

## A GREAT HOME MISSIONARY FIELD.

We understand by a Home Missionary field in general, a community destitute of the ordinary means of grace, and unable or unwilling to provide them. The case may be urgent for various reasons: as, the numbers to be reached may be great; the destitution may be nearly absolute; vice and iniquity may abound; great perils and consequent great need of the prompt and faithful presentation of the truths and consolations of the Gospel may prevail; a very interesting class of persons may be embraced in the field; and the influence they are destined to exert upon the country, may be seen to be great for weal or for woe, according as they receive or reject the Gospel. Almost any one of these features would give importance to the field characterized by it. Should several of them be found combined on a single field, as great numbers and great destitution and iniquity, the interest of Christians would be roused; they would pray, they would plan, they would give, they would labor. Such a combination of necessities is found in the neglected parts of our great cities, and the zeal with which mission schools and chapels and tract distribution and Bible reading are carried on in those districts, proves that Christian people appreciate the emergency.

Are they, as yet quite aroused to the far greater emergency presented by the religious condition of the army? Do they see in the army and navy as they should, a Home Missionary field unparalleled in its nature and extent? Do they feel pressed in spirit, are they driven to prayer, do they combine, plan, give, act, as if a field vast, inviting, and important in the highest degree was open for and demanding evangelization at their hands?

Look at the facts! A million of men are away from home, from church, from Sabbath school, from the restraints of civilized life, amid the temptations of the camp or the hardening influences of the battle-field, every feature of their daily life changed from its ordinary course, and changed for the worse. These men are the youth of our country—the Spring-time of the nation's year—its future men of power and influence, its legislators and rulers. It is scarcely too much to say that what they are, the country will be. They are exposed to the chances of battle, many of them have but a few days or weeks to live; many of them will languish wounded, sick, dying in hospitals. Some, many, we hope,—of the regiments have good chaplains; but, perhaps, half of the army is either without these officers, or, worse, has unworthy men in their places; and even good chaplains need to be aided with supplies of literature and reinforced when battles multiply their cares and labors. There are half-a-million of needy, destitute and important persons,—our friends, brothers, sons, fellow-citizens, future men of influence on our missionary field,—a field close at our doors, very open to our labors; they are men who are fighting, bleeding, receiving frightful wounds and dying for us. Such is the field presented to our labors, and this is the extraordinary combination of claims it has upon us.

For the time being, all other openings for Christian effort dwindle away in the comparison. All others will be sure to suffer hereafter, if this be neglected now. To allow an immense army like ours to go destitute of evangelical influences, and then to spread over the community, bearing with it, like the sweep of an inundation, the profanity, the recklessness, the impiety of the camp, would be to undermine the foundations of all evangelical life and activity in the nation. The reflex influences of no missionary effort can be felt as those of faithful, abundant, judicious labors in the army. Many and many a field at home and abroad, is held with long struggles and great expense of men and money, and every feeling of Christian duty is appealed to, successfully, for the means necessary to sustain the laborers on it, which in dimensions and results, looks like child's play, compared with the work in the army. We do not wish a single hopeful field of effort in our regular church enterprises to be abandoned; we would counsel advance and enlargement in every quarter. But we feel it a high and sacred duty to keep alive in the hearts of Christian people, so far as we can reach them, a sense of

the greatness, nearness, and solemn obligation of the Home Missionary work in the army. And we rejoice that an Association, embracing all denominations of Christian people, has been and is efficiently at work on this field. Christian people know it, and know the men composing it, too well to need any fresh commendations from us. They can safely make it the medium of their efforts and the channel of their contributions for this great object. We regard the Christian Commission as the greatest Home Missionary organization of the day. It has other aims we know, looking to the physical wants and sufferings of our soldiers, but we ask Christians, especially, to remember it in their prayers, and their sympathies, and their gifts as the only systematic agency for evangelizing the army; for carrying out, probably, the most important work; for fulfilling, perhaps, the most imperative duty, ever laid upon the American churches.

