

SCHEMES OF THE CHURCH.

The ecclesiastical year ended on Friday last. The books of the Agent were closed promptly that evening. It is exceedingly gratifying to learn the result of the year's work, so far as the finances of the various Schemes are concerned. There is indeed reason for heart felt gratitude to God for the large measure of success attained, notwithstanding the unexampled period of business depression throughout the country.

Rev. Dr. Warden reports the following Funds as having ended the year without debt:—Home Missions, Augmentation of Stipends, Widows' and Orphans', Assembly Fund, French Evangelization and Presbyterian College, Montreal. The year began with an indebtedness of \$6,576 in the Ordinary Fund of Knox College. This amount has been reduced to less than \$1,000. Many of the graduates of the College agreed to contribute an average of \$25 each, with a view to removing the deficit. Already a large number of these have forwarded their contributions. It is expected that within the next few days the others will do so, and that the indebtedness will be entirely wiped out.

It is gratifying to report that the Foreign Mission debt has been reduced to \$10,000. The contributions for Foreign Missions this year have been \$23,000 in excess of those of any former year in the history of the Church, and this notwithstanding the fact that the receipts from legacies are much less than usual, and that about \$15,000 have been specially contributed towards the Indian Famine Fund. A number of congregations have not yet responded to the special appeal of the Committee on behalf of the deficit. When these are heard from, and when the special contributions which are being raised by the W.F.M.S., are obtained, it is hoped that the \$10,000 yet required will be got, and that during the month of May.

The Aged and Infirm Ministers' Fund is in debt nearly \$2,000, the Committee might have reduced the annuities so as to avoid this debt. They felt, however, that this would scarcely be just to the annuitants, and resolved to pay the higher rate in the full confidence that the Church would come to their assistance, and during the month of May provide the amount necessary. In this confidence we trust they will not be disappointed. Surely there is sympathy sufficient for these aged brethren, who so long have borne the burden and heat of the day, to secure a generous and prompt response to the Committee's appeal, so that when the Assembly meets they may be able to report that all liabilities have been met and the Fund freed from indebtedness.

The total contributions received during the year just ended for the Schemes of the Church will be found to be considerably in excess of those of any preceding year.

THE POWER OF GOOD BOOKS

is shown by the following incident related by one who attended one of Rev. F.B. Meyer's lectures last month.

Before the service I was attracted by an elderly Jewish lady, who sat next to me. I exchanged a few words with her regarding the lectures and Mr. Moody's gospel sermons. She informed me "she had been converted by reading one of Canon Farrar's books ten years ago. A Christian lady gave it to me to read and I would take it to the park and read and enjoy the fresh air and sunshine at the same time. I was born again; a new light came to me, never having read and seldom having heard of the Lord Jesus before. To think of His dying to save sinners—such sacrifice and such love filled my heart with gratitude. I think I had a rapturous spiritual vision, for nature and everything seemed so different, so beautiful, I was beside myself with joy. I have twelve living children—good, moral children—six are Christians, six are followers of Ingersoll." I asked, "Are you not unhappy about the unbelievers?" "No and yes," she replied. "They will become Christians I'm sure; I'm sorry they are missing so much happiness and joy. My husband died four years ago in the Jewish faith. I was so troubled and prayed so earnestly that he would be saved. I opened my Bible at those verses about believers and unbelievers being yoked together. God speaks to me through His Holy Word. I believe through my prayers he was saved. I am so happy in the Christian religion."

LOOKS INTO BOOKS.

THE SPIRITUAL SENSE OF DANTE'S DIVINA COMMEDIA. By W. T. Harris. Pp. xxi+193. Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Boston. 1890. Price, \$1.25

THE DIVINA COMMEDIA of Dante has been pronounced to be *far and away* the religious poem of the world, and within the 200 pages of this volume one finds an interesting and able study of its profoundly engaging theme. The substance of the book, it appears, has been worked out very carefully in the author's mind, and during the last twenty-five years has been frequently presented to the public (through the press and upon the platform) in various preliminary productions. It is now published in what may be considered its final form,—a form at once complete and compact, and in this little treatise, which contains the results of all this honest and painstaking labor, there are abundant evidences of the scholar's judicious restraint and of the poet's intuitive penetration.

As most are aware, Dante was much more original in the manipulation of his material than in the discovery or creation of it. His ethical teachings he borrowed from the Church; his framework of incidents and actors he borrowed from Literature. The real core of his poem is the *Purgatorio*,—to which the *Inferno* is simply a necessary introduction, and to which the *Paradiso* is the fitting conclusion. But Dante himself is to be looked for especially in the central section of this "mystic mighty drama,"—that section of it moreover, which is unquestionably the poet's *coup de maître*.

The deeper significance of the DIVINA COMMEDIA, when one possesses himself of those teachings which do not lie wholly upon the surface, is interpreted by Mr. Harris in the following manner. He shows that the doctrine of Sin is the pivot upon which everything else turns, and Sin is invariably an act of human free will. It is the choice of a responsible being, whereby he puts himself out of harmony with the Divine purposes. Thus "whatever a man of free will does, he does to himself. Here is the root of Dante's 'Divine Comedy.' . . . | "The three-fold future world,—*Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, *Paradiso*,—presents us the exhaustive picture of man's relation to his deeds." So long as a man regards his own will as the sole umpire of his actions, he takes no account either of Society or of God. He is self-centred, and resents instantly any interference from without. The punishment of sin, from whatever source it comes, enkindles his anger. God, engaged in punishing sin, he regards as his especial enemy,—"only another fiend, more potent than the fiends of Hell," and so he bitterly and continually blames God for all his pains. Such a one, following the bent of his own selfish choice, finds his home perforce in the *Inferno*.

When, however, a man, under gracious influences, consents to a limit that all true liberty takes account of the legitimate liberty of others; when he concedes that Society has rights as well as the Individual; when he voluntarily acknowledges that, after all, the Supreme will ought to be the Divine Will, and when (moreover) he cheerfully submits himself to the governance of that Will,—the pains which he endures because of his sin begin gradually to purify him. The suffering continues, but now he bears it willingly, because he discerns its purpose and its effects. God is no longer his persecutor, but his friend. He perceives that he is not a unit in the universe, but holds eternal relations with myriads of other beings, who may help him (through exhortation, prayer, etc.) and to whom in turn he ought to render constant assistance. Thus the soul, enlightened and subdued, passes naturally into that environment which Dante calls the *Purgatorio*.

But the process is still far from complete. In the *Paradiso*, there are no fewer than ten Heavens, rising one above the other. In those blissful abodes, the will still retaining its inherent freedom, man is ever coming into closer touch and into more conscious touch with Him who is the ultimate centre of all things. The original perverted conception, that man can live for himself alone, is found here to be entirely eradicated: each lives for the welfare of others, while all alike strive to magnify the ineffable glory of God.

Such, briefly outlined, is the burden of this thoughtful little book. Mr. Harris attempts no systematic exposition of Dante's great poem, but incidentally he has enriched his work with bits of genuine exposition of an exceedingly high order. As to the dress in which this volume greets its readers, it will suffice to say that its clear cut type and gilt tipped pages and noticeably dainty appearance suggest at once that thoroughness of mechanical execution which has made *The Riverside Press* famous around the world.

LEWIS H. JONAS.

The *Biblical World* for April discusses the book of Jonah editorially in a not very satisfactory way, and is a good deal below the average in its other articles. The central feature of this magazine, however, the articles on Bible study are of the usual character and are likely to be greatly helpful to any one who will take them up seriously. Chicago University, Press. \$3.00 a year.