

The Christian.

ST. JOHN, N. B., - - OCTOBER, 1898

EDITORIAL.

ONCE DARKNESS, NOW LIGHT.

For ye were once darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord; walk as children of light. Eph. i, 8.

The apostle forcibly contrasts the past state of the Ephesians with the present. They had once been darkness, but were now light. He does not say that they had once been in darkness and were now in light, but that they had been darkness itself, but were now light in the Lord. To be in darkness is an injury to one's self, but to be darkness is an injury to others. So also is it a benefit to a man's self to be in light, but to be in light is a blessing to others.

When "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us," He so united humanity that "no man liveth to himself." No man can pass through this world without the influence and help of others, and no man lives but either to aid or hinder others. "For to this end Christ died and lived again that He might be Lord both of the dead and living." To Him all must answer for the influence they exert on others. Jesus first asks the lost one, "Where art thou?" and as soon as He finds and saves him, He asks him "Where is thy brother?" The murderer replies, "I know not; am I my brother's keeper?" But the child of God is anxious for his brother's salvation, and tells him of the Saviour that he, too, may be saved.

These Ephesians had once been on the road to ruin. Living in idolatry and sin, they had influenced their children and others to pursue the same course. But Jesus in His great love had found them and drawn them unto himself. They were now light in the Lord. His spirit had borne witness with their spirit that they were children of God. There was a blessed change from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God. Being in fellowship with Him who is the true light, they were children of light, and Paul's great anxiety was for them to walk as children of light. While he rejoiced greatly in their salvation and in their hope of future glory, he pled with them to so walk that their influence in leading others to Christ might be still greater than it had been in leading them astray. In this letter he makes this walk exceedingly plain. What can be plainer than the following instructions: "Wherefore putting away lying, let every man speak truth with his neighbor; for we are members one of another. Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he might have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice. And be ye kind one to another,

tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God has for Christ's sake forgiven you."—Eph., 4th Ch.

All these instructions Christians can understand, and by God's help can practice. What a beautiful description is given of Christian conversation. It is good to edify saints, to build them up in their most holy faith, and also to minister grace to the hearers. God has promised to show his salvation to the man that ordereth his conversation aright; and here it is described as the channel through which salvation flows to the unconverted. When Christians meet, if anxious to do right and watchful, how easy it is to avoid corrupt communication and speak with grace, even when not speaking of grace. David calls his tongue his glory and determines to use it for God. It is the helm of a man's character, and with it he steers either in the narrow path or on the road that leadeth to destruction; and by its influence he is either darkness or light to others. The Christian is in constant need of divine aid, and Jesus has promised it in this way: "If ye abide in me and my word abide in you ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you." Abiding in Christ, we have God's promise of everything we ask of him, and he gives us power to shine as lights in the world.

Many a man can look back to the time when he was in darkness and trouble about his state, and how eagerly he sought the company of Christians to hear them talk of Jesus and his love, and of his sad disappointment when their conversation ran on other matters. But when he did meet a man who told him of the Saviour, how very anxious he was to save and how plain he made the plan of salvation. That man he can never forget. His form and appearance is ever before him. The very place on which they met is to him like the gate of heaven, and among the greatest joys of the future will be the meeting of this spiritual parent and child in the celestial abode. Let Christians remember that in the multitudes around them travelling to eternity there may be many halting between darkness and light who are watching their deportment, especially their conversation, and while they are determining in the Lord's strength that their sacrifice will be the fruit of their lips giving thanks to his name, let them in the same strength order their conversation so that it may be good to the use of edifying and minister grace to the hearers.

The long evenings will soon be upon us. How shall they be spent? Not, we trust, in sin nor in simply pleasure. Life is too short for its hours to be squandered. Here is a note from B. L. Smith that may be helpful. "I wish to commend to you a new book, 'Sketches of the Pioneers' by F. D. Power, Washington, D. C. It is a condensation of the lives of the pioneers and contains sound teaching. It will be sent by J. Z. Tyler, Cleveland, Ohio, for 25 cents a copy." How delightful and stimulating to spend some evenings over such a book. To walk with wise and bold men will help to make us wise and bold.

Original Contributions.

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL.

AGNES M. WILLIAMS.

Some few months ago the editor of a certain well-known journal treated his readers to an editorial on "The Decay of the Sunday School," but I'm sure that ere this the poor man has been made to realize the folly of his opinions, for from various sources have come stirring defences and unmistakable proof, in the form of statistics, that the power and influence of the Sunday School is not on the wane.

While his criticisms may be to a certain extent deserved, yet we feel that the good results of the work are sufficiently self-evident to sustain our faith in the organization. It seems impossible not to recognize that it is one of the most important departments of the church. A successful and well organized school is one of the surest indications that the church is becoming more and more alive to the glorious possibilities awaiting development in the young hearts and minds in the primary and intermediate grades of our schools.

Indeed, I do not think I am speaking too strongly when I say that the success of the church depends, to a very great extent, upon the Bible Schools of to-day, for from its classes the church will receive its most earnest and effective members.

Early impressions are the most lasting, and we are all willing to admit the necessity of early spiritual training and its importance in character building.

Now, although the purpose of the Sunday School is not to supplant, or in any way lessen the necessity for home training in religious matters (which unfortunately seems to be the impression entertained by some parents), yet the systematic outline of Bible study adopted by our most progressive schools is such, that, added to the somewhat unconsciously imparted truths the children so readily assimilate in their every day life, causes them to become more or less familiar with the Bible. With this familiarity, to even the most careless and indifferent scholar, there will come visions of a nobler and more ideal life, a deepening consciousness of the true meaning of Christianity; while the habit of direct reference to God's word, rather than the unquestioning acceptance of the opinions of men, will also be acquired.

Although the Sunday School is more adapted to the needs and intelligence of children, it should not be allowed to supplant the regular church service, which, judging from the absence of the Sunday School children from most of our church services, seems to be the case. We must always remember that it is a means to an end and not the end itself. It is one of the easiest and most natural entrances to the church, for in the ideal Sunday School, and, I trust, in many that are perhaps far from being ideal, the supreme object is to convert each and every scholar to Christ, and to help give them an