

prayer meeting, Sabbath school, Bible class, the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, the doing justice and loving mercy and walking humbly with God is becoming altogether too commonplace and humdrum for us. We do business at railroad speed nowadays, and we must "work at" religion in the same fashion. Much of our work is of such a character that it would be hard to pick a flaw in it—from the outside. I have no doubt of that. Neither have I any doubt that Uzzah thought he was doing a praiseworthy thing when he put out his hand to steady the ark. David, we are told, was angry at the Lord's judgment on Uzzah; and doubtless many good men in our day would be angry, did anyone question the soundness of the "work" which they supervise and stimulate. But, look you, my brothers, Diotrephes and Jezebel are not developed in a day; nor does the devil often undertake to drive his wedges butt-end foremost. He is older than you are, and knows a great deal more about human nature.

Turn to the minutes of the last General Assembly, and see what the Synod of Hamilton and London, and the Systematic Benevolence Committee have to say about the various schemes and dodges for money raising and other "Christian work"—such as the promoting of a "social feeling" in congregations.

Probably they are speaking of these things in the more advanced stages of their development; but don't they all grow from the same root?

Now these words of our Presbyterian bishops are words of truth and soberness. But, buried as they are in the small type of the minutes, how much influence have they in moulding thought and action in our congregations? Look abroad and see!

Yes, our bishops are good men, well fitted to bear rule; but we give them small chance to get their work in. They go to Halifax and pass resolutions, and Diotrephes and Jezebel (*in posse and in esse*) go right on in absolute ignorance of the existence of these deliverances; or if they hear some round-about version of them, snap their fingers and say that the bishops are quite welcome to—go to Halifax! The "strong arm" of which you speak, exists, of course; but you know the story of the little girl who was asked, Was her father a Christian? "Yes, sir," she said; "but he's not working at it much." Our strong arm is tied up, and when the actuating force is strong enough to burst the lashings, other things are apt to get smashed also.

In his last book, Professor Bryce marks, as an American characteristic, the general refusal to accept any man as authority upon matters of opinion. This spirit is good up to a certain point. But when Miss Eighteen and Mr. Twenty snap their fingers at such men as you name—when those just entering upon the Christian life, or just professing to enter upon it, laugh to scorn the experience of their elders in spiritual things, what is to be done about it? Said a gentleman to me the other day, "The average minister knows that he must consent to these innovations or leave." Just so, and the average Board of Managers will tell you that you will lose in numbers and revenue if you resist them; and the average Session will not see its way to interfere. Yet we are not Congregationalists; we are Presbyterians, with a grand system of strong armed church government! But what can be done with the innovators? If they professed to be better than their neighbours, we could get at them; but they don't. They simply want to "put some life into the thing" and "get the young people interested" and "run the Church in good shape." Cake and comic readings, tea and "classical" music are among the milder means. A "good time" and the money for a new organ or some other attractive luxury, the more common ends.

Do not imagine that I am in love with the "Holiness" people. I have no personal knowledge of facts or persons in the Galt case; but my experience of others who hold these ideas is distinctly disenchanting. Still, is it not rather a queer position that any ground should be given for an assertion that we excommunicate people for being too good, while practices which our own Supreme Court condemns are openly indulged in—are encouraged by many pastors and officers.

Many deplore these things. Many would be willing to take all the risks (I speak as a man) which might be involved in setting in motion the "strong arm" for their suppression, could they but find a point upon which to rest their lever. But, unless the evil has run to extreme lengths, there does not appear to be any such point. And even if there were, is not prevention better than cure? Faith should see no risk, dread no pain in the righting of wrong; but why not endeavour to prevent the wrong?

Is there anything to prevent the Assembly sending down to Sessions—jointly with a ringing pastoral on Systematic Giving (or Systematic Paying, as it was better put by a minister near you lately)—a very strong protest against money-raising by other than distinctly Scriptural means, and against the using of churches for other than distinctly religious meetings? Many Sessions need just about that amount of starch in their vertebrae, and there are few congregations in which a direct, emphatic message of that sort would not effect a salutary quickening of sleepy consciences.

A stock argument in favour of these innovations has been above alluded to—many would leave the Church, we are told, if they were suppressed. I do not believe that we would suffer materially in mere count of noses, and I am quite sure that any shrinkage would soon be made up. But suppose we did lose half our members and three-fourths of our adherents—what then? The shrinkage in Gideon's army was far more than that. Our congregations might be smaller; but the Church would be larger, and far, far stronger. N. T. C.

