

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

STARCH.

We abhor starch. Mrs. Macwheele reads this short sentence, and as she does so, we see her honest, motherly gray eyes glow with a warm light, born partly of indignation and partly of tender feeling. With a little tremble in her voice, she asks if we do not remember that but for *corn starch* the twins would not have survived their first summer? She further asks reproachfully if it was at no more distant date than yesterday that we professed to enjoy greatly, and certainly praised loudly, the maize pudding, in reference to which she enlightens our masculine understanding by informing us that it is made of the substance on which the babies thrive so well. We gladly except that form of the article from the sweep of our condemnation; but we stick to our guns manfully, and repeat that we abhor starch. "Abhor starch!" quo' she; "and what would your linen be like without it?" The question is a home-thrust, or, as Mr. Richard Swiveller would prefer to call it, a *staggerer*; for our soul delights in snowy cuffs and collars, in immaculate shirt-front and neck-tie. We, therefore, hasten to conciliate and satisfy the disturbed lady by explaining that it is not starch as set on the table, but as seen in the manners—not starch in the clothing, but in the character, which is the object of our abhorrence. *Thit* form of the article men, women and children dread and detest.

When, where, and in whom is starch most objectionable? To the first member of this triple question we answer, unhesitatingly, "On the Lord's day." Christian people should strive with special earnestness to banish from the Sabbath the starch-demon of stiffness and coldness. In the remaining three hundred and twelve or three hundred and thirteen days in the year enough of worry and discouragement will be packed to make it very desirable that the fifty-two or fifty-three Sabbaths should be bright, warm, and cordial. If they are, their moral and spiritual power will be all the greater and more benignant.

The second and third questions may with advantage be considered together. In what persons and in what places is the presence of starch most repellent and injurious? We answer. Among Christian people, and particularly among Christian workers; in the pulpit, in the Sabbath school, in the sick room, by the death-bed, and in the house of mourning. Instances of the evil thing's presence in all these places are painfully familiar, and most of us have known by sad experience what it is to have an avalanche of starch, in the shape of a preacher's dull and icy formalism, or a teacher's coldness and stiffness, impede "the genial current of the soul." We have perhaps so far treated the subject somewhat too lightly; but we feel that the *evil* is by no means a light one. We do not forget that the Gospel of the grace of God can triumph over infirmities such as we have mentioned; but still we are obliged in all seriousness to say that the type of character, or, as it may sometimes be, simply the stamp of manner, which we have been reprobating, does tend to hinder the Lord's work. And on the other hand, how delightful is the feeling, and how precious are sometimes the results, when a true, simple, unstarched soul has been at work in the pulpit, or the class-room! "Mamma," said a little child one day, "my teacher told us such a sad story about Jesus; it made me feel so bad to think they killed Him, I had to shut my mouth so's not to cry, and she was most crying herself, too." It is very certain that in that happy class-room starch was conspicuous by its absence. We rejoice to think that doubtless there are many class-rooms like it, and is there not ground for rejoicing in this when we remember the extreme danger of a starch-stiffened manner doing violence to a child's tender sensitiveness? It may be remarked, further, that the little incident which we have mentioned, illustrates somewhat forcibly that power of almost unconscious discrimination which appears in children at a much earlier period than many are apt to think. We are inclined to mention another incident which seems to us to cast a somewhat fresh light on the same theme, though in a widely different way. A thoughtful observer tells how his attention was called some time ago to the fact that crowds of children who were issuing from a certain Sabbath school wore an aspect of mingled joy and decorum which was very unusual. Inquiring into the cause, that he believed he

found it in the following circumstance, which we will allow him to relate in his own words: "There, right at the doorway, stood the venerable pastor—gray-bearded, gray-headed, but with a face glowing with youthful enthusiasm in spite of the wrinkles, and eyes that kindled and sparkled in spite of their spectacles, and for every one that passed that way—and they all seemed to pass that way—he had a cordial grasp and a friendly word. He stood, not like a general on review, proudly watching, but as an affectionate father bidding good-bye to his children." The observer thought that in this spectacle the magical secret lay disclosed; that strange combination of joy and decorum which delighted the passers-by was here explained. We are strongly inclined to believe that the explanation is the right one. There was no starch in that pleasant school. And somehow, as we thus write, there rises before our mind's eye the angelic, the Christ-like picture of Mrs. Fry sitting among the poor, unhappy creatures in the Bridewells of the old world, and talking to them tenderly of her Saviour and theirs, her voice the while, as one describes it, "like the voice of a mother to her suffering child." There was probably starch enough about the prison-chaplain, and the very worst form of the article is undoubtedly the ecclesiastical vanity; but starch there was none about the saintly, unpaid missionary who went, a true angel and minister of grace, to the very foulest abodes of misery and sin, and won such trophies for Christ among the fallen and the forlorn. Workers like these do not claim—and because they do not claim, they the more surely win—the fealty and love of those among whom and for whom they labour. And, what is incomparably better, they see

"Day after day filled up with blessed toil,
Hour after hour still bringing in new spoil."

