you like the bishop?' "Well", came the answer from the spokesman, "if the parsons were all like that, Charley Bradlaugh would have to put the shutters up!" I have mentioned Bishop Fraser, and I am inclined to digress a little, and speak of some of the notable clergymen whom I met during that first year of work. But first I must describe the great shoemakers' picnic, which we held that summer in Greenwich Park. Picnics are not such common things in the great metropolis as in this country, where intelligent children, of wide religious sympathies are sometimes known to patron-

ise half a dozen of these entertainments in one summer. The East end Rectors generally manage to secure a day in Epping Forest or Southend for their children, though they must make appeals in the papers to obtain the money. Our children had Regent's Park not far off, and therefore were not strangers to green fields. And nearly all had visited the Zoological Gardens, which I shall always think the most delightful of all places to any child. Mr. Selater, the Secretary, gave me a free pass for our own children that year, and a liberal member of the Congregation enabled each child to enjoy a ride upon the celebrated elephant 'Jumbo', then an ornament of the gardens. When I think of the hundreds of buns which the elephant consumed that morning, I feel that nothing short of the eventual collision with a locomotive could have affected a frame so healthily constituted. But to return to my picnic. The children having plenty of amusement, the idea was mooted that the fathers and mothers should have their turn. The idea seemed quite revolutionary, but was very popular notwithstanding, and eventually it was carried out. On a fine afternoon in July, some forty adults, together with a liberal supply of babies, embarked at Charing Cross Bridge on the river steamer. It will hardly be believed, but a majority of my guests had never been on the river before. And yet there is no more beautiful sight, so far as town sights go, than from the spot where you see on one side, the Houses of Parliament, Lambeth Palace, and St. Thomas's Hospital, and on the other, Somerses House, Cleopatra's Column, the wide sweep of the Embankment, and St. Paul's towering in the background. After London Bridge is passed, the steamer threads its way through crowded shipping, not indeed of the largest tonnage, for the great ocean lines do not ascend above Blackwall, but still representing the commerce of every nation. At last Greenwich Hospital appeared, and we landed. The first thing was to inspect the picture-gallery, and I may remark that the comments of my companions displayed a greater measure of intelligent appreciation than one hears at the Academy from the well-dressed crowd. But our real goal was the Park. What blessings these open spaces are to London! How all enjoyed themselves, and yet so decorously, and with such regard to others. The mothers with babies sat down and talked; the fathers lit their pipes and explored the park. Some indeed, in the exuberance of high spirits, ran races, and were boys again in every sense of the word. But at length the hour of tea arrives. As we came up to the park, we had traversed a street in which every house bore this sign, most significant to excursionists like ourselves: 'TEA AND SHRIMPS, 9d.' And at each door stood the proprietor, male or female, with features wreathed in the most alluring smile at command, while not a few invited us audibly. But we had among us an experienced traveller who knew the land and its resources, and he decided us on our selection where (as he averred) the tea was unequalled in strength, and the shrimps veritable monsters of the deep. Memory does not enable me to say how far these glowing predictions were fulfilled; but never did a party more thoroughly enjoy themselves until the clock warned us that we must be seeking the homeward steambot.