

—One thought which ought to impress us in connection with the Sunday School lesson this week is that, in the divine thought for man, spiritual good has the first place. God is not indeed indifferent to the material welfare of his people, as the passage clearly shows, but the thing which is made of first importance here as everywhere in the Scriptures is spiritual purity—a new spirit, a heart changed and made soft and impressionable to the appeals of truth and grace, a disposition to hear and obey the commands of the Lord. These are put in the foreground as the condition of the highest spiritual and also the highest temporal prosperity. God's promise to multiply for his people the corn and the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field, to remove from them the affliction and the reproach of famine and to make the land that had been a desolation to become like the garden of Eden, was indeed a promise of great blessing. But the promise to cleanse his people from their iniquities and to save them from their uncleanness, to give them a new heart and to put his own spirit within them was a promise exceedingly greater and more precious. Then it must not be forgotten that the acceptance of the larger blessing is in a real and true sense a condition of the enjoyment of the less. It is true indeed that God makes his sun to shine and his rain to fall upon the just and the unjust. Many an ungodly man rolls in wealth and many a good man feels the pressure of poverty. But history shows that in the life of a people material prosperity is by no means independent of their moral and religious condition. Moreover it is not merely what one possesses but what he enjoys that is significant, and it is not difficult to believe that the poor man in whose heart the love and peace of God are dwelling is getting more real enjoyment out of this present world than the man who, though he be a multi-millionaire, is without experience of the divine grace that cleanses and renews.

—The Watchman has been calling attention to the fact that though in Massachusetts there are more Baptist ministers than Baptist churches, yet about a score of the leading churches of the denomination in the city and its vicinity are pastorless. Among the number are included Clarendon Street church to which the late Dr. A. J. Gordon ministered; Dudley St. of which the late Dr. Gumbart was pastor; the First Baptist church whose pastor, Dr. Wood, has accepted the presidency of Newton Theological Seminary; The Brookline Baptist church; the First Baptist and the North Avenue churches, of Cambridge, and the First Baptist church of Newton Centre. In discussing the reason why the supply of acceptable ministers is not equal to the demand on the part of such churches as those named and others, The Watchman expresses the opinion that it may be partly because the product of the theological seminaries does not commend itself to the churches and partly because the churches have become too finical and exacting. The Watchman does not however believe that the fault is on the part of the seminaries. The trouble is rather that men of commanding ability are not seeking the ministry in as great numbers now as formerly. "The preaching of the immediate past and the tone of church life have not impressed upon the sons of Christian families the duty of devoting their lives to this work, and parents who are able to give their children the best advantages, do not, as a rule, seek to lead their sons to consider the claims of the ministry." Another thing which is believed to be having no little influence in the same direction is the craze for young men as ministers. If in any calling a man is to be ruled out as having "crossed the dead line" at an age when most men are just reaching their intellectual prime, the effect must be to deter men of ability from entering it. "Take the popular dictum that at forty-five or fifty a minister has crossed the dead line, and what sort of appreciation does that show of the solid qualities that go to make a man an able minister?"

Conference or Covenant Meeting—Which?

In a recent number of the MESSENGER AND VISITOR there appeared an article from one of our pastors on "The purpose of the Covenant Meeting." The communication is so thoughtful, graceful, and withal written with such evident good intention, that one feels like apologizing for expressing a word of dissent. Inasmuch as the Scriptures are silent on the question, it will no doubt be admitted that the need of the churches should determine the purpose and name of this monthly service; and the more the subject is studied the more deeply the conviction roots itself that the meeting, whose purpose is described in the article referred to, is not the kind that our churches need.

The purpose of the meeting, according to this article is,

firstly, "to keep us attentive to private devotions"; secondly, "to produce carefulness in the matter of home religion"; thirdly, "to spur to thorough uprightness and consistency with the world outside"; fourthly, "to increase sympathy and thoughtfulness for brethren in the church"; fifthly, "to foster zeal and stability in all our relations with our own particular church"; sixthly, "to give quickening in the world's evangelization"; and seventhly, "to produce greater fitness for partaking of the Lord's Supper." Have we not here the purpose of the church, or of the covenant itself, rather than that of any one service of the church? These points are all very important, but are not the pulpit, the Sunday School, the prayer meeting, and the B. Y. P. U. bound to deal with some or all of them? The church surely needs to emphasize these matters, but does she need a special monthly service in which to do it.