Up in the Woods, January, 1888.

BOOKS AND READING.

It may be thought that education has now made such progress among us that it is no longer necessary to insist upon the importance of reading or to give suggestions as to the books which should be read or the manner of reading them. We are not quite sure that this opinion is well founded. It is quite true that most people are now capable of reading books in their own language. It is also true that a considerable majority of those who are able to read do read something. But there is still a vast number of persons—not at all badly educated—who read hardly anything at all; and there is a number as large, perhaps larger, of persons whose reading must be so unprofitable that perhaps they had better not read at all. Indeed, there is a conflict of opinion on this very point, men of equal eminence taking different sides; some holding that it matters little what a man reads when he reads, providing only that he gets the habit of reading anyhow, since, the habit once formed, he will certainly, in time, eschew the evil and choose the good. Others again, notably Mr. Carlyle and Mr. Frederic Harrison, are very earnest in protesting that bad books are worse than nothing, that the man who is reading mere worthless or hurtful books would do very much better to let books alone altogether.

It is of small importance to adjust the balance between these opposing views. The utility of reading is so generally recognized that, even if it is abused, there is little hope of its being abandoned. Without reading and study men cannot gain knowledge, cannot become learned or cultivated in any full sense of these words. It is therefore more to the purpose to offer some guidance to the reader, for people will read, than to tell those who are reading amiss to desist, which they will be little likely to do. With regard to the class of subjects which are profitable for reading, we might say at once that all are profitable, if only they are taken in their proper proportions. It is too late in the day to prohibit the reading of fiction and poetry and the drama. It may be all very well for those who are shut up in the cloister, or who are living by rule under some definite authority, to renounce anything which is forbidden to them. Obedience of this kind may be a very good thing, especially if it keeps people to their own chosen and appointed work. But the man who tells ordinary people, "living in the world," that they shall not read fiction, may as well tell the wind not to blow. Besides, he cannot possibly be consistent. The most severe prohibitionist in this line would read and recommend the *Pilgrim's Progress*, which is fiction. And the same may perhaps be said of many Scripture parables. We say "perhaps," because Archbishop Trench suggests, and many persons believe, that the parables of the Gospels, or some of them, are true stories.

But, although we cannot hope or desire to stop the reading of fiction, we may do something to regulate it and to restrain it. One who reads nothing but light literature is as certainly ruining his literary digestion as one who ate nothing but pastry would be ruining his stomach. If any one should find it impossible to read a volume of history, or a play of Shakespeare, or a book of *Paradise Lost*, or a play of Walter Scott's without toil and weariness, then such an one had better call a halt without delay, and subject himself to a process of self-examination. It will be well, in such a case, to break off the reading of novels at once, and begin the effort to read something else, taking perhaps a little at a time, until his powers are confirmed, just as an invalid is permitted to return to his full diet only by slow degrees.

If, however, it is a matter of strict necessity and of duty to our own intellectual nature to limit our reading of fiction and light literature generally, it is still more obligatory upon us to avoid all corrupting literature. And we are apt to make mistakes on this subject. It is quite easy to say of certain books that they are filthy, and it is not difficult to bring the censor down upon their publishers. But these books are seldom the worst. A book of this kind was suppressed the other day in England, and its publisher was fined. Yet an eminent literary man remarked, with perfect truth, that the book was no more demoralizing than an open sewer would be; it was simply sickening and disgusting. The books of this kind which are most mischievous are those of which it is impossible to prohibit the circulation. Every one must take care of himself, and, as far as possible, of those whom he can influence.

It was remarked by the late Lord Lytton to the present writer that, "in literature we should read the older books, and in science the new." There is no great need for this caution in regard to the latter class; but the importance of the other portion of the counsel is imperfectly recognized. Of course, it was not the intention of so eminent a writer to interdict the reading of new books. In that case his own occupation would have been gone; and such a piece of advice would have exposed its author to the lash of Horace, as applicable in our own times, as in his. But we are certainly justified in holding that the man or woman who can find no pleasure in books, unless they are of the ephemeral type, has no proper appreciation of literature at all. And this is true of a great many of our modern readers.

"The books which ought to be in every gentleman's library," as some one sarcastically called them, are too often allowed to rest on their shelves, whilst the books which will never find a permanent resting place in any library are often eagerly devoured. We may as well make up our mind, as Mr. Frederic Harrison has lately warned us, in his excellent essay on the "Choice of Books," that,

if this is all that our reading amounts to, we are in a very bad way indeed. If we cannot read Shakespeare and Milton and Scott without weariness, then we must really give up pretending to be educated people. And there are many persons who cannot read a play of Shakespeare or a novel of Walter Scott's without weariness, or at all!