## SERIOUS ASPECTS OF OUR TIME.

The rationalism that was only as a smouldering fire in dreamy Germany, and that seemed to be dying out even there, has flamed out clear and high in the practical mind of the cultivated Anglo-Saxon. It is mixed up with no abstruse philosophies; it is not known by schools and masters; it is flowing downward with a clearer and a wider stream embracing larger circles of the general public in its course. If the "Essays and Reviews" were written by, and adapted for, scholars, they were for the clear-headed scholars of Great Britain; while Colenso's attack on the Pentateuch required little more learning than the multiplication table; and finally, Renan's Life of Jesus addresses to the wide circle of readers that cares less for science than for imagination; that seeks to be entertained with romance, rather than fortified with fact.

The unbelieving naturalists have sunk into comparative quiet since the discreditable forgeries of the Abbeville workmen have come to light; and the notion of a Pre-Adamite family of man has become very shadowy, yet it is as true as ever, that no accurate reconciliation of science and the Mosaic Record has yet been effected. Serious difficulties yet remain, and cold and unbelieving investigators press hard upon believers in the Bible doctrine of the unity of the race, and the Mosaic chronology of anti-diluvian age. Infidelity has come back again to work upon plain men, not with the ribaldry of Tom Paine, but with the popularized results of critical interpretation and of natural science. Nor is this all. If it were, it would still in its main features be neither startling or alarming. The peculiarity of the situation is found in the attitude of one of the leading churches of Christendom, hitherto deemed steadfast in the faith, with a leaning rather in the direction of Romanism than Radicalism. If the Church of England has, at any time, been suspected of unsoundness, it is because her leading men have exalted her ritual, her order, her claims to an historical connection with the primitive church. Surely, it is an astonishing, a monstrous phenomenon, that this church, first by one of its own prelates, and then by its highest court, should suddenly range itself upon the side of unbelief; should declare the loosest views of inspiration, of the atonement, and of eternal punishment—all leading points of faith—compatible, not only with membership, but with high office in her enclosure. How far the body of the church is represented in these extraordinary manifestations, we cannot as yet tell. Certain it is, she is utterly powerless to discipline her members for the most positive deviations from her standards; and all her great resources, her numerous parishes, her stations of emolument, honor and influence are open for the unmolested dissemination of views subversive of her own and the common creed of evangelical Christendom. The result cannot but be disastrous. Rank infidelity will shield itself under the form, and will nourish itself on the bread of the church. It has a warrant to enter the pulpits and the pious homes, and to sit by the dying beds of the people of England. The people are taught, in effect, that a meagre Deism is all that is needful to worthy membership of a church, until now recognized by the whole of Chris-

tendom. To our minds, a rapid defection from evangelical Christianity among the educated classes of England, is to be looked for, as a result of this decision. The staid old *Edinburgh Review* defends Canon Staley and begins to follow—*longo intervallo* as yet—in the destructive track of the *Westminster*. This will prove a pregnant instance doubtless.

Although the evil cannot present itself in this land of free churches in such a concentrated shape, with such prestige from a union with civil authority, it is necessary for us to inquire how to meet it here. In fact, the purely literary influences of our country, the leading organs of the *belles lettres* of the land, have long been controlled by a sort of vanished heathenism, a "baptized infidelity" very popular in New England. And the public is excited, and the minds of the young in our schools and colleges are agitated under the new aspects and developments of unbelief in the mother country.

