

Messenger and Visitor

Published in the interests of the Baptist denomination of the Maritime Provinces by

The Maritime Baptist Publishing Co., Ltd.

TERMS: \$1.50 per annum in advance.

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Address all communications and make all payments to the MESSENGER AND VISITOR.

If labels are not changed within reasonable time after remittances are made advise "Business Manager," Box 330 St. John, N. B.

Printed by Peterson & Co., 107 Germain Street, St. John, N. B.

THE HOME READING.

A great deal depends for the welfare of the family upon the character of the reading matter that finds admittance to the home. There may be Baptist families in this country where there is a scarcity of reading matter, but that can hardly be a necessity. Literature is so abundant and so cheap today that the poorest may possess it, in quality good, bad or indifferent according to the taste of the reader. If even there is no money to buy books, papers or magazines they can be begged or borrowed, so that wherever there is a will to read there is almost always a way to obtain the means of satisfying the hunger of the mind. Conditions are very different in this respect today from what they were in times easily within the memory of some of the older readers of this paper. Books and papers were then a luxury to be found only in the homes of the wealthy or of those who were willing to make considerable sacrifice to obtain them. Even for those who had wealth at command the supply of available reading matter was limited. Of course good books were obtainable, but they were costly, and so beyond the reach of most; and as for current literature it was not only expensive but was meagre indeed compared with what we have today. The homes outside of cities that could afford more in the line of current literature than a weekly newspaper were few and far between, and those in which even so much as that was to be found were not numerous. And yet the advantage is not wholly with the present as compared with the conditions which obtained in this country fifty or sixty years ago. If the means of filling the land with books and periodicals, so cheap as to be within reach of the slenderest purse, has brought large opportunities for mental improvement, it has also certainly brought great temptations to mental dissipation. A great deal of the literature that is consumed in immense quantities today is no more adapted to promote a wholesome mental development than a diet of confectionaries and pastries is adapted to promote the wholesome development of the body. In the old times a good many people were able to find in their scanty libraries and in one family newspaper incomparably more food for their minds as well as for their souls than many readers of the present day secure from all the abundance of literature good, bad and indifferent—with which they are supplied ad surfeit.

There is therefore great need of careful discrimination in connection with this matter. Parents should accept it as an important duty, to superintend and direct their children's reading. "Just as the twig is bent the tree's inclined" as true in this connection as any other, and there are few others in which children and young people more need a direction than in this. In this connection the proper attitude to be taken in reference to fictitious literature is of course a question which will demand attention. There are risks here from which if possible the young should be deterred. But in these days wise parents will hardly think that they have done their whole duty by their children in particular when they have peremptorily forbidden them to read novels. Probably no parent would think it unwise, even if he deemed it desirable, to prevent his young people reading more or less of current fiction. And it is wise, we think, to recognize that here, as elsewhere in literature, the good and the bad find place, and discrimination needs to be exercised. There is fiction which is to be condemned, not because it is positively bad, but because it is trashy and enervating, and there is other fiction which rises with it from the pollution of the soul, and should be avoided as one avoids a deadly atmosphere. But there is also fiction which, read in moderation, is wholesome, engaging and uplifting in its influence. Though the characters and events which it portrays are ideal and not historical, yet it cannot be said that in the larger sense, it is true to life, and the lessons which it teaches are true and in the highest degree salutary and important. And as we have seen, it is inevitable that our young people all read fiction of some kind; it is certainly in the highest degree important that their selections from the great and immensely heterogeneous mass of literature which is classed under that name shall be of the best.

But it hardly need be said that even the best of fiction is not to be recommended as a steady intellectual diet for either young or old. Nor need we say that, apart from fiction, there is an abundance of good and wholesome literature in variety suitable to all ages and capacities, and interesting enough to hold the eager attention of any bright child or youth whose taste has not been spoiled by over-indulgence in highly spiced fiction.

