

Our Contributors.

GOLDEN MEAN BETWEEN THE TOO EXCITING AND THE TOO HUMDRUM.

BY KNOXONIAN.

During the past two or three weeks there has been too much excitement in this country. A large number of the people have been shouting at political meetings, tearing around the country in sleighs and on railway cars, sitting on committees until all hours of the night, going out to see a man too often, coming home with a highly-flavoured breath and all that sort of thing. Business has been neglected, church meetings have been neglected, social duties have been neglected, family duties have been neglected, in fact pretty much everything has been neglected—except politics.

Of course this is true of only a portion of our population. Even in Canada there are men who, like the famous knife-grinder, "take no interest in politics." Their number, however, is small. The typical Canadian is a politician. Then there are some whose interest is mild. They vote and nothing more. The vast majority, however, devour political newspapers, attend political meetings and give more or less assistance to their favourite candidates. Denouncing politicians in this country simply means denouncing the great body of the people, for nine out of every ten men and a large proportion of the women are keen politicians.

Is there any harm in all this? Would it be better if our people took no interest in public affairs? Would the country get on better if the affairs of government were left in the hands of a few and the great body of the people were satisfied to be mere beasts of burden? Ought the average man to have nothing to do with laws but obey them—nothing to do with taxes but pay them? It is too late in the day to preach that doctrine. The average Canadian has got the idea pretty firmly into his mind that if he has to obey laws he should have something to say about the making of them. If he has to pay taxes he wants to be consulted about the levying of them. The average man has right and common sense on his side.

There are a few countries in the world in which the few rule and the many obey; the few levy and the many pay; the few kick and the many are willing to be kicked, but Canada is not that kind of a country.

But it would never do to have political feeling up to the boiling point all the time. Popular government is noisy, and rational people need quiet. Popular government takes men away from their business, and business must be attended to. Popular government interferes with family life, and family life is the basis of national life. Popular government interferes somewhat with Church work, and if the Churches go down neither the N. P. nor Reciprocity can save the country. Popular government fills the newspapers with campaign politics, and people get tired of hysterical headlines. By popular government we mean of course popular government as it is seen during election contests.

Too much excitement is not good for the body politic, but a "death-like apathy" would be much worse. How long would the country last if all respectable people should stand aloof from public affairs and let things drift? How long would the Churches prosper if the country went to ruin? Deathlike apathy is as dangerous as revolution, and often brings revolution in its trail. Problems that men are too apathetic to settle with their ballots may have to be settled by their sons with the sword.

Here, as everywhere else, there is a golden mean between undue excitement on the one hand and chronic apathy on the other. That golden mean is reached when a citizen gives a proper proportion of his time and labour to public affairs without neglecting duties that devolve upon him in other relations of life. Government is but one thing—an important thing no doubt—but after all the shouting and noise of the last few weeks only one thing.

In Church affairs there is also a golden mean between excitement and monotony. No Church is surer to fail in the end than one that has a "show" of some kind every Sabbath evening. Sensible people become disgusted, and the crowd that want the show will always keep on clamouring for a more exciting show until the Church comes into disrepute. More than this, the fellows who want a show on Sabbath evenings never do anything towards footing the bills. They are always one cent or no cent men. A Church that goes into show business comes to grief sooner or later. It may give some trouble to neighbouring Churches while the business lasts, but all they need do is go on with their work and bide their time.

But whilst the show business is fatal and disreputable, it is quite possible to go to the other extreme. A Church may dwindle or die from monotony as well as from sensationalism. Judicious variety is a good thing even in religion. Anniversary services, missionary services, Sabbath school services, an occasional exchange of pulpits, are good things in most congregations. Too much of the same thing is not always desirable even when the thing is good. Were it not that Presbyterian people are so conservative, an occasional change in the mode of conducting our Sabbath services might be pleasant and perhaps not unedifying. To avoid monotony without pandering to the depraved taste of those who are always clamouring for something new in the problem.

In social life there is a golden mean between constantly running about and constantly staying at home. Both ex-

tremes should be avoided. It is scarcely desirable to take tea every evening in one's own house, and certainly it is undesirable to take tea every evening in the house of a neighbour. The happy medium lies between.

