

Our Contributors.

A LIVELY AND TIMELY NEW BOOK.

BY KNOXIAN.

Professor Young in recommending a book to his class—the book was on church government if we rightly remember—said it was written by a number of Irish ministers and was one of those “triumphant” controversial books such as Irishmen alone can write. Irishmen do sometimes write controversial books in a triumphant style, but they are not the only men who can write in that way. Joseph Parker can do it. The Fleming H. Revell Company have just published a new book by the great London preacher, the title of which is “None Like It—a Plea for the Old Sword.” On every page of the two hundred and seventy the author brings down the “old sword” on some of the higher critics in a style that might well challenge the admiration of the most accomplished Irish gladiator. The book shows Parker at his best and Joseph Parker at his best is good enough reading for anybody.

We have met ministers who said they could not read Parker. We shall not say these brethren were indulging in a little priggish clerical affectation. Perhaps nature constructed them with a dislike for Parker. We would be very sorry to throw any such responsibility on nature, but nature does some abnormal things and there is a remote possibility that nature may have built some men in such a way that they cannot read *Ecce Deus* or *ad clerum*, or the City Temple, or the People's Bible, or the “Plea for the Old Sword.” We have heard a number of ministers, and among them one preacher of continental reputation, declare that they could not read Spurgeon's sermons. A Calvinistic preacher who does not read Spurgeon's sermons for their *tone*, for their spirit, for their unrivalled power of direct address, must have peculiar ideas, but of course some men have ideas of that kind. We have heard of literary men who could not read *Paradise Lost* and have known several people not specially ignorant that could see no sort of sense in *Shakespeare*. It is sad to think that there are men in this world who do not admire *Macaulay*. We could forgive a man for individuality in spelling, for not putting such words as “only” and “at least” in their proper places, for not keeping up a proper connection between pronouns and their antecedents, for being shaky in the use of shall and will, but it goes hard with this contributor to forgive a man for not admiring *Macaulay*. We admire any writer that has a style of his own and unless stern duty calls for the sacrifice, we never read a book that any fairly educated man in a thousand might have written. Parker has a style, you may call it *Parkerish* if you choose, but all the same it is a style with well marked characteristics, a style that no one can successfully imitate, a style that displays intense individuality, a style the study of which would do good work in the way of breaking up what Principal Willis used to denounce as “pulpit soporific.” This new book, as already stated, is Parker at his best. The condensed sentences, the brilliant suggestive flashes, the irony, the humour, the sparkle, the egotism, some critics would say, are there. Pervading all there is the author's intense love for the Word of God, a love that shines out in all the books Joseph Parker has written, but in none with a steadier or clearer lustre than in this “plea for the old sword.”

We intended to make a few quotations but find a selection impossible. Anywhere you turn one thing is about as good as another. There is a piece of very effective work at the close of the first chapter. After urging the destructive critics to “dig deeply and speak fearlessly,” the author suggests the reconstruction of “the canon in the light of present day knowledge” and coaxes the critics to take up the work. If the present Bible is full of errors, he sees no reason why those who are so much exercised about the alleged errors, should not give us a revised canon with the errors left out. Is there any reason? Is not Parker's request perfectly fair and reasonable? Well does Joseph Parker know that the destructives will never venture

on any such work and that if they did not two of them would agree upon the material for the new canon.

The attempts made by preachers and other good people to please the “dear and sensitive infidel” before whom they stand “in white-faced awe,” are well handled, and so are the excuses made by those who say they would become Christians and take the communion if certain alleged discrepancies in the Bible were cleared. Dr. Parker does not believe they would do anything of the kind. In a chapter styled “notes and comments” he goes after one or two of his clerical neighbours of the extreme school of Higher Criticism in a style that is quite exhilarating to the reader but must have made the neighbours wince more than a little. The chapter addressed to pastors and written from the standpoint of a preacher in actual service is worth many times the cost of the whole book.

MEANS OF GRACE.

BY J. A. R. DICKSON B.D., PH.D.

