

## NEW YEAR'S CALLS.

A TIME-HONOURED usage is the New Year call. Like many other things it may mean much or it may mean little. The friendly interchange of greetings and well wishes is all well enough, and to this no reasonable person can object. Many of the ordinary courtesies and civilities of life, possessing but little significance in themselves, are nevertheless of considerable value in promoting friendly intercourse. Brusqueness and angularities are toned down, and much irritation is avoided by the exercise of a little civility. In mankind naturally there lingers a little of the savage, which at the slightest provocation is only too ready to reveal itself. It may be perfectly true that these cheap courtesies afford but a thin veneer. Still it is better than the rough and gnarled surface of an unpolished nature.

Genuine friendship, even social amenities, demand something more than the meaningless formalities of what is often understood to be included in the society call, though even that is not without its use. The New Year call, is not in itself to be condemned as a meaningless sham. People whose busy days exclude them from opportunities of visiting, save at rare intervals, find the first day of the year a suitable and appropriate time for making a circuit among their friends and acquaintances. The brief but jocund salutations and fervent good wishes shed a gleam of pleasure on many circles, and the bonds of friendship are strengthened.

It is, however, deeply to be regretted that around this good old custom of New Year's visiting reprehensible customs should have been entwined. On all hands it is now acknowledged that the habit of treating visitors to intoxicating drinks is an objectionable one. The folly of the custom is freely conceded but it still lingers. Even yet the later visits are accomplished under considerable difficulties, affording anything but pleasure to either party. Such a state of things is felt to be degrading, and the time-worn excuses have a dreadfully hollow ring about them. It has to be cheerfully confessed that of late years there has been a marked progress in social reform, but most people now ask that the habit of providing ardent refreshments be reformed out of existence. Wine is now rarely offered to callers on New Year's day, but in too many cases it is in presence and the temporary guest is at liberty to help himself. To a great extent this throws the responsibility upon the caller, but not altogether. It is a lingering and unnecessary sacrifice to a belated superstition. The good ladies who make such provision for their friends have no intention of doing evil, but consistency and principle alike require the removal of what might cause their neighbours to offend.

The well-nigh exploded idea that a generous hospitality is incompatible with strictly temperance principles still influences some to continue a custom after they are convinced that it is useless if not dangerous. Several years ago it required some degree of courage to depart from general usage. It requires no sacrifice now. In the name of common sense, to mention nothing higher, let the New Year call and the intoxicating cup be forever dissociated. The pleasure and happiness of received and receiver will be greatly increased, not diminished. Whether other refreshments should or should not be provided we do not presume to say. It is morals not manners with which we are chiefly concerned. Whatever tends, though in a modified way, to countenance and perpetuate the drinking usages should have no place in well-regulated Christian homes. We cordially wish all our readers a happy and a pleasant time, and a Happy New Year on which they are about to enter. The discontinuance of an indefensible habit, we are sure will cause no one the slightest regret. It will add to, not detract from, the happiness of all concerned.

## MISSIONARY MEETINGS.

THE missionary meeting! What mingled memories, and varied associations the well-known words recall. They will revive recollections in the minds of older readers of the days when railway facilities were not, when tasteful Presbyterian church edifices now to be seen throughout the land, were unbuilt, when earnest, self-sacrificing pioneers in the work of the Gospel visited in succession the scattered groups of Presbyterian families who had gone into the forest to rear homes for themselves and lay the foundation of industrious well-doing. Stirring addressess on missions would be

delivered to small but deeply interested audiences. From these meetings great things have come. Impulses were received that are felt in the larger and better organized missionary efforts of the Church at the present time. From several of our country congregations have come the best missionaries now labouring so devotedly in the home and foreign fields.

The days referred to were days of leisure compared with our own. People in the country could in many cases devote a whole day to the missionary meeting and think it well spent. That cannot now be looked for, but the missionary meeting for diffusing intelligence, quickening zeal, and enabling the people to realize their responsibility relating to the extension of the Gospel is of as much importance as ever. It might, it ought to become much more effective than it has yet been. It has rendered important service in the past; it is capable of doing still more valuable work in the future.

The other week reference was made to the splendid meetings held in Erskine Church, Montreal, where the various congregations united in holding a series of anniversary missionary meetings. The condition and claims of the principal missionary agencies of the Church were ably and eloquently discussed by leading ministers. To the enterprising friends in Montreal distance is no obstacle. Though there is a traditional belief that wisdom comes from the east, they never hesitate to invite representative brethren from the west to take part in these great missionary gatherings. The plan has wrought admirably in Montreal. In other centres it might also be adopted with like good results. There are many places, however, where this would be inapplicable. In different localities conditions vary; what might be the best possible method in one place would be unsuitable in another. The result is the chief thing to be aimed at—a hearty and soul-inspiring meeting in every congregation throughout the Church.