What is needed is a meeting whose chief purpose shall be to hear and act upon reports of work done in the past, and to lay plans for more and better work in the future. Twelve times a year are not too many for the church to ask its representative workers to render an account. The yearly report will be all the better for the other eleven. The pastor, S. S. Superintendent, presidents of the B. Y. P. U., and W. M. A. S., and chairmen of standing and special committees should be expected to present such a statement of work attempted or done, as would inspire the whole body to noble endeavor. To make this the chief purpose of the monthly meeting would result in the taking up of much practical work that is being shamefully neglected. Most of our churches are leaving temperance, and other matters touching the social life of the community, to other organizations. They are even leaving their sick to be cared for by the Odd Fellows and Knights of Pythias. A number of their poor are on the parish. May it not be that we have spent the time talking about how holy we were that should have been given to considering such questions as how our youth could be prevented from being drawn into vortices of evil, or how those already fallen could be rescued? If a church will make this the purpose of the monthly meeting for one short year it will find out how much of its professions are sham and how much true Christianity. The aim and scope of their Covenant obligations will be brought home to the members more forcibly than they could be in any other way. No better preparation for the Lord's Supper could be devised. The Covenant might be read at the close of the meeting, but there would be accessions every month if this plan were carried out, and it would be better to read it in the public service when the hand of fellowship was given.

The fathers made no mistake when they called the service a "Conference Meeting." Perhaps they acted more wisely than they knew. Certain it is that a conference respecting the Lord's work once a month is what is needed by the churches, and it is by no means clear that anything is to be gained by changing the name to "Covenant Meeting."

F. H. BRALS.
Causo, July 17th.

Alberta Letter.

"Innisfail"—This name stands for a pretty little village about 75 miles north of Calgary or 115 miles south of Edmonton. To the Baptist ear it represents the only English Baptist church between the termini of the Calgary and Edmonton R. R. In the writer's mind these syllables will ever awaken memories of days recently spent in most delightful fellowship with this little church—the youngest of the Alberta group. Our five English Baptist churches in Alberta extend from Calgary to Sturgeon, 25 miles north of Edmonton, a distance of 215 miles. It is evident that our opportunities for general fellowship are not great. All the greater was the privilege of meeting recently with the brethren of the Innisfail field on the occasion of their second church anniversary. These brethren are scattered over a field 15 by 40 miles. The church organization owes its existence largely to the efforts of Rev. G. E. Good who is well known to many in the Maritime Provinces. Being compelled by ill health to give up pastoral work he came with his family to a farm near Innisfail. During these years his home has been a centre of Christian influence, and as health permitted he has preached and engaged in Sunday School work. His friends will be glad to know that he is now enjoying better health than for many years past.

Among the brethren I discovered one Nova Scotia family—Mr. and Mrs. Brown and children. They came from Chegogin. During five years residence in this country they had never had the privilege of attending a Baptist service until this summer. There are many such Baptist families in this country. This summer a student pastor is laboring on the field. The people gathered at the village for a two days' meeting. Pastors McDonald and Litch, besides the writer, were present. The Methodist chapel was granted for our use, and the Methodist pastor and others listened attentively while we rang out the fundamental teachings of the New Testament. One morning we adjourned to the river and witnessed the baptism of two young women. In the evenings we held evangelistic services and rejoiced to see souls turning to God. Among those who confessed their acceptance of Christ were Bro. Good's two daughters. The sons were already Christians and members of the church. The resident pastors with Brother Good are continuing the services.

This Innisfail district is but one of several in Alberta where there are Baptists "scattered abroad" who need only the encouraging and unifying presence of a missionary to make them a power for God and the foundation of strong Baptist communities.

Our rally at Innisfail marks the beginning of a new era in our work. Appreciating the great value of such meetings, we appointed a committee which will summon the church-s for the forming of an Association.

On the Sunday following, the writer exchanged pulpits with his Acadia class-mate, Pastor Litch of Calgary. The great progress of the work during the eight months of Bro. Litch's pastorate was manifest in the large congregations, the ready testimony of many new-born souls and the intense interest shown in the Lord's work.