In family life the golden mean is, we believe, the right thing in matters of amusement and recreation. Boys who run to some amusement every evening are pretty certain to turn out imbeciles or something worse. Girls who do the same thing are likely to become inane, insipid giglets. Young people who are never allowed to go out at all or see company at home may escape the damage sustained by those who run somewhere every evening, but they are pretty sure to be damaged in some other direction. The happy medium is the right thing. Happy are the parents who can always hit it.

In expenditure there is also a good medium. Economy is much better than extravagance, but economy may easily be carried to meanness, and meanness seriously injures character and lessens influence.

Nowhere can the happy medium be shown better than in matters of dress. Loud, showy clothes may be one never-failing mark of a fool, but shabby, poorly-made garments do not by any means prove that the wearer has either sense or piety. Reason about the matter as you may, a good suit of clothes increases a man's self-respect and influence. One of the worst things about the chronic poverty of many ministers is that it compels them to wear cheap, poorly-made garments. The golden mean is the right thing, but if a minister has many mean parishioners he may find some difficulty in getting the gold.

A WORD ABOUT BOYS' MISSION BANDS.

The band is the school where the boys may acquire a knowledge of the subject of missions. It is the workshop where the tools may be prepared and made ready for use in the work to be taken up and continued at a later stage. The preparing of these tools is a most important rudimentary branch of mission work, in fact, a home mission work in itself; a work to be entered upon in an earnest, conscientious, prayerful realization of its importance, and in reliance on the promised help of the Divine Spirit.

It would be unreasonable to expect the boys to know about missions by intuition, just as it would be unreasonable to expect them to know about any other subject without some educative process. Possessing no such knowledge it would be altogether unreasonable to expect them to entertain any interest respecting missions, just as there could exist no interest in any other subject about which they should remain in utter ignorance. The wonder is not that the boys should be indifferent, but rather that they should evince any interest whatever in what they know so little about. Before there can be interest some amount of knowledge is implied. In learning to read, whether starting, as in the old-fashioned way, from the A B C, or in some newer and it may be wiser and more intelligent mode, yet equally rudimentary, the pupil, beyond a certain amount of ambition perhaps, and the mere pride attaching to acquisition, can have no interest in knowledge for itself, or desire even to attain it, until he begins to realize that he is in possession of the golden master key that is to unlock for him the door of the treasure house. Then even this small amount of knowledge has become power—a power which begets interest and action. As long as the mere rudimentary stage, dealing only in words and terms, continues, missions can possess but little personal interest for the boys, and can wield no influence whatever over them. But under the guidance of an earnest, intelligent teacher, they ought very soon to pass out of this rudimentary stage, and, interest awakened, they will begin to acquire the knowledge of what missions really mean, and by degrees, from time to time, learn all that is possible to be known about them. To awaken such an interest and give such a stimulus to the acquisition of knowledge seems to be the first and main object for the formation of boys' bands; and this not so much with a view to what may be achieved by them financially or otherwise towards the actual furtherance of missions as to prepare them for the more apparently remunerative activities of a later stage in age and knowledge. Youth is pre-eminently the time to learn, and if that period passes by without the effort to do so all after attempts will be uphill work—it is so in every walk of life—and that the young may learn to some purpose it is absolutely necessary that they receive some instruction and wise guidance, and besides these, unlimited encouragement in all sincere efforts to learn. Hence the benefit to be expected from the formation of boys' bands. And this benefit would not be restricted to missions merely, for in the training of such bands it would be inconceivable that other matters of moment could be overlooked, one thing being so indissolubly connected with every other thing of spiritual import, it would be impossible to dis sever one from the other.

At this late day in the Church's history it ought not to be necessary to enforce the undeniable fact that it is incumbent on all the professed followers of the Saviour not only to further missions after some blind, mechanical fashion, but to educate themselves into a full knowledge of these, their meaning—*raison d'être*—state of progress, and requirements; with an ardent desire to redeem the time, as the day for work is shortening, in fulfilment of the distinct and last command of the Saviour as He ascended into glory, leaving as encouragement and support to his followers in their efforts the promise of His divine presence and the help of the Holy Spirit,

the Comforter, without such presence and help it would be impossible to carry out and fulfil any of the Divine commands. The reward for fidelity and the penalty for presumptuous disregard are alike beyond the imagination of man to conceive, but the certainty of consequence may, as a problem of cause and effect, be to some extent understood, for encouragement in obedience and restraint from disobedience.