It is true of the past that in some instances the annual missionary meeting was almost extinguished by dullness and lack of adaptation. Estimable brethren would deliver long—very long—addresses without point and without definite aim. They started with the correct idea that the field is the world, and they therefore felt that they had a roving commission. These days, we repeat, have gone by. In every Presbytery of the Church, in every district, ministers are found who can speak most effectively on the various aspects of mission work. All that is needed is the proper distribution of topics. One brother excels in statistical statement. He thoroughly grasps his subject, and can make it comprehensible and interesting to any audience; another, better skilled in the figures of speech, has also abundant scope for the exercise of his gift. A third, who has himself been deeply interested in the history of missions, will be able to communicate an array of facts no less interesting to his hearers, while many others can speak eloquently on the duty of preaching the Gospel to every creature. In all cases there must be faithful and careful preparation. No man can hold the attention of his fellowmen on any subject by merely talking purposeless platitudes. The missionary meeting might be made a far more powerful agency than it now is, stimulating to holy consecration, and well-directed activity in promoting the one great purpose for which the Christian Church exists—the proclamation of the Gospel of the blessed God, for the advancement of His glory in the rescue of the perishing.

## RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

IN the work of education the most perplexing problem to solve is the one frequently termed "the religious difficulty." It has presented itself wherever a national system of education has been adopted. In England and Scotland, where an admirable system is now maintained, it took many years to reach a practical harmonizing of what for a long time appeared to be irreconcilable contradictions. Churchmen and Non-conformists in England confronted each other. North of the Tweed, Presbyterianism for a time maintained a three-cornered contest. The Established Churchman thought the admirable system of parish schools, once so suitable for the whole country but failing where the want of educational facilities were most needed, in the large cities, should remain unchanged. The Free Churchman wanted a national system, but he wanted that system to embrace religious instruction.

The unflinching United Presbyterian voluntary demanded a national system of education, but contended that the State was not competent either to teach religion or to pay for its being taught. Various conciliatory measures were doomed to failure. At last the conclusion was reached that to secure a great public good, on which the welfare of the nation depended, certain compromises had to be made. No section of the community could have its own way altogether. No particular church could impose its peculiar ideas on the great body of the people. The large-minded and large-hearted ministers of all denominations sought for principles of harmony, not for points of difference. In reference to the Scottish educational measure, while it was being popularly discussed, the Rev. William Arnot in his hearty, generous and effective way urged its adoption, saying of Lord Advocate McLaren's Bill: It is not the best possible measure, but it is the best we can get. He was tired of always objecting. He desired progress.

Here in Canada the desire for more effective religious teaching in our public schools has been strongly expressed by earnest men. It is pleasing to learn that their efforts have apparently brought about an important practical result. The Provincial Minister of Education, who has been indefatigable in his efforts to secure the efficiency of our educational system, obtained the services of competent clergymen representing the leading Christian Churches in the Province to revise a volume of Scripture Readings, containing a course of lessons so arranged as to include the most instructive portions of both the Old and New Testaments. It also contains forms of prayer suitable for use in the Public and High Schools.

The new regulations regarding the reading of the Bible and prayer in the Public and High Schools, approved by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council, are as follows:—

1. Every Public and High School shall be opened with the Lord's Prayer, and closed with the reading of the Scriptures and the Lord's Prayer, or the prayer sanctioned by the Department of Education.
2. The portions of Scripture used shall be taken from selections authorized for that purpose, by the Department of Education, and shall be read without comment or explanation.
3. Where a teacher claims to have conscientious scruples against opening and closing the school as herein provided, he shall notify the trustees to that effect in writing.
4. No pupil shall be required to take part in the exercises above referred to against the wish of his parent or guardian, expressed in writing to the master of the school.
5. When required by the Trustees the Ten Commandments shall be repeated at least once a week.
6. The Trustees shall place a copy of the authorized Readings in each department of the Public and High Schools under their jurisdiction, within one year from the date hereof.
7. The clergy of any denomination or their authorized representatives, shall have the right to give religious instruction to the pupils of their own church, in each school-house at least once a week, after the hour of closing of the school in the afternoon; and if the clergy of more than one denomination apply to give religious instruction in the same school-house, the School Board or trustees shall decide on what day of the week the school-house shall be at the disposal of the clergyman of each denomination, at the time above stated. But it shall be lawful for the School Board or trustees and clergyman of any denomination to agree upon any hour of the day at which a clergyman, or his authorized representative, may give religious instruction to the pupils of his own church, provided it be not during the regular hours of the school.

As the Regulations prescribing the Hours of Daily Teaching, provide that they shall not exceed six hours in duration, but "a less number of hours of daily teaching may be determined upon in any Public School, at the option of the trustees," arrangements may therefore easily be made by the trustees for closing the ordinary school work earlier than the usual hour, on certain days, so that time may be given for religious instruction.

The excellent plan adopted may not be a perfect solution of the religious difficulty in our Provincial system of education, but taking a comprehensive view of the various conflicting elements that must be considered, if any satisfactory practical result is to be arrived at, it is in every respect the best yet offered. It ought to be received in a spirit of candour, and given a fair trial.

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