

BOOKS AND MAGAZINES.

THE NATIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER. (Chicago: Adams, Blackmer & Lyon Publishing Co.)—The February number of the "National Sunday School Teacher" will be found very full in its expositions of the International Lessons for the month.

BALLADS AND OTHER POEMS. By Alfred Tennyson. (Montreal: Dawson Brothers.)—This is the author's Canadian edition of a work recently published in England, containing new poems, the Laureate's latest work. We have no doubt it will be widely read. The publishers are to be congratulated on their enterprise in bringing out, simultaneously with the English edition, so handsome a volume.

CHURCH-YARD LITERATURE. By John Kippax, M.D. (Chicago: S. C. Griggs & Co.; Toronto: Hart & Rawlinson.)—The author treats his somewhat dismal subject in a very interesting manner; bringing together a number of quaint and queer, as well as serious and laughable epitaphs; the whole forming a readable volume of more than two hundred pages. As might be expected, by far the larger number of epitaphs given are from American church-yards, but not a few are Canadian.

THE INTERNATIONAL REVIEW for February has some very interesting papers. Among others "Froude's Defence of Henry the Eighth," "The Tariff Question," "M. Zola as a Critic," etc. One on "Fiction and Public Libraries" speaks of a crying and growing evil of the times in connection with public libraries, whether these are absolutely free or open to the public at a moderate charge. The supply of "fiction" and "juveniles" in all such institutions is stated to be something positively alarming. In five years the issues from the free library of Boston and branches amounted to 4,872,595 volumes, and of these 3,824,938 were "juveniles" and "fiction." In other words about four-fifths of the issues were the lightest kind of fiction, and all over the country the same rule may be said to hold good. That it is the same thing in Canada, though perhaps not quite so bad, is beyond all reasonable question. But it is not merely the amount of this fictitious literature circulated which is the formidable consideration, the character of by far the larger portion of it is also to be considered. The writer says truly that "the largest class of the story readers are the young or those whose minds, from lack of the highest education, are similar to those of the young. It is not, therefore, to be expected that they can enjoy the delicate delineations of character, the fine weighing of motives, the skilful adjustment of circumstances which are essential to a story of the first rank. The quiet pictures of home life, of life in foreign lands, or in historic times, however carefully studied and truthfully painted, are too tame and spiritless to find favour with them. Their interest is almost exclusively in novels of incident, in which one exciting event follows another in rapid succession. This kind of story, however, is of the lowest class, and its tendency is inevitably downward rather than upward. The ordinary relations of our every-day life are soon exhausted by the novelist, and new and extraordinary relations must be discovered or invented." How true all this is every one knows. Poor boys and girls and still poorer young men and women, saturated with that sort of exciting stuff, crave even for something still more exciting, and like intellectual dram drinkers must have their ever-increased dose of "forty rod" if they are to be even moderately comfortable. Children in our Sabbath schools, girls bursting into womanhood, and others old enough to know better, cry out for incident, complain of narrative or description as "dull," and look upon everything that requires the slightest thought or the smallest amount of attention as "dry." What is the result? Those fed on such diet by-and-by can relish nothing else. A page of history puts them in the horrors, and even a story of Walter Scott's is too great a task for their jaded and enfeebled intellects and corrupted tastes. The spice is always made stronger and stronger. The unnatural, the marvellous, and by-and-by the vicious, are all laid under contribution to suit the ever-growing corruption at once of morals and taste. It would be well, in fact, for all who have a desire to do good in their day and generation to consider whether the great mass of public libraries, as at present conducted, are a general benefit or a public curse. Sure we are, at any rate, that in Canada as well as in the States,