It is clear that we must meet unbelief on the question of *Inspiration*. Whether the Scriptures are inspired at all, or in such a degree inspired as to put them in an entirely different category from every other book extant, is not, however the pressing question of the time. There is a disposition to concede much on this point, while denying, after all, the essential character of the Bible, in the view of evangelical Christians. What we are called upon to maintain in the face of verbal criticism, arithmetical quibbles, geological and physiological surmises, and French romancing, is the universal blending of the divine with the human in the Scriptures—a God of truth and holiness present in every part, in every book, chapter and verse of the Bible as originally communicated. And it is no less our duty, in maintaining this cardinal point of doctrine, to have respect to all well-ascertained tendencies of criticism, and of natural sciences to be careful not to overlook plain indications of Providence, from this or any quarter, and to guard our mode of stating the doctrine lest we sin against light, offend common sense and needlessly bring God's word into disrepute. Professors in seminaries, defenders of Christianity through the press, preachers and seekers for the truth everywhere, must have regard to the doctrine of Inspiration. It must be defended and cleared up. And great service will be done to the truth if, by the onset of error, we are led to clearer views and more tenable positions upon great principles.

In conflicts which arise with error, we should never suffer ourselves to be so lost in intellectual strife, as to forget the moral and spiritual facts of man's nature, to which the Gospel is addressed and in adaptation to which the great power of the Gospel lies. There is such a thing as being diverted from the grand business and ended from the true attitude of the ministry before sinful and perishing men, while endeavoring to meet the cavils of unbelief. Our aim should be, mainly, to commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God, rather than to meet his scientific scruples and square with his geological notions. By the simple, earnest, faithful presentation of our message as ambassadors from God to a revolted race, we shall often do more to overwhelm doubt, than by an elaborate process of refutation. The moral nature of men must be quickened; their consciences must be aroused; their dormant consciousness of sin must be awakened; divine justice, mercy and grace must be declared out of a full heart; the efficacy of the simple preaching of the cross must be relied on; the discourse based upon experience and bathed in the spirit of prayer, and which is, in effect, a telling of what the Lord has done for our souls will always win sympathy and produce conviction. It is the marvellous accord between the Gospel as a remedial scheme and man's deepest and most pressing necessities; it is its answer to his questionings, its interpretation of his soul's dim yearnings; it is its full and exactly suited supply to his greatest moral wants; it is its support and comfort under trial, its strength to his wavering tempted purpose to good, its "hope that maketh not ashamed" and that holds like a sheet anchor his tossed soul; it is its rod and staff in the valley and shadow of death,—it is these moral and spiritual ties, these experimental

evidences that alone can give the truth a steadfast hold on the mind of man. Let but the Holy Spirit bring the truth, in any of these relations, home to the heart, and how like poor cobwebs, the artifices of unbelief, the strongest and most ingenious fabrications with which criticism, natural science, or philosophy has darkened and burdened the mind, will be swept away!

Live near to God and continue faithfully to declare his truth and offer his salvation to men, and the strongest possible demonstrations of its divinity will be given. With these experimental proofs, we may be sure no amount of argument addressed to the intellect will prevail, and no logical triumph will establish the Gospel in the permanent belief of man.

## QUENCH NOT THE SPIRIT.

The great Vivifier of souls, the Author of the new creation is, descending in large measure on many parts of our land. The strife of war has not driven him from our borders; nay, some of his marked manifestations are among those who have pressed forward in defence of the country. All along the front, where the war-cry will soon sound, and the hellish tumult of battle will rage, the quiet, blessed, heaven-born influences have descended as softly as dew upon the grass, bestowing a life which the milder stroke of war cannot take away. And among those who have been praying for the soldiers at home, and been brought thus into lively spiritual sympathy with them, the same life-giving Power has been abundantly at work, with such sudden and gracious manifestations, that ere we are aware, we find ourselves surrounded with genuine and fruitful revivals.

Let us improve the time. Let the gracious gift which, on account of our unbelief, comes upon us with a sudden yet a glad surprise, be as promptly accepted. Let this blessed interruption to our warring on the field and our extravagance and worldliness at home, be welcomed as an indication of the divine preference that we should not perish but have everlasting life. Soldier, waiting the order to move, which may also be the solemn summons of the great Commander to the last conflict, hear and heed the kind invitations of the Spirit which have persuaded so many of your comrades to receive Christ and to give him their hearts. Do not resist the gracious influence; do not, in your perilous circumstances, run the risk of its withdrawal. Do not go to the battle-fields of this summer, where the reaper death is sure to gather such a great harvest, confirmed in your wickedness, hardened in your impotence, steeled to a still greater degree of desperation by a new rejection of the only influence that can change your obstinate, sinful heart. Do not risk the loss of body and soul at once by refusing the only complete defence, the Gospel Helmet of Salvation.