An eminently practical question yet remains. How shall we get free from this clogging and hindering element of starch? We believe that many are dimly conscious of its hateful and hurtful presence in their own character or manners, and are in deep earnest in desiring deliverance. Is there not much reason to believe that a quickened religious life in the rigid and frigid ones themselves, or in those who are around them, would do a good deal towards gaining them their freedom? True fervour is infectious and diffusive. A blazing fire will necessarily make itself felt; and so the warmth of religious zeal and love will work and has worked wonders in dissolving starch of manner, and even starch in the grain of human character. The grace of God is sufficient not only to refine the coarse and elevate the low, but also to set the starch bound free. We are thus brought back to the position of the "Royal Penitent," in whom religion seems for a time to have stiffened into an almost lifeless form, and who, in consequence, fell into foulest, darkest sin, but who was constrained at last, with a breaking heart, to raise the cry which many of us have such sad reason to echo often and earnestly for ourselves, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit me within." M. D.

IS THE TAY BRIDGE HORROR A DIVINE JUDGMENT ON SABBATH PROFANATION?

MR. EDITOR,—On Sabbath evening, the 28th of December last, the most appalling railroad horror yet recorded took place at Dundee, Scotland. Of all the seventy-five or more passengers on board, not one escaped! The two-mile iron bridge, one of the most wonderful structures of the kind in the world, and justly regarded, since its completion, with a feeling of national pride, yielded at the fatal moment to the fury of the tempest, and the ill-fated train plunged from its dizzy height a hundred feet into the Frith of Tay! The sainted McCheyne was minister of St. Peter's, Dundee, when the railroad company concerned commenced running their first Sabbath trains, and in his earnest and indignant remonstrance against such profanation, in which also he was but giving voice to the feeling of a Sabbath-keeping nation and people, he said, "You will triumph for a little while; but Scotland's sin, committed against light and against solemn warning, will not pass unavenged." These prophetic words have met with a startling fulfilment, whatever theory of that fulfilment any man may hold. All the profits of Sabbath labour on railways in Scotland since the first Sabbath train was run would not equal the loss of the company by this disaster, their stocks have declined over thirty per cent., and

about twenty millions sterling of their capital is for the time idle and unremunerative. The theory of the terrible tragedy put forward by engineers and experts, and generally accepted as correct, is that the lateral pressure of the tempest, testing the structure already to the utmost, became greatly increased by the additional surface presented to the wind by the ill-fated train approaching at that critical moment. Consequently their theory is that had no train been crossing at the time, the bridge might have been still standing. Put in other words, this means that had no Sabbath trains been running, the tempest would have spent itself, leaving the bridge still intact. Corporations have, as such, no future existence, and if punished at all, must be punished now. If God were intending to rebuke, in a terrible manner, the profanation of the Sabbath on railways, where would the judgment be more likely to fall than where the most earnest and wide-spread remonstrance against such profanation had been lifted up by His witnessing people? There the sin is the more aggravated, the vindication of His people's testimony the more loudly called for, and the lesson likely to be the more impressive on the public mind throughout the world. It is dangerous hastily to interpret the course of Providence towards individuals, as we see by the case of Job and others, and it may seem to some not only unchristian, but almost inhuman to suggest that this appalling disaster may be a divine judgment, but let us beware of falling into the sin of explaining away divine judgments altogether, and of refusing to see the hand of Him who holdeth the winds in His fist.

TESTIMONY.

REV. E. P. HAMMOND AND REVIVAL IN ST. CATHARINES.

MR. EDITOR,—The Rev. E. P. Hammond has lately spent some time in this city, and I would like to state in a few words some of the more prominent facts connected with his work here, and the results of that work, so far as these are already apparent. I need scarcely say that there is a wide-spread diversity of opinion regarding Mr. Hammond and the value of the service rendered by him to the cause of Christ. In regard to this, if I may make a personal allusion, I was decidedly opposed to inviting Mr. H. to come to St. Catharines; not so much from anything I had against himself or even his modes of work, for although I had heard many things of that kind, I had to own to myself that when I made allowance for prejudice and the naturally *cumulative* character of such statements, there was nothing very weighty or very consistent left; but my experience of "revivals" brought about by men sent for to get them up had been of a painfully disappointing character. I was afraid that the prayerful preparation which I believed God had graciously granted to His people, might be turned into a wrong channel. However, against my voice, Mr. Hammond was invited, and my personal prayer then was that I might be preserved from *cry-stallizing* into a state of opposition and cold criticism which becomes so easy when it consists in finding proofs that a previous judgment has been correct.

As to Mr. Hammond personally, I think no one can associate with him without liking him, I may say, without loving him. He is open, transparent, intensely earnest, acting spontaneously almost as a child, and above all, one feels that he is guided in his work by the Spirit. His genial, cheerful manner has a wonderful influence on his audience, and this influence deepens almost every time they hear him. His manner of work is peculiar. It is his own, however. It is *himself*. Men wonder where the power lies, and yet they go again and again to hear him. He lays great stress on his work among the children, and no one but a cynic could see their glad faces and hear them sing in the meetings before Mr. H. left without feeling that a good work had been done among them. In his preaching, the atonement is the centre, all else converges towards that, and however he may seem to ramble in his discourse, the hearer finds that he has been steadily brought nearer to the cross. The one conception is Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Mr. Hammond is a Presbyterian minister; he was regularly ordained, I believe, to his present work as evangelist, and is in relationship to the Presbytery of New York, and under their jurisdiction. He is *very* decided in his views of the Church, and on every occasion speaks in the most earnest manner of the dignity of the ministry. In every way he seeks