

THE CANADIAN INDEPENDENT.

All communications for the Editorial, News of Churches and Correspondence Columns should be addressed to the Managing Editor, Box 2648, P.O. Toronto.

Pastors and church officers are particularly requested to forward items for "News of the Churches" column.

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will please notice that as new financial arrangements have been made for the carrying on of THE INDEPENDENT, all remittances for the current volume, and communications on business, are to be addressed to the Business Manager, box 2648, Toronto. We would earnestly appeal to all to pay up their indebtedness—it is small to the individual subscriber, the aggregate is large, and if paid would remove all difficulty. Kindly send us your dollar at once. Payment for back volumes up to 1st July last can be sent to Mr. A. Christie, 9 Wilton Avenue, Toronto.

UNSEEN GUARDS.

IN one of Southey's poems Caradoc lies sleeping; pleasant were the dreams of his country and prospective home; the foe unexpectedly steals upon him, and, exulting, raises the spear to smite him as he lay;

"That instant, o'er the Briton's unseen harp
The gale of morning passed, and swept its strings.
Into so sweet a harmony, that sure
It seemed no earthly tune;"

and the savage quails; thinking that some protecting spirit watched beside his intended victim, he abashed withdraws. It was a favourite opinion of old that each individual was under the eye of his guardian angel; certain it is that "the angel of the Lord encamps about those that fear Him;" and though these are the days of critical scepticism, we may still read with pleasure what Edmund Spenser wrote concerning angels:—

"How oft do they their silver bowers leave,
To come to succour us that succour want!
How oft do they with golden pinions cleave
The fitting skies, like flying pursuivant,
Against foul fiends to aid us militant;
They for us fight, they watch and duly ward,
And their bright squadrons round about us plant
And all for love and nothing for reward,
Oh! why should God to man have such regard?"

The morning breeze as it awoke the soft notes of the harp was an angel's touch to the sleeping Briton nor should we disdain to find comfort in the truth that angel hosts encamp around; it may be were our eyes touched by a prophet's prayers we too, as Elisha's servant, would see the mountains filled with the guardian host.

"A prophets prayer"—has prayer power to guard? to shield a loved one from evil? Abraham's prayer would have prevailed for Sodom had ten righteous men been found, and then unconsciously, by an unseen and unknown power, the doom from the city had passed away. But the ten were not to be found, and Sodom fell; which fact leads us to the thought that there are conditions to prayer, to the safety given by the unseen guards, conditions which lie consciously or unconsciously in the individual whose blessing or security is in question. Even ministering angels may be balked of their intent by the perversity of the individual guarded. Christ did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief. The wind may play through the strings of the Aeolian harp, but if no ear is near or attentive, its sweetest powers are mute; only as the listening ear is open are its strains full melody. The unseen guards around us meet only faith's keen sight, and the complement of the blessing rests with the soul to be blessed. The ten righteous without an Abraham's prayer had been in Sodom in vain, and the efficacy of a mother's prayers for her prodigal boy has hope in this, that some crushed, smothered germ of conscience may be freed and live. They who need, and they who would become, the power of an unseen and unknown guard, may trust and toil with confidence. Mahanaim is still the name of the place where the

believer abides, and those hosts appear as the need and circumstances require. To Joshua with the foe before him, the captain of the Lord's host held the drawn sword in his hand; to us in our hour of sadness they come by some silent motion which may be contemporary with the prayer a friend for us is offering at the mercy seat. Thus to us our guardian angels hover round, bringing to one man wisdom, to another peace, lifting a Martha's weight of cares, a Mary's load of sin; giving strength to the weak, companionship to the solitary, power to the toiler, deliverance to the threatened, to each his heart's desire, if the heart but rests in God.

SHOULD THERE BE A CREED?

"I HAVE no creed but the New Testament," said an impugner of creeds to a fellow-traveller, who acknowledged one. An examination of the relative position of the speaker to the various sections of professing Christendom may aid us in our inquiry. He who had no creed but the New Testament had very decided convictions of what he found there. He was a rigid Trinitarian, Calvinistic to the backbone, a premillenarian and a firm believer in the unending character of the future state of retribution. Yet the Arian, Arminian, post-millenarian and restorationist say with apparently equal sincerity, my creed is the New Testament only.