And you, thoughtful inquiring one at home, child of a pious house and centre of many prayers, trifle not with the call, which now meets you with new force because many around you are heeding it. Suffer not this golden season to pass unimproved. Suffer not yourself to sink down from this aroused and elevated spiritual condition, when duty is so plain, when heaven and hell are so near, when the law shines out in such perfection of holy shewings, when the Saviour is so suited to the wants of sinners, when comrades are yielding, when conscience is urging; without settling forever the great question and securing your soul's salvation. Time is passing; opportunities are lessening; the mind grows harder; death in a thousand forms waylays your path; you are trifling with no less a being than the Holy Spirit, and may provoke Him to anger and final withdrawal.

What momentous questions tremble now in the balance! While the Spirit waits, you may be deciding your immortal destiny. You may come out from this season of religious interest with a heart rejoicing in its unconditional submission to Jesus; or you may have written in adamant your own sentence of everlasting despair. The Spirit can be quenched. O! do not even dampen the divine warmth and light of His influences. Do not put out the very eye and sun of the soul. Do not run the terrible risk of offending him,

by treating it as a matter of indifference, whether you yield to him now, or whether you wait for another and another call. The present is the only sure call. It is all the opportunity you want; you may never have another. Exalted to the gates of heaven now, you may be cast down to hell next. Begin, then, with this season of revival. Christ calls you now. The world and the church need you now. "Now" contains every thing you need for salvation.

## SPRING MEETING

OF THE PRESBYTERY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

The Presbytery of the District of Columbia, met in the Sixth Church, Washington, D. C., the 5th of April, 1864, at 7 o'clock P. M., and was opened with a sermon by the Moderator. The attendance of ministers was large—only one being absent. The churches, however, were not all represented by their Elders. The usual business for the Spring was transacted. The statistical report, and the records of the Sessions showed that the churches were in a prosperous condition.

The Commissioners elected to the General Assembly, were Ministers, Rev. H. Dunning, and W. McLain, alternate; Elder, F. H. Smith, and David Bassett, alternate.

The Fall meeting is to be held in the First Constitutional Church, Baltimore, the first Tuesday in October. Presbytery adjourned to meet in the First Colored Church, Washington, the 9th of May, at 10 o'clock, A. M.

W. McLain, Stated Clerk.

## A WORD OF CHEER FROM OUR CAPITAL.

The following brief extract from a private letter, from an able and honorable member of Congress, is only one of the many indications we have, that our attempt to make the AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN the best religious paper in the land, meets with a generous sympathy and liberal encouragement. We hope still to continue in the line of improvement, and still further to win, if possible these words of noble cheer.

"Some weeks ago I received two numbers of the *American Presbyterian*. I need not say that I recognized in 'Genesee,' the pen of a valued friend. I was so much pleased therewith, and especially with the Northern letters, that I at once became a subscriber. Thus far we, which includes the better half, like the paper very much. Under its new management, with one bound it has placed itself along side, (and I think at the head) of the best religious papers of the age. Although pressed for time, and overwhelmed with reading matter, I diligently read the Rochester correspondent."

## PAYING CHURCH DEBTS.

It will be seen, from the circular of the Pastoral Association in another part of the paper, that a movement for the liquidation of the entire indebtedness of the feeble churches in the Third and Fourth Presbyteries of Philadelphia, is in contemplation. A comparatively small amount is required for this object, and the present is one very favorable for such an undertaking. We hope the laymen of our churches will especially give attention to the call for a meeting in the First Church, next Tuesday, and will take hold of the matter with the earnestness and liberality that have characterized all their recent movements for extending the kingdom of Christ in our city.

