

Our Contributors.

BLUE DAYS.

BY KNOXIAN

Most preachers have blue Mondays. On these days they have a feeling of "goneness." They don't know exactly what is the matter with them but feel that they are "all gone." They are unfit for hard work, are likely to be the least bit crusty. They account for the blueness by ascribing it to the labours of the Sabbath. In this they are at least partly mistaken. Blueness on Mondays more frequently arises from overwork on Saturday than from ordinary work on Sabbath. If a preacher rests on Saturday and takes plenty of exercise in the open air on that day, ordinary Sabbath work will be little more than healthy exhilaration for him. A preacher who works late on Saturday evenings and goes into his pulpit tired and weary on Sabbath morning must always have very blue Mondays. The manner in which Saturday is spent usually determines the degree of blueness to be endured on Monday.

Blue Saturdays are not unknown to preachers. Busy, overworked preachers see them occasionally; lazy procrastinating preachers see them every week. If on Saturday morning a man knows that he must say something to a congregation twice on Sabbath, and also knows that he has nothing to say, he usually feels blue. The feeling is a perfectly proper and natural one. Unless he has been prevented by Providence from preparing his message he ought to feel ashamed as well as blue. His congregation may feel both ways before Sabbath is over.

There are blue Sabbaths as well as blue Saturdays and blue Mondays. Too many people in this country are likely to look upon any Sabbath in which the congregation is small as a blue Sabbath. It has often been said that our neighbours across the lines judge everything by its size. In their judgment everything big is great. With them big and great are synonymous terms. They have a big country, big cities, big prairies, big rivers, big hotels, and they have learned to judge everything by its bigness. Canadians imitate their example to an extent that few would be willing to admit. Church going people are the greatest sinners in this regard. Almost the only question that many fairly good people ever ask about a meeting is: was it large? If large then all is well. How easy it is for people in this state of mind to jump to the conclusion that a wet Sabbath must be a blue Sabbath. And the good man who conducts the service is very likely to catch the contagion and come to the conclusion that "anything will do for a wet Sabbath." The rich, well-prepared sermon is perhaps laid aside on Sabbath morning and the good man resolves to make "a few remarks," and dismiss the few people who have braved the storm and come to their place of worship. That kind of an effort called "a few remarks" has a marvellous power for drawing itself out. It elongates like a telescope, and perhaps the effort on a wet Sabbath actually measures more by the clock than an ordinary sermon. Measured by homiletical standards it may have been a month long. The people may have thought it never-ending. The day was considered blue at the start and the good man intensified the blueness until he made it almost black. If there is one day more than another on which a wise preacher will do his best it is a Sabbath which promises to be blue. If there is one congregation more than another that deserves the very best a preacher can give, it is the brave handful that face a howling storm. A numerically small congregation may not be small in any other way. It may be large in faith, in hope, in liberality, in good works. Some meetings numerically large are contemptibly small every other way.

One very wet evening some years ago, Kennedy, the king of Scottish song, was advertised to give a concert in Toronto. The night was dark, and the rain came down all the afternoon and evening in a steady pour. It was a cold pitiless pelting November rain. A few people, many of whom had free tickets, went to the hall. As the hour drew near the only question discussed was whether the Kennedy family would sing to such a small house. Prompt to a minute the old gentleman came out in full dress, blithe and cheery as a spring morning, and opened the proceedings with this little speech: "Friends, it is a wet, disagreeable evening outside, but that is no reason

why we should not have an enjoyable evening here. If the night is unpleasant outside, all the more reason why we should enjoy ourselves." Then he went through the programme, sang his best songs, told his best stories in his own inimitable style, and the uniform testimony of those present was that the old gentleman fairly eclipsed himself. There was nothing blue about that meeting. "The children of this world," etc.

Great good may be done by preaching to a very small congregation. An Irish minister once preached to a congregation of three at Castlebar. One of the three was converted and became William Arthur, author of the "Tongue of Fire." Dr. Archibald Alexander once preached to two persons and both were converted. Were the days on which this work was done blue because the congregations were numerically small? As a matter of fact it is not the congregation alone that the preacher slights when he puts a few people off with a few remarks and goes home thinking he has had a blue day. He slights his own work and his Master's message. Jenny Lind was once asked why she sang so long and so well to an audience composed of a few ignorant coloured people. Her answer was "I never slight my art." Away with the vulgar idea that a wet Sabbath spent in preaching to a few of God's children is necessarily a blue day, and a day spent in addressing a large number of people must necessarily be a good one. The Master may form a very different estimate of the day's work. Some days are blue to the preacher even when the weather is fine and the church full. He does not know the cause and the blueness is all the more distressing because he does not. As Spurgeon says, the chariot wheels drag heavily. Why they do so one cannot always tell. Perhaps the cause is largely physical. Indigestion, unstrung nerves, worry and want of sleep, have unmanned many a noble preacher at the critical moment and destroyed many a good sermon. One of the surest trials an earnest preacher ever endures is the failure of a sermon on Sabbath that he has spent a long time and a large amount of labour in preparing. And these are just the sermons that often seem to have very little effect. Blue days must occasionally come to the pulpit as well as to every other department of human activity, but there is always one consolation left to the man who has done his best:—the Spirit may bless the bluest day to a congregation.