If incumbent on all the followers of the Saviour that they, relying on Divine aid, fulfil His express commands, it is surely necessary that the baptized children of the Church should be educated to know their responsibilities, and the obligation to teach them must lie with the older members of the Church, and it rests with these to decide how this is best to be accomplished. Bands might be one means to educate them into a knowledge of missions at least. The chance of success in these bands might in far-reaching results make them worth trying, even at the cost of some disappointments and even sad failures. These would probably be in apprehensive, distrustful anticipation, magnified far beyond the reality, while the faith that removes mountains would bring along with it its own reward. Are they worth a fair trial for your own sakes, you older members of the Church, as well as for the sake of the boys, and, above all, for the cause of missions?

One thing more. If the boys are to be interested their teachers must not only be interested themselves but they must make the bands a source of true and profitable interest to the boys if they would not have their formation become worse than useless.

Boys' bands are not altogether an experiment now. They have been tried already and found to be successful, and bearing good fruit—preparing well-tempered tools for mission work; but they are not nearly so general in the Church as they ought to be to give them a fair trial. The girls' bands far exceed them in numbers, although it cannot be said justly that they exceed them in efficiency. Is there any reason why there should not be a boy's band for every girl's band at least? It requires no stretch of imagination to anticipate in the future under such an improved state of things that ten then to one now of our young men arrived at man's estate would continue their interest not only in missions but in all that concerns their own and the Church's true welfare.

A. B.

THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF SACRED LITERATURE.

A year ago the American Institute of Sacred Literature announced a curriculum of examinations, one of which was successfully carried through in 1890. In accordance with the policy then adopted, this Institution offers to any person or group of persons an examination upon any biblical topic, and award certificates for all meritorious work.

By this means a minister, a Bible teacher or non-professional Bible student, having completed the study of a certain biblical subject, may be provided with a set of comprehensive and suggestive questions which will show him whether or not he has grasped the essential facts of the subject, its teachings, its relation to the Bible as a whole, and its historical and literary value.

Two general examinations are offered for 1891. The first is upon the Gospel of John and will be of special interest to those who take up the study of that gospel with the International Sunday School Lessons beginning July, 1891. The second takes up the life of the Christ based upon the four gospels, and is primarily intended for the many who are this year engaged in the special study of this topic.

In order that the questions may be adapted to all classes of persons, they are prepared in four grades as follows: (1) the Advanced grade for ministers, theological students and persons who have done close and critical work; (2) the Progressive grade for the members of adult Bible classes who have done a less amount of work upon the subject; (3) the Intermediate grade for Bible classes, the members of which are from fifteen to twenty years of age; (4) the Elementary grade for those who are from ten to fifteen years of age.

Careful study of the Sunday school lessons with the usual helps ought to be a sufficient preparation for these tests. Thorough study by any method whatever will prepare a student to answer the first two grades of the questions. Special helps are suggested to all those who wish to prepare themselves for a higher grade.

The examinations will take place January 15, 1892. They will be conducted by special examiners, of whom there are already more than one thousand appointed by the Institute. Wherever, in any place which can be reached by mail, there is even one person who wishes to take the examination, a special examiner will be appointed.

All examinees are furnished with an examination direction sheet containing suggestions for work and helpful outlines.

Certificates will be awarded to all those whose papers reach an average of seventy per cent. These will be of three classes, A B or C, according to the standard attained. The individual results of the examination are not made public, but are known only to the examiner, the examinee and the Institute instructors.

This work can best be made universal by a multiplicity of examiners. A special appeal is therefore made to all ministers, Sunday school superintendents or Bible class teachers, who are willing to become special examiners, to send in their names at once.

All these, and also all individuals or groups who desire to take one or both of these examinations should write immediately to William R. Harper, New Haven, Conn., who will receive and give prompt attention to all enquiries.

New Haven, Conn.