When one reflects how much must depend for their character and influence for good in the world on what our young people read and what they refrain from reading, he must appreciate the large opportunities and corresponding responsibilities which parents have in directing the reading and cultivating the literary tastes of their children. There are no doubt many parents, anxious to do their best for their children, who will distrust their own abilities in this matter and who will do well to avail themselves of the counsel of their pastor and of other friends who may be able to advise wisely on this subject. And our young people too, who have come to years of maturity will do well to accept their own share of responsibility in this connection, and so improve the opportunities which some measure of leisure and an abundance of good literature place within their reach, to make the most of themselves for Christ and for humanity.

THE SBARRETTI INCIDENT.

It is not unnatural that what has come to be known as the Sbarretti incident has stirred up some feeling in this country. The prevailing sentiment in Canada is strongly against any union of Church and State, and to a large majority of the people the idea of being ruled from Rome, either directly or indirectly, is to the last degree unpalatable. It may be that more is being made of this incident in some quarters than the facts will justify. We are inclined to think that is the case. But it must be admitted that it is not pleasant to hear that a Provincial Government has been approached by an Ablegate from Rome, and requested to open a question which, after much difficulty and with the full approval of the people of the Province and the Dominion, had been settled, and as was supposed, settled permanently, and further to hear that the Ablegate had declared that compliance with his request would tend to advance the undertaking of the Province for the enlargement of its boundaries. Of course the Papal representative explains that he meant only that compliance with his request would favor the designs of Manitoba as to enlargement, because Roman Catholic populations would be more willing to be included within the bounds of the Province if the privilege of separate schools were assured to them. This may have been all that Mr. Sbarretti meant. But if so it would seem to be rather a gratuitous piece of information, since, if it is a fact, the members of the Manitoba Government might be supposed to be aware of it as well as the Monseigneur himself. Is it uncharitable to suppose that Mr. Sbarretti in connecting the amendment of the school law with the extension of the boundaries meant that if the Manitoba Government satisfied the Roman Catholic Church in reference to the school law of the Province it would find the Church using its influence in favor of, instead of against, the extension of the Provincial boundaries? The method of bringing the ecclesiastical influence to bear is another matter. It is not necessary to suppose that there was anything in the way of an undertaking or an agreement that the Dominion Government should serve the purposes of the Roman Catholic Church in this matter, and since Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Mr. Sbarretti have both declared positively that there was nothing of the kind, we at least have no difficulty in accepting the statement. But the Church of Rome has many ways of working out its purposes, and it is by no means necessary to suppose that when its leaders design to bring their influence to bear in the political affairs of a Province they will proceed by way of a positive understanding with the Federal Government. No one need doubt that the Roman Catholic Church, either through Mr. Sbarretti or other agents, is bringing to bear what influence it can, or what it deems practicable under the circumstances, to bring its designs to pass in reference to the schools both in Manitoba and the Northwest Territories. We need not wonder at this, nor can we greatly blame the Church, if we concede its right to hold the principles which it does. We certainly do not believe that the system of separate schools which the Roman Catholic hierarchy demands is adapted to promote the best interests of Canada. But we do not wish to enter here into any discussion of that question. And we are wholly averse to any unnecessary stirring up of religious strife. The history of this journal is proof of our assertion. But we cannot but wonder that in certain quarters there is an attempt to cry down as disturbers of the country's peace, men who feel impelled to utter their protest against the invasion of a people's rights in the imposition of a hard and fast separate school law upon two new Provinces. Strife is bad enough, but there is worse, and if our fathers had loved quiet more than liberty there would have been the free institutions which are our boast today? Everybody knows that the embodiment of a separate school law in the constitutions of Saskatchewan and Alberta today is a concession to the Roman hierarchy of Quebec, just as the attempt to pass