there is need for the closing words of this article being carefully and deliberately weighed. "Where one," it is said, "was injured by over much novel-reading a generation ago, possibly there are a hundred now. Not only may this be true, but as the number of vicious stories has increased, I believe, in greater proportion than the innocent and harmless, so much the greater is their influence in confusing the ideas of right and wrong, in loosening the bonds of social order and morality, in undermining the principles and in leading to actual crime. Now I would not be thought to charge the public libraries as a class, or any of them in particular, with freely and deliberately disseminating the lowest grade of the literature leading to such results. My charge is that they create a demand for this literature by circulating such stories as I have referred to, which under a thin veil of decency are indecent, and, under the pretence of faithfully portraying life, attack religion and morality. Few young persons can read these exciting tales of crime, these 'lively descriptions of the *demi monde*,' without having the desire awakened to read still more exciting stories, still more lively descriptions, than the public libraries furnish. That such a taste when once formed can readily be gratified is only too well known. Were the public libraries throughout the country to cease circulating stories and novels, I am confident that the labours of the 'Society for the Suppression of Vice' would in no long time be greatly lessened, and the demand for the literature which it endeavours to destroy would be gradually diminished by the drying up, as it were, of the most fruitful source of the evil." Of course some of these remarks are specially applicable to the States. But they to a great extent suit Canada as well, and when cheap reprints of more than questionable novels are issued in our own city and paraded and advertised with a great deal of diligence, to say nothing of still worse, that may easily be had for a few cents, if they can't be loaned out at a still cheaper rate, it is time that the friends of sound literature and pure morals were bestirring themselves.

SABBATH SCHOOL TEACHER.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

LESSON VII.

Feb. 13. } PREACHING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST. } Luke iii.
1881. } 7-18.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance."—Luke iii. 8.

HOME READINGS.

M. Luke iii. 1-22. The Ministry of John.
Tu. John i. 19-36. John's Testimony to Jesus.
W. Matt. iii. 1-17. The Baptism of Jesus.
Th. Isa. xl. 1-11. The Voice in the Wilderness.
F. Mal. iv. 1-6. The Forerunner Foretold.
S. John iii. 23-36. John's Later Testimony to Jesus.
Sab. Mark vi. 17-29. Death of John.

HELPS TO STUDY.

The period between Christ's appearance in the temple at twelve years of age (see Lesson VI.) and His entrance upon His public ministry at the age of thirty, is passed over in silence by all the evangelists. Regarding John the Baptist they are equally reticent, the sole record of his life from infancy up to the opening of our present lesson, being the words of Luke (i. 80): "And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel."

The following comprehensive extract from the "National Sunday School Teacher" will render further introductory remarks unnecessary: "The eighteen years of silence at last are broken by the voice of one crying in the wilderness. The child who was in the deserts had grown, and waxed strong in spirit, and now the day of his shewing unto Israel had come. Like Jesus at Nazareth, John was away from all teachers and schools of philosophy and of learning. He was a disciple of the Holy Spirit only. When he spoke he spoke in the power of the Holy Spirit. From his grassy pulpit in the wilderness he made the whole nation hear his startling cry: 'Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!' He aroused the consciousness of the people in that time of almost universal corruption so that they flocked in multitudes to his baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. The ignorant peasant, the unscrupulous publican, the brutal soldier, and the learned and self-righteous scribes and Pharisees found themselves seated side by side under his preaching, and cowering alike under his fearful arraignments, his terrible denunciations of sin, and his appalling warnings of judgments near at hand. His austere appearance, which had in it much that resembled Elijah, the prophecy of whose coming he fulfilled, reinforced, and gave greater effect to his words. He was clothed with a coarse garment woven of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle was about his loins. He was superior to the vanity of his time. His food was locusts and wild honey, and he was a Nazarite, abstaining entirely from the use of wine. He, therefore, stood in contrast to the luxury that was a marked weakness of his generation. He made no attempt to conciliate the priests, the scribes, and the Pharisees, who were the ruling classes, and, therefore, he shewed himself to be above the ambitions of his

day. In him God selected evidently the most fitting of heralds to announce the coming of His Son."

The following are the main topics of the lesson: (1) *Natural Depravity of Man*, (2) *Reformation the Proof of Repentance*, (3) *Unimproved Privileges Useless*, (4) *The Doom of the Impenitent*, (5) *Advice to the Common People*, (6) *Advice to the Publicans*, (7) *Advice to the Soldiers*, (8) *John's Opinion of Himself*, (9) *The Saviour's Speedy Appearance Announced*.

I. NATURAL DEPRAVITY OF MAN.—ver. 7. No doubt, as distinctly stated by Matthew, the Pharisees and Sadducees were especially aimed at in the words, *O generation of vipers*, etc., but the fact that Luke does not single out any particular class as being addressed, shews that the description is more or less applicable to all while unconverted; and is not every unconverted person, at heart, either a Pharisee or a Sadducee, or a little of both? The grand point insisted on in the Bible doctrine of natural depravity is that, for our salvation, there is nothing in our natural condition or character that we can build on; we must relinquish all credit on this score and begin upon a new foundation—not our own righteousness but the righteousness of Christ.