All who read the Bible intelligently must conclude that it teaches something, and that something, written, expressed, thought, is a creed; and until all minds are made and educated alike, different conclusions will be reached, hence creeds will differ. The cry against creeds *per se* is mere meaningless rant, only this and nothing more. A man must find some definite proposition in the Bible; that proposition, if the Bible is accepted as authoritative, goes to make up his creed. The man who has "no creed," if not a nothingarian, is one of the narrowest of all sectaries. However, as Mr. Powis said in the Union sermon, the tendency of the day is not in the direction of over-devotion to creeds, but of indifference thereto. Yet confessedly, how to handle a creed is a question more readily asked than answered. The statement of facts in our article last week, which statement is capable of indefinite extension, shews plainly that subscription does not, and if experience justifies any assertion, cannot secure even an approach to uniformity of belief; no, nor secure substantially similar teaching for the masses. All possible shades of belief are found regarding what the Gospel is between the volume of Scotch sermons, referred to in our last, and Boston's Fourfold State; between Dean Stanley on the one hand and Canon Liddon on the other, and the same state of things is fast approaching in our American and Canadian churches where subscription is demanded.

It will hardly do to make a wholesale charge of dishonesty against those who manifestly depart from their subscribed creed, for among other considerations unless the infallibility of the creed is assumed, how could it be charged were neither mouse nor bird permitted to peep or mutter? Besides, men of otherwise undoubted integrity and Christian character do stand in the equivocal position. By common consent subscription is nowhere assumed to be a covenant binding to the letter of the bond. Why then subscribe at all? The mind does not work in the line of mechanical art by square and compass and rule, it must be free; obligation and subscription imposed as conditions seem to threaten if not violate the necessary freedom of the mind, and hence become shackles, or are disregarded save by those who find liberty within the circumscribed boundaries.

Is there not a better way? We think there is, and it is here. A church must have principles which it holds to be vital; in simple straightforward language let such be stated; we need neither false colours nor hidden light. Having thus raised its standard it thereby invites all who can rally around it to fellowship and co-operation. Our creed then becomes a rendezvous not a prison.

But traitors may rally. Judge no man, but where what we deem vital principles are ignored or under-

mined, from such let us withdraw ourselves. Let attention be directed to that word "withdraw," used twice in our English Bible in such connection, 2 Thess. iii. 6; 1 Tim. vi. 5. We should ever be above the *odium theologicum*. Even the unbeliever may be a darkened soul struggling for the light, "treat him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

Our position, then, regarding creeds is simply this: A creed is a mental, a spiritual necessity; let a church's creed or covenant be as simple and straightforward as possible, eschew all attempts after how not to say it, let that creed or covenant stand not as a prison wall, but as a standard shewing where that church may be found, and where honest men may gather.

SHORT TALKS ABOUT OUR CHURCH POLITY.

NO. 2. CONGREGATIONAL.

IN our last article we spoke of the "Independent" side of our polity, we desire now to say a little on its other aspect, the Congregational. What are we to understand by that term, and what does it include? It asserts a privilege and inculcates a duty which our church members too often neglect—that everyone should have a share in the management of the church. We often hear complaints as to the working of churches. In one case it will be the pastor who will lord it "over God's heritage," in another case it will be some Diotrephes "who loveth to have the pre-eminence." Here the church is said to be too much under the influence of one man, there under a body of deacons, or some special clique. We fully believe that in most cases there is but little ground for such complaints as these, it is apparent, not real, while in many instances individuals are forced by the indifference or neglect of duty of others to put themselves forward, and assume positions of prominence and responsibility from which they would gladly have been spared, and would thankfully be relieved; and a pretty long experience convinces us that churches oftentimes owe more to such men than they can readily apprehend. There can be, and is, true self-sacrifice here, as well as in other departments of Christian service. However that may be, it is unquestionable that a large number of church members fail to recognize the duty of doing their part in the business of the church, in other words, of being "Congregational." Many a church has had its well being imperilled, some it may be have suffered shipwreck, because their members have failed just here. We have heard regrets and condemnation of the action of churches in various matters by the members, and have not unfrequently found that these very members took no part and had no interest in the deliberations which led to the course they condemn. Let every member feel that he or she individually is responsible for all that the church does, and strive to fulfil that duty in the fear of God.

But, it may be said, is said, will not this bring confusion and disorder? will not the church meeting degenerate into a mere debating club? and will not there arise factions and parties in the church? Yes, if the pastor is an unwise, unspiritual man, and if the membership is a mere heterogeneous mass of men and women without the principle of a living faith, and the sense of responsibility to guide them, and when that is the case, not only will these results follow, but the sooner they do, and put an end to the whole farce of a church, the better. No, if pastor and people be alike imbued with the spirit of the religion they profess, with a spirit of consideration, of forbearance and of Christian love. Let these prevail and the most difficult questions may safely be left to the assembled brethren. Circumstances may arise, such as cases of discipline, when it will be best that the church should ask brethren in whom it has confidence to investigate and report to them, and then follow their recommendation in the disposal. These, however, are exceptional cases, and only prove more clearly the rule of duty as generally binding.

May we not carry the idea of the word one step further, and ask if it is not "Congregational" for churches, by such as they shall choose, to meet to-