the Remedial Bill for Manitoba was a similar concession in 1896. Why should such a concession be made? The Northwest has its separate schools today and we are told that the new Provinces if left to themselves would almost certainly continue them. But that is not enough for the power which seeks to dominate our politics. Separate schools must be put into the constitution as hard and fast as any earthly power can put them there. If the Government had left the whole subject of education to the Provinces Roman Catholics would have had no reason to complain, and Protestants would not have felt called upon to enter any protest. Why then did not the Government avoid all occasion for the stirring up of racial and religious strife by leaving education in the power of the Provinces where it rightly and constitutionally belongs? But there is a contention that Parliament has not constitutional power to do otherwise. Very few men, we believe, with any reputation as constitutional lawyers are willing to risk it on that contention. But if the Government believes that it is under constitutional obligation to put separate schools in the constitutions of the new Provinces, why not test its faith by submitting the question to the Privy Council?

Editorial Notes.

—Dr. Guinness Rogers is now eighty-three years of age, but despite his age, is still actively engaged fulfilling engagements in the pulpit and on the platform.

—The Watchman learns with regret that Rev. Dr. William Howa is quite seriously ill at his home in Cambridge, Mass. Dr. Howa will be ninety-nine years old in May, and until recently has been wonderfully vigorous and active. He had called at The Watchman's office three weeks ago.

—We have received from Brass Hill, Barrington, a letter dated April 6th enclosing a one dollar bill and fifty cents in stamps which the writer states was for the MESSENGER AND VISITOR but neglected to sign the name. Remittance will be credited or subscription added to list as required if writer will forward signature.

—Readers of the MESSENGER AND VISITOR, will, we know, unite with us in giving a hearty welcome to a letter which appears in another column, from our highly esteemed brother in the ministry, Rev. Isaiah Wallace. All will rejoice to hear of his increasing strength, and will hope that with the advancing spring his health may fully return.

—The Dominion Conference of the Y. M. C. A. opened in Montreal on Wednesday of last week. The following were elected officers: President; John M. C. Quaker, Owen Sound; Vice Presidents, Lyle Reid, Ottawa; J. E. Morris, Orillia; Secretary, H. Ballantyne, Toronto. The report of the committee stated that during the year five new Associations had been formed, bringing the total number up to 36. Reports from 29 Associations gave the membership as 12,591.

—Dr. Alexander MacLaren has been spending the winter, or at least the latter part of it, at Mentone, and though the winter there has been unusually severe, has enjoyed his stay. The British Weekly says that Dr. MacLaren has been busy preparing for the press his "Expositions" of Isaiah, the first volume of which is already in print. Much of it is published for the first time, and the whole is a notable contribution to exegesis. Dr. MacLaren's Expositions, the first volume of which appeared before the end of last year, have had an extraordinary welcome, and promise to exceed in popularity every publication of their kind.

—Rev. Dr. Goodspeed, for fifteen years past professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics in McMaster University, has submitted his resignation. The reason for this step is said to be the reconstruction of the Theological curriculum recently decided upon by the Senate of the University. Whether or not there is a probability of an adjustment of the difficulty, which will admit of the resignation being withdrawn we do not know, but we should suppose that McMaster would be very sorry to lose a man of Dr. Goodspeed's scholarly attainments and ripe experience as a teacher of theology.

—The Grand Jury of the Toronto Quarter Sessions in their presentment last month recommended "spanking" as punishment for drunkards, after a first conviction. But Dr. Roseburgh, Secretary of the Ontario Society for the Reformation of Inebriates, has entered a protest against this recommendation on the ground that the punishment would be ineffective for the cure of drunkenness, since as he holds, chronic inebriety is a disease, and corporal punishment under the circumstances would be cruel. However this may be, it is certainly a very poor way of reforming drunkards to gather them in periodically off the streets and impose upon them heavy fines which in many instances must be paid out of the meagre pittance which their impoverished families have to live on. We are not sure but that in many instances the substitution of the proposed corporal punishment for the fine would be more wholesome for the drunkard as well as for his family, though it might not add so much directly to the city treasury. But whether the drunkard is to be fined or spanked, the man who sells him the liquor and makes him drunk should take his full share of the punishment.