MORE GOOD WORDS.—A minister in New York writes: "I like your paper better and better. It is the only really conscientious paper I find."

Another in the same State writes: "The *American Presbyterian* gives universal satisfaction. Of several first class religious papers that come to my table, regularly, there is no one more welcome than the *American Presbyterian*. May God bless you, my brother, in your work."

Our reports of the anniversaries of the *Christian Commission* have given great satisfaction. A minister in Central New York writes: "Your admirable reports of the meetings of the *Christian Commission*, in Philadelphia and Washington, are worth the price of the paper for the year."

A Lawyer in Rochester, renewing his

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"I am respectfully yours."

## News of the Churches.

WESTERN CHURCHES AND MINISTERS.—"Ambrose" in the *Evangelist* says, the First Church, Chicago, have recently built and dedicated a brick chapel, costing \$13,000, and employed a Mr. Loomis as missionary. Rev. Alfred Eddy was installed pastor of Olivet Church, in the same city, March 18th. Rev. C. J. Hutchins, of Racine, preached the sermon. A new church has been organized and a lot secured with a view to building in the western part of the city. Rev. W. C. Dickinson has been called to the Church at Lake Forest, near Chicago. The congregation recently gave him \$150. His father, Rev. Baxter Dickinson, D. D., resides in the place. Rev. E. J. Stewart, of Bay City, Mich., has received \$233 from his people, and \$200 has been added to his salary.

NEW YORK CITY.—The *South Church Brooklyn*, Rev. Dr. Spear's, has been enlarged and improved, at a cost of \$23,000. It has been decided by the Consociation to be inexpedient that Rev. Alex. McLean be dismissed from the charge at Fairfield, Conn., to accept the charge of the North Church, late Dr. Hatfield's. The people of Fairfield have presented Mr. McLean with \$700. This looks like remaining. Five young men were licensed by the Fourth Presbytery, New York, April 5th. One of them belonged to the Middle Class, Princeton Seminary; the rest to Senior Class, Union Seminary.

REVIVALS.—Clyde, N. Y., has been visited with refreshing; forty-five persons express a hope. For five weeks, the special services were exclusively prayer meetings. Afterwards there were six weeks of preaching. \$205 were presented to the pastor.

DONATIONS AND INCREASE OF SALARY.—Rev. Robt. Aikman, of Elizabeth, N. J., received \$500 in the week preceding his twelfth anniversary Sabbath. Rev. Chas. D. Shaw, of the Second Church, Patterson, N. J., received \$200. His salary had been previously raised \$200, and a new parsonage is in prospect. Rev. John Waugh, of Canton, N. Y., received \$110. Rev. E. B. Miner, of Baraboo, Wis., and Rev. S. N. Hill, of Birmingham, Mich., each received \$70. Rev. W. H. McCarrer, pastor of the church of Evansville, Ind., the dedication of whose new and handsome edifice was recently noticed, received \$321, from his people at a visit made by them at the parsonage in March.

CALLS AND CHANGES.—Rev. E. Dickinson, of Auburn Seminary, has accepted a call to the Church of Fentonville, Mich. Rev. B. Parsons, of Lacon, Ill., has accepted a call to the Church of St. Joseph's Mo., and the Lacon Church have called Rev. E. Marsh, of Canton, Ill. The Church at Burr Oak, Mich., has called Rev. S. Ottman, of Edwardsburg, who has accepted.

THE CHURCH AT ELLENBURG, N. Y., has just completed a new edifice, begun in 1857. It will seat 250 persons.

REV. A. D. JACK writes to the *Christian Herald*, stating that he has closed his labors with the Troy Presbyterian Church, of Whitley county, and engaged to labor with the churches of Shiloh, Gilead and Franklin, Ind. During the two years of his ministry in the Troy Church, thirty-five members were added to the communion of the church. He says: "Their isolated situation—no other church of our denomination being near enough to be united under one minister—and the fact that they were unwilling to receive aid from the Home Mission Committee, made my residence among them trying in a financial point of view."