In the charming and tender little brochure by Miss E. T. McLaren on “Dr. John Brown (the author of ‘Rab and his Friends’) and His Sister Isabella,” we receive a very distinct impression of what the genial humorist and the thoughtful prose-poet was at home among his friends. We are indebted to Miss McLaren for the faithfulness of her touches in these lovely sketches. We always want to know a little more of the personal history of our favorite authors, and Miss McLaren has in a most satisfactory way done this in reference to the author of “Rab.” She introduces us to their intimacy and tells us of the pleasure she had in getting a drive in his carriage, and in course comes this note, which gives us our text for this paper: “Many years after, when one day he spoke of driving with him as if it were only a dull thing to do, I told him that when he asked me I always came most gladly, and that I looked upon it as a ‘means of grace.’ He smiled, but shook his head rather sadly, and I was afraid I had ventured too far. He did not refer to it again, but weeks after he came up to me in the dining room at Rutland street, and without one introductory remark said, ‘Means of grace to-morrow at half past two.’ And means of grace it was then and always.” It could not be otherwise. To sit by the side of a man so kind, so true, so thoughtful, so observant, so Christian, and so thrilled by his talk, and shot through with the bright arrows of his thought, and uplifted by his quickening and influential presence, could not but be a means of grace of the most comprehensive and efficient kind.

Our fathers were wont to limit the phrase ‘means of grace’ to the ordinances of God's house. They looked upon them as being ‘the Word, sacraments and prayer.’ And, no doubt, these are the principal means, but God's quiver has in it many an arrow beside these. No one, however, will dare to say that these, whatever they may be, are not edged, or fashioned, or clothed with energy, in one way or another, by the principal means. Any nature is refined, or increased in its magnetic mass, or endued with new affinities, or filled with a richer and more godlike love by these. The principal means underlie and give value to all other means. But we do ourselves an injury if we close our eyes to all other means except the principal means. The other means of grace are not infrequently the most effective. And they are that, just because they help men where they need it most, and so appreciate it most.

In our Lord's time the feeding of the hungry, the healing of the sick, the blessing of little children, the kindly sympathetic word, were all means of grace. And so it is to-day. The manifestation of the Christian spirit in the most ordinary and homely way is a means of grace. Hence, no good man need put on his Sunday coat, or go out of his way in the least, or turn aside from his ordinary avocation to be a means of grace to some one. Indeed, God has strewed His people among their fellows, as He has set the stars in the sky, to discover His glory in the depths of the darkness. And He has laid upon them this injunction, that needs no interpretative clause to make it plain. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and

glorify your Father which is in heaven.” The light that is in a man must shine out. The peace that is in him must pour through him. The joy of his heart will illumine his face. The confidence of his soul will give elasticity and firmness to his step. All that goes to make up the mass of his character will be recognized and felt.

As gas cannot be confined in a skin, and as water may be pressed even through gold, and air sweeps through the densest rock, so what is in a man will discover itself. It will shine or darken in his eyes, set its mark upon the face, make itself felt in the grasp of the hand, touch with its magnetic power the tones of the voice. What is in a man—what a man is, cannot be hid. A Chinese convert who recently died had this said of him: “There is no difference between him and the book.” David Sandeman, a devoted Christian and afterwards a zealous missionary in China, was often revolving this question in his mind: “Why have I not a walk with God as close as McCheyne's?” revealing to us the wonderful influence McCheyne had. Dr. Jas. Hamilton, of London, speaking of this same David Sandeman, says: “It was good to be in his company. His bright intent and holy walk was quickening to any fellow traveller who received even the shortest convoy.”

This world is so truly God's world, and He so lovingly works in it, and through it, in all its various departments, that it would be very hard for us to exclude anything, or any act, from the possibility of being used as a means of grace. All things work together in the most subtle and surprising way to bring about high spiritual ends. A smile has drawn a whole family to follow a minister to church. A kind act has melted a hard heart and given indubitable evidence of a true Christian faith. A simple business honesty has illustrated the reality of a godly profession. It was the title of a book, “Emmanuel, God With Us,” seen by the late Adolph Saphir, D.D., in a bookseller's window, that took hold of his mind, and puzzled him so that he set about enquiring what it meant, and eventuated in his conversion. That title was a means of grace to him. It was the prayer of a little boy for his mother, accidentally overheard by her, that awakened her to deep concern about her eternal welfare, and led her to go to Mr. Moody to receive instructions as to the way of life. We are told that when Dr. Chalmers was at the very zenith of his popularity, he was walking home one evening with a friend, who told him of a person who had been converted through the instrumentality of a sermon which he had preached. Immediately the teardrop glittered in the good man's eye, and his voice faltered as he said, “That is the best news I have heard for long. I was beginning to think that I had mistaken the leadings of Providence in coming to your city; but this will keep me up.”

