

THE

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AN EXCELLENT SUGGESTION.

WHILE we cannot say "Amen" to all the sentiments uttered by our recent correspondent from Montreal, yet he makes one good point which we hope the Union Committee will not disregard. He suggests that there should be more papers read, in which "the ripe thought of our ablest men may unfold itself in refreshing streams of hearty and inspiring religious sentiment." There was, undoubtedly, dearth of these at our late meeting. The blame, however, was not so much the Committee's, as the brethren's who permitted themselves to be nominated as essayists, and allowed a twelvemonth to slip away without doing the work assigned to them by their co-labourers. We take it, that every man who accepts such a duty—so important to the success of our Union gathering—should make it a matter of conscience rather than convenience; and if he finds himself unequal to the task, he should promptly notify the Committee, so that other arrangements may be made. At our last gathering, the Union preacher for the Sabbath morning was absent, but so far as we remember—we may be wrong—not a single scratch of the pen was sent explanatory of his absence. There has been too much of this thing in the past, and we hope it may never occur again.

Then as to the topics of the papers to be read. Let there be care exercised here. The contention of the Rev. Mr. Wallace at the last meeting is a good one, that "this perpetual debate on the merits of a Liberal or Conservative theology is absolutely out of place, in view of the more pertinent and practical questions with which the Christian Church has to deal to-day." There are hearts almost wavering to-day before the strong impugment of many of our Christian tenets. There are plans of Christian work which will bear the improving touch of a reformer. There are grave social evils which need a strong protest from those who love the right. There is the colossal Sabbath school interest which ought not to be passed by in silence. There is the spiritual life of our churches, none too high-toned or Christ-like. There are scores of themes like these which if discussed would rekindle the quenching torch of our faith, and send us forth as quickened messengers of the Christ. The mint, and anise, and cummin are less than the weightier matters of the law.

CHURCH GRUMBLERS.

Our subject is not a very inviting one. We would almost as soon lay our hands on a porcupine as write about it. And then, it has been taken up so often in religious newspapers that nothing very new can be said on it. Still,

we believe that it needs a word or two pretty often.

Is there a church in Christendom that has not its grumbler? We think there is a possibility of finding one in Scotland. Recent returns show that there are parishes in connection with the establishment in that country with only one name on the communion roll. There, it seems to us, there must be a chance of finding such a church. But we would not be too sure of that. This we know, we have never seen a church that did not have one member of the far-renowned family. Of course, there are differences between Church Grumbler and Church Grumbler. One shows the family features more clearly than another.

We once thought that the Church Grumbler was nothing but a pest. We classed him with the mosquito and such creatures, and held him to be a useless annoyance. But we have learned that the mosquito is good for something. And we have learned that the Church Grumbler sometimes answers some end.

Many of our churches need a tongue-lashing now and then. Pastors and deacons and people are all the better for a little scolding. They need something other than a bag of sugar-plums or a jar of preserves. Most Reformers have something of the grumbler in them. Garrison could growl. So can Wendell Phillips, some think, a little too well. So can Goldwin Smith, according to the "Globe." And we ought to be thankful now and then for the Church Grumbler. He often sets us right when we are wrong. He often wakes us up when we are sleeping. He often arouses us to earnestness when we are careless.

But the mischief lies here. When men of a certain temperament begin to grumble, they never leave off. They acquire a habit of grumbling. Grumbling becomes a second nature with them. They keep at it morning, noon and night. There is nothing as it should be. There is nothing that is said or done in the proper way. The pastor never preaches, never prays, never reads as he ought to do. Why, he can't even talk or laugh or weep or walk, or wear his hat or coat, after a thoroughly orthodox, saintly fashion. The deacons are a set of useless, good-for-nothing men. They don't understand their duties, or, if they do, they never attend to them. The Sunday school is mismanaged. The choir is a disgrace. The finances of the Church are in a deplorable condition. The members are destitute of all spiritual life. Everything is in a sad, woeful state. It was not so in the years that have passed away. Then everything was fair and flourishing. Then everything promised well. We have met with many men to whom this description applies. They grumble all the while. It looks as if they had discovered the secret of perpetual motion and had applied it to their grumbling.

Does the Church Grumbler know that he is a nuisance? Does he know that he is a pest to his brethren,—just as much as the potato-bug is to

the farmer? We would kindly and gently insinuate this to him—give him an Irishman's broad hint of the fact. Does he know that he makes other folk uncomfortable? Probably he imagines that a mild purgatory here will do them good hereafter. Probably he thinks he is specially commissioned to teach them the virtue of patience. He may as well understand that, as a rule, he does not succeed in doing that. If he could read their minds and hearts at times, he would see something very different from patience there, something not very gracious, either.

And does the Church Grumbler know what is the influence of his conduct on outsiders? Does he know what impression non-religious persons obtain from him of the character and power of religion? He does not help to exalt religion in the estimation of the community. He may depend on that. Complaining, murmuring, finding fault doesn't make men much better in this world. For one unkind, ungentle word that has done good, there are ninety-nine that have been sources of incalculable harm. That is not the method which Christ has ordained for the renewal and elevation of men. You can't lift men up by beating them with clubs. Nor can you improve their appearance by pricking them with needles.

So much to the Church Grumbler to-day. We may have something more to say to him by and by.

VACATION.

Vacation time! What floods of joyous thoughts does the word bring into the hearts of those who have grown hoary in professional or public life! It implies escape to the green fields, going on long walking excursions, fishing the lakes and streams, bathing and swimming and boating. One single holiday is intensely precious to the man who has the spirit to enjoy it. While it may pass rapidly away, it may have concentrated in it all the enjoyments of every vacation time of our past life. That is why one single day is so valuable to a man who is overtaxed with commercial or professional labour. It brings but a few hours of relief from toil and anxiety, but in these few hours a life time may be lived over again. The hand may have forgotten its cunning in casting the fly or firing the rifle; but the old days come back as pleasant memories when we could take our place beside the best of them in manly sport and recreation. When the children come rushing into the parlour, pitching down their loads of books, and running off with a shout, and crying we have got our vacation, does it not make the blood of parents tingle, and flood their hearts with gratitude and joy? What music is there in the boy's cry that there is no more school! How pleasant to see the girls settling down to their quiet games of playing house and being real mothers, and forgetting they have just escaped from their teacher's control!