In Strathcona (corporate name for the old town of South Edmonton) Pastor McDonald rejoices in congregations that crowd the little chapel. They will need to enlarge ere long but are wisely determined to move cautiously in the matter.

Here in Edmonton we hope to close the year free of debt, and after that to be able to relinquish a good part of our grant for some other field.

Permit, in this connection, acknowledgement of our gratitude to those friends in the East who have come to our assistance in this work.

Permit me also to solicit their earnest prayers that our blessings may not be confined to financial prosperity but may speedily include the turning to God of many souls.

C. B. FREEMAN.

Edmonton, July 26.

Literary Notes.

An Outline of Christian Theology—a text book for the use of students in Hamilton Theological Seminary, Hamilton N. Y., by Rev. Wm. N. Clarke, D. D.—Price \$2.50, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

This treatise upon Christian Theology, from its first appearance has been claimed by the "New" school as representing their position though we think Dr. Clarke had no conscious intention of identifying himself with that movement. His book is simply the frank, candid statement of the treatise to his pupil, without apparently any idea that it would be noticed beyond his own classroom. As one studies its pages, he almost feels himself in the presence of the author and he thinks he can hear his voice. A satisfactory idea of this book is in no way possible in a brief review for it is so carefully written and so organically one, that to properly mention it would require to re-produce it. It makes no pretense to be a systematic Theology and has in it none of the old and musty arguments that obscure the ordinary text-book upon that subject. It starts with the reality of religion as a feature of human life, and then intellectual attention to this religion gives us Theology. Religion is a life; Theology is the science of that life. Dr. Clarke does not argue "from nature up to nature's God" but he starts with Christ and through Him, His life, ministry and death, he interprets the universe, its purpose and end. Its doctrine of an endless revelation is both rational and reverent. Revelation was made primarily not in written history, but in act and fact. The revelation in Christ was not in the written gospels but in His life, and the gospels are a mere incident. Since action alone can express character it was only through the life of Christ, His ministry and death, that God could reveal himself. Did revelation stop with Christ? Yes and No. Directly God's personal manifestation in humanity was only in Christ. Indirectly and through His Spirit, revelation is just as really continuous in the church "which is His body." He does not claim perfect accuracy, or inferracy, for the Scriptures, either in their present form, or in their original manuscripts. Dr. Clarke does not hold to the inspiration of the documents, but of the writers, hence his view is not that of Dictation, but of Illumination. The Scriptures are of value because they contain a truth worthy of God and man. The author divides his book into six parts, dealing in turn with God, Man, Sin, the Holy Spirit and things to come. It is upon sin, the atonement and Last Things that he differs most widely from the old school theology. And though one may hesitate to accept all his views, he cannot but feel that this book is the result of long years of careful and prayerful study. The reader will find this more than a treatise upon Theology; he will find it a refreshing book for devotional reading.

David Harum. A Story of American Life. By Edward Noyes Westcott. Toronto: William Briggs. Price, Paper 75 Cents; Cloth \$1.25.

The author of David Harum did not live to know of the great reception given to his book by the reading world, but died of consumption just as the work was being published. With Mr. Westcott authorship was a pastime rather than a profession. His active years were devoted to the business of banking in his native city of Syracuse, N. Y., where most of his life was spent. But he possessed the sensitive and impressionable temperament essential to the successful literary artist and when at length he took up the pen he was able to create in David Harum "a character so original, so true and so strong and yet so delightfully quaint and humorous" that his book at once received such flattering recognition from the reading public as falls to the lot of but few who have devoted themselves wholly to literary pursuits. There is a mild love story running through the book, but that is of much less account than the portrait of the character whose name appears as the title. David Harum is to be taken as a type of a certain class in American life as Ian MacLaren's "Drumsbeugh" and "Jamie Soutar" are types of Scottish life. David Harum is a country banker who with this business combines horse trading as a source of relaxation and profit. His masterly astuteness in this line of things is demonstrated by the fact that he is able to get the better of "Deacon Perkins" in a transaction. David is a man of much mental capacity, keen-witted, shrewd in business, indomitable, talkative and quaintly humorous. The dialect in which he presents his ideas is not wholly unfamiliar to Canadian ears. The leading banker and horse trader of Homeville is a man hard to beat in a bargain, but with all his keenness has a saving salt of sympathy and philanthropy in his nature which repays acquaintance.