Hearers have their blue days as well as preachers. Some hearers think every Sabbath a blue day. But there are good earnest souls who really desire to enjoy the service and profit thereby and even to these blue Sabbaths occasionally come. They are not in a good frame of mind. They do not feel as they used to do and they cannot tell the reason why. It is a happy thing when one of God's children can say on Sabbath evening "I have enjoyed the day very much." One reason doubtless why many hearers have blue days is that they do not begin to prepare for Sabbath soon enough. If people work in their stores until midnight on Saturday, and have no good refreshing sleep; if they tumble out of bed at ten o'clock on Sabbath morning, dress hurriedly, pray hurriedly—if they pray at all—take breakfast hurriedly, and hurry to church; how in the name of common sense can they expect to have a good Sabbath?

Drummond in his wonderful book defines a living being as one who is "in correspondence with his environment;" at least he accepts that definition from Spencer. If a hearer is not "in correspondence with his environment" in church he cannot be happy. The environment is chiefly made up of the preacher, and the elders, and the trustees and the precentor or choir, and his fellow worshippers. Drummond would say that if he has no correspondence with any part of the environment said hearer is dead. Well, if he has no correspondence with the greater part of his environment he must at least have blue Sabbaths. The best thing he can do is to put himself in correspondence with his environment and then perhaps the Sabbaths will not be so blue or the hearer either. Want of correspondence with environment in church is a bad thing.

NOTES OF A WESTERN RAMBLE.—IV.

(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

STRATFORD.

In the railway jump which the traveller makes from Berlin to Stratford, although the distance is much greater than from Galt to Berlin, there is not such a complete change of nationality. Essentially a Scotch

town, there is nevertheless in Stratford and neighbourhood a considerable Teutonic element, sufficient, at least, to demand the existence of a German newspaper. Stratford gives promise of being a city of considerable importance. It occupies a prominent place as a railway centre.

The Presbyterian body is well represented in the town. The congregation, presided over by Rev. P. Wright, is large and influential. The church occupies a splendid position on the main street, and is a building of great elegance. The interior decorations give evidence of a very decided reaction from the old time, barn-looking buildings which Protestants have dedicated, since the Reformation, to the worship of the Creator of all that is bright and beautiful. If there is a fault in this respect, it is in erring on the other extreme, and in departing from what is chaste and ornate to the florid, where the eye is satiated with gorgeousness. The young people of the congregation have a literary society in connection therewith, and I was glad to have an opportunity of studying how these affairs are conducted in other places. I cannot say that I was very greatly impressed with its usefulness. Beyond some very good solo and duet singing, there was absolutely nothing of an improving nature in the whole programme, and certainly nothing to indicate that the society was a twig from a live Christian tree.

St. Andrew's Church, which overlooks the valley at the west end of the town, is a neat but much less pretentious edifice, and as a remnant of the old establishment, has rather a different class of worshippers. The Rev. E. W. Panton has been labouring here for some time, and his earnest efforts are having a good effect. The week following my visit, he was assisted by Rev. Mr. McIntyre, and I have learned some fifty souls made profession of having found the new life, besides there being a grateful awakening on the part of older members.

But Stratford, too, must be left behind.

ST. MARY'S.

The stone town, might also be called the last of the hill range along which the Grand Trunk railway makes its way to the boundary line at Point Edward, where it jumps into Uncle Sam's embrace. It stands on either bank of the Valley of the Avon, and is still further divided by a considerable creek. It is one of the most important grain and cattle export stations on the line, and from a business point of view I should judge it to be considerably ahead of its eastern neighbour, although considerably smaller. There is here, too, a very large Scotch element. A few years ago the Presbyterians worshipped harmoniously in one church, but a difference sprung up amongst them, and with true Scotch stubbornness neither party would give in, and so one went out. Perhaps this was only the natural result of vigorous growth, and the offshoot was only hastened by a trivial dispute. Be this as it may, the seceders built a fine new church, called an excellent pastor, and have flourished admirably. The work of describing churches is somewhat monotonous, but suffice it to say that Knox Church, St. Mary's, in point of substantiality, beauty and architectural design is equal to any hitherto mentioned, and, best of all, is clear of debt. Much of this excellent result is due to the energy and liberality of Mrs. Milner Harrison, whose example was worthily followed by others. It is at present vacant, its late pastor, Rev. W. A. Wilson, having gone to India to pursue missionary work on that fertile field. As a proof of the vitality of the original church, however, and that the secession did not harmfully weaken it, there is still a large and influential membership. A new church has been built, which is a landmark for miles around, and under the pastorate of Rev. J. A. Turnbull, a steadily increasing congregation is growing up. I was present at the annual thanksgiving service, and was much pleased with the simple eloquence of the pastor. But I must not linger in the pleasant stone town, and hasten on to that metropolis of the west,

LONDON.

To begin to say anything about London in a ramble of this description would be to insult its importance, as an established centre of commerce and industry, so I shall confine myself mainly to the churches, in which your readers are most interested, and of them I can only speak briefly. I may premise, however, that at the time of my visit it was severely shaken by one or two commercial failures, and that a general feeling of hard times past and present had a subduing effect upon the community. The city and its suburbs con-