It is something that these things should be already said and heard, because a great many persons are under the quite false impression that the mere fact of their devouring quantities of ephemeral novels proves them to be readers of certain literary pretensions, if not also students. These false notions may not be dissipated at once or very widely. But if only one here and there will make the resolve to adjust the proportions of their reading in a more satisfactory manner, the influence will spread, and the reformation will at least have been begun.

It is beyond the purpose of these brief and straggling notes either to consider the whole subject of reading in anything like a complete manner, or to suggest a collection of books which are worthy of being read, and which ought to be read by all who aspire to literary cultivation. To a great extent safe guidance will be found in the papers of Mr. Frederic Harrison and Sir John Lubbock, the latter of whom has given a list of what he regards as the hundred best books. We may, however, suggest a way of beginning to those who have had little guidance in this business of reading, and may be glad to be helped into better ways.

First of all, then, there are English classics which are acknowledged by all competent persons to have a position beyond the range of criticism. And with the works of these, or some considerable part of them, it is the duty of all who aspire to be educated men and women to be acquainted. We name, as mere samples, Shakespeare, Milton, and Scott. Perhaps none could be named greater than these, although we are aware that by some persons Chaucer and Spenser are preferred to Milton. In French literature, there are Corneille, Racine, Molière; in prose, Bossuet's *Histoire Universelle*, Pascal's *Provincial Letters* and *Pensées*. In German, there is Goethe's *Faust* and *Hermann and Dorothea*, Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*, Lessing's *Nathan der Weise*. In Italian, Dante, to go no further. In Spanish, Don Quixote and the plays of Calderon; and English readers may be recommended to Archbishop Trench's admirable little volume on that which is the principal play of this Spanish Shakespeare, namely, *Life is a Dream*. There are good translations of most foreign works which are worth an English dress; and those who are unable to read the originals should have recourse to them. As examples may be mentioned, the excellent translation of Faust by Bayard Taylor, and of Dante those of Cary and Longfellow. With regard to classical authors, Homer and Virgil for instance, there are many very good translations, and of late some excellent renderings in prose have been published by eminent Cambridge scholars. Probably these translations will give an English reader the best notion of the originals. Many however will continue to prefer metrical renderings. Pope's Homer will always be popular, and Chapman's will be valued by those who appreciate strength and force.

PRISON DISCIPLINE AS A MEANS OF EDUCATION.

An American contemporary furnishes some interesting items concerning the system pursued at the Elmira Reformatory, in which the experiment has been in progress for some years of using prison confinement as an opportunity of conferring educational advantages on the inmates. The little book of some hundred pages which sets forth the results of the system is printed by the prisoners themselves. Only such convicts are sent to the institution as have never been in a state-prison before. They are sentenced to an indefinite term subject to the discretion of the board of managers, but can not be detained beyond the maximum period for which they might have been incarcerated under the law. For burglary, e.g., man may be kept in Elmira for ten years, but not longer; but if the superintendent believes that a prisoner, from his record, will lead an honest life on discharge, he may be allowed to go free at any time after one year. To obtain his release he must get a perfect record in three branches—for good conduct, zeal, efficiency as a workman, and proficiency and diligence as a scholar. In this latter field is found the distinguishing characteristic of the Elmira system. It is, in fact a school for convicts, and the results are surprising. On the average, it is said, 60 per cent. of the convicts released from other prisons find their way back, but thus far 80 per cent. of the discharges from the Elmira Reformatory during the eight years the experiment has been continued are believed to be permanent reformations. Every improvement has been introduced not inconsistent with proper discipline, looking to the health and well-being of convicts. The experience of those engaged in this humanitarian work is opposed to the view that intellectual development increases the capacity for wrong-doing. By enforced study the energies formerly employed in criminality seem diverted toward more praiseworthy pursuits. It is found, however, that even the so-called intelligent criminal appears mentally deficient as soon as he passes out of the groove in which he has been accustomed to exercise his cunning, so that it is no easy task to broaden his views of the aims and duties of life, and thus qualify himself for occupying a useful place in society. The experiment appears to us to be well worthy of consideration by social reformers, and by all who desire that penal inflictions should be made subservient to reformatory results in our criminal population.—*London Lancet.*