That little bit of information was a means of grace to the truly great man, and no doubt would put new energy into his grand gospel declarations.

A pleasant nod of recognition on the street has kept alive faith in godliness in many a desponding soul, which was beginning to say to itself, “No man careth for me.” A warm hand-grasp has had the same effect as it has intimated in the quietest and most unobtrusive way the true brotherhood of all God's children. “Means of grace!” why, everything may become means of grace to men, if the sweet, gracious, benign Spirit of Jesus only control our hearts and place its stamp on our nature.

A gentleman of some standing in his community, had been seriously impressed by the searching preaching of Dr. Nettleton, the well-known American Evangelist, and after having a private interview with him said, “Dr. Nettleton, I will thank you not to speak of my case to any one, for it is doubtful what the result may be.” “I quite agree with you,” said Dr. Nettleton, “that it is best your case should not be known; and I engage to keep it entirely to myself; and if you do the same it will not be known. It is as you say, very doubtful how the case will turn out. You may give up the subject and lose your soul.” This was a bow drawn at a venture. And it was effective; a means of grace indeed. The man was soon so deeply distressed that he cared not though all the world knew it, and very soon he found peace in believing.

No act, word, or manner, shall be void of the heavenly investiture of light, if we use the prayer of the holy George Herbert:

“Teach me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see,
And what I do in anything,
To do it as for Thee.”

Written for THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

JOHN RUSKIN, SCOFFER.

BY W. H. M.

It was with deep regret that I read, in the CANADA PRESBYTERIAN of Feb. 7th, a quotation from Collingwood's biography of Ruskin, accompanied by a comment, not justified even by the misleading extract, which is calculated to give a very wrong impression concerning the life and work of that remarkable man, and thus deter his great loss many religious persons from reading him. The comment was not justified, because it is not stated that Ruskin scoffed at Christ, but that he seemed to scoff at the evangelical creed—a very different thing. Christ has not in this century had a more faithful and reverent servant than John Ruskin. From the time, when a boy of three, he preached to the assembled household his short sermon, “People, be good,” it has been the occupation of his life to advance the Kingdom of God on this earth. No man has preached a loftier or holier ideal, or kept closer to the Bible text, and no man has more consistently lived up to the ideal he preached. Whether he wrote on art, political economy, or religion, the Bible was the confessed foundation of all he said; and for practical obedience to its precepts he, throughout his whole life, pleaded. And this is the very reason why he is not, except to a small circle (and except in a general sense), a leader in modern life. For religious fervour, for passionate and authoritative proclamation of the Right, and stern and fearless condemnation of the Wrong, we have to go to the pages of Hebrew prophecy, or to Paul for a voice like John Ruskin's. And to many of us who have not ceased to believe that it is the inspiration of the Almighty that not only hath given, but doth give us understanding, His voice is authoritative in these times, and to be disobeyed at our peril. But mankind ever has preferred to build the tombs and garnish the sepulchres of the dead prophets rather than listen to and obey the living ones, who come not to destroy but to fulfil what was spoken by them of old time. That John Ruskin endeavored not to destroy, but to fulfil what Christians hold sacred, I hope to make abundantly manifest.

Certainly, the view suggested by the comment referred to is not the one current in the English religious world; for the following appreciative words, in connection with the biography, appeared lately in that widely-informed and fine spirited journal, the *British Weekly*: “His pure and generous nature is seen in his life, even more than in his books.”

On deeper consideration we may see that the career which, looked at from this side, seems most tragic and broken, may from the other be seen as victorious and complete.” I may speak with some authority as to Mr. Ruskin's religious position; for I have been continuously for five or six years a student of his works (during which time I have reverently copied many of his pages into a certain monkish book I keep, wishing they might be letters of gold). I have also read Collingwood's biography.

But let Ruskin speak for himself. I quote almost at random from different works written after he had been delivered from the narrow creed of his early manhood, in which he had been zealously educated. The incident referred to occurred in 1872. (1867, age 48).—(There is) “an infinitely wise and kind Father above all of them and us, if we can but find our way to Him, and ask Him to take us for servants, and put us to any work He will, so that we may never leave Him more.” (Time and Tide).

(1876, age 57).—“Say to yourselves every morning just after your prayers: ‘Whoso forsaketh not all that he hath, cannot be my disciple.’ That is exactly and completely true; meaning that you are to give all you have to Christ to take care of for you, and