

Debating Union. The younger boys of the Sabbath School aspire to be members of this Club, and are thus kept in the Sabbath School. The aim is to lead the boys in ways that are right, by influences that are suited to their boyish natures and inclinations. The elders, the parents, the Sabbath School workers, and all friends, unite in saying,—God bless the Twentieth Century Club and its members ! And the boys take pleasure in wearing their pins, the badge of their membership.

St. Thomas, Ont.

Book Talks

II. "LES MISERABLES"

"The battle of the angels and the demon for a man's soul", this great story of Victor Hugo's has been called.

"Literature", one has said, "includes four epic poems of the first rank of genius. In the order of time these are the Iliad, the Æneid, Dante's Divine Comedy, and Milton's Paradise Lost. These primary springs of education for four nations have one and the same theme—the divineness of man's soul, its loss and its recovery." This is also the theme of *Les Miserables*.

It is a long story, really three books in one—Jean Valjean, Fantine, Cosette. Jean Valjean, an honest, hard-working, unselfish peasant, has been committed to the galleys for stealing a loaf of bread, when no work was to be had, to feed the starving children of his widowed sister, for whom with her children he had toiled from seventeen to twenty-seven, at sixteen sous a day for seventeen hours' work ; and comes out of prison nineteen years later, "with a heart as cold as granite and a will as hard as steel, only to have his heart melted and his whole nature turned to God and to an honest life by the Christlike compassion of the good bishop.

How Valjean makes headway in the world, establishes a profitable business, becomes mayor of his municipality, is a merciful providence to Fantine, an unfortunate waif of society, and a devoted father, when she is gone, to her little Cosette ; how, in short, he lays his whole life on the altar of service to those who stand in need, and how he himself is rehabilitated by the sacrifice—

becomes a man again ; the reader will discover opening itself out in a tale of absorbing interest.

These four vital truths, this wondrously skilful story makes plain and memorable how unjust and tyrannical law may be, when the spirit of mercy is absent from it ; how conscience still keeps its hold on the most hardened, and strives to whip them back into the right way ; the power of a kind word and a loving touch to win the worst into right ways : and the transforming influence of service of others.

Les Miserables, as has been remarked, is not of the short story type. It takes weeks for the reading of it, but its hold increases as the reader goes on. One feels, when he has finished it, that he not only has some deeper knowledge of how hard sin grips its victim, but a higher conception, also, of how much good remains even in a bad man, and how wondrously this can be brought out by the touch of human sympathy and divine help

Bible Strong Men

II. THE TIRSHATHA

By Rev. R. Douglas Fraser, D.D.

The king's cupbearer Nehemiah was, as we first see him,—an honorable office, but in the service of a foreign monarch. The Tirshatha, —the governor of his own home city, the royal Jerusalem,—Nehemiah comes to be, holding the city against foes within and foes without, and rehabilitating it with something of its former glory. He tells the story in the book that bears his name, not with any false modesty, but straight out, as the facts were ; and the facts reveal a strong man, one who loved his country well, and showed his love by brave deeds, and wise counsel, and patient continuance in work begun ; one, too, who loved his God, and who rested for wisdom and strength upon the counsel of the Almighty

It was because he was a good patriot, that Nehemiah "wept, and mourned, and fasted" when the news reached him at the Persian court, of the devastation of Jerusalem, walls broken down, gates burned with fire. The royal favor, the honor and luxuries of office, were as gall and wormwood to him, while his fellow countrymen were in distress.