II. REFORMATION THE PROOF OF REPENTANCE.—ver. 8. This is what the "S. S. Times" says about it: "The real thing always shews itself. Whether it is love, or friendship, or generosity, or gratitude, or trust, or repentance, it will evidence its genuineness in something more than profession. There are shams and there are realities in all these spheres, and the differences between them will stand out in the long run. There is a great deal of sorrow over sin and over sinning that is not repentance. The guilty prisoner is sorry that he got caught. The guilty man who hasn't got caught is sorry that so much of evil and trouble comes of his wrong doing. There is sorrow because of the results of sin, in every sinner's soul. But that is not repentance. Repentance is the turning away of the soul from sin as sin; it is the turning toward something better than sin. This state of mind will shew itself in conduct that gives proof of sincerity. Sinful courses will be abandoned. Reparation will be made. A new course of living will be adopted. In word and in action there will be fruits worthy of the name of true repentance. Has your penitence shewn itself in such ways?"

III. UNIMPROVED PRIVILEGES USELESS.—ver. 8. On this verse the "National S. S. Teacher" comments as follows: "It is strange under what refuges the arraigned sinner will take shelter! The Sadducees and the Pharisees inwardly answered the voice of the preacher and that of their own conscience by saying, that they were the children of Abraham—the heirs of promise. They sought to find a cover for their sins under the cloak of the faithfulness of their father Abraham—an effort not much more absurd than that of the one who 'guesses' that he is about as good as other people after all. But John tore away this cloak. He made it plain that nothing would take the place of good fruits. Ancestral piety is of no avail to corrupt children. A good pedigree counts for nothing in the kingdom of God. It is not the stock from which one sprung at which God looks, but at the fruit that he bears. God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. There is no such thing in God's kingdom as an hereditary spiritual aristocracy. No persons, merely on account of their descent, are necessary in the carrying out of God's plans. To have the spirit of Abraham is better than to have a lineal connection with him. Those who copy the spiritual life of that patriarch are more his children than those who derive their physical life from him, and who live at enmity with his covenant."

IV. THE DOOM OF THE IMPENITENT.—ver. 9. See Isaiah x. 33, 34; Heb. xii. 29; Ezek. xv. 2, 4; Luke xiii. 7; John xv. 2, 6. The tree is judged by its fruit; the man is judged by his conduct.

V. ADVICE TO THE COMMON PEOPLE.—vers. 10, 11. Some one says that John's answer is in the spirit of the Old Testament. That is quite true, but it is equally true that it is in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount. In prescribing impartial and universal benevolence the preacher aimed a sweeping stroke at selfishness. Until they came under the influence of the Gospel the people could not follow the Baptist's advice.

VI. ADVICE TO THE PUBLICANS.—vers. 12, 13. The Publicans were tax-gatherers under Roman authority. They farmed the taxes; and therefore extortion was the publican's chief temptation. John touched his patients exactly on the sore place.

VII. ADVICE TO THE SOLDIERS.—ver. 14. There is historical proof that many Jews at the time referred to served as soldiers in the Roman army. "It was," says the "S. S. Times," "one thing for one class, and another thing for another class, that John named as a test of a right spirit in the professed penitent. But after all it amounted to this, do your own duty in your own sphere. What is another man's duty is his business. What is your duty is your business. Mind your business. And the counsel for then is the counsel for now. The words of the preacher to the Jews and Romans of eighteen centuries ago are timely words for American and English Christians of to-day. Share your clothing and your crusts with the destitute; claim nothing more than belongs to you; do no violence to anybody; neither slander nor misrepresent any human being; and be contented to earn and to receive the pay you have agreed to work for. Who can say that he needs no reminder of duty in either of these lines of personal conduct? He who cannot would do well to hear and to heed the call of the preacher in the wilderness."

VIII. JOHN'S OPINION OF HIMSELF.—vers. 15, 16. John attached no importance to himself but as God's messenger and the Messiah's forerunner. He describes himself (John i. 23) as nothing more than a "voice;" but we have it from the Saviour's lips that "among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist" (Luke vii. 28).

IX. THE SAVIOUR'S SPEEDY APPEARANCE ANNOUNCED.—vers. 16-18. For baptism with the Holy Ghost see Isaiah xxxii. 15; Prov. i. 23; John vii. 39; Acts ii. 4; Acts x. 44. The fan was an implement somewhat like a shovel and sieve combined, used for winnowing grain.