

Our Contributors.

JUST A LITTLE BETTER THIS YEAR.

BY KNOXONIAN.

The New Year has begun. The resolutions of the season have been made and perhaps some of them broken. How would it answer to make one strong general resolution to be better and do better than we have ever been or done during any past year.

Somebody tells of a pastor who explained the doctrine of human depravity to an elderly Scotch woman, a parishioner of his. "Aye," said the good woman, "that is a fine doctrine if we could only live up to it." Would that we all found as little difficulty in being and doing better as we find in illustrating the doctrine of human depravity.

Difficult things, however, are just the things worth doing. If the people of this Dominion would all be better and do better this year than last the country would get a splendid lift. Good living would do more for Canada than the N. P. ever did. Honesty and truth are of more value to the country than unrestricted reciprocity. Fairplay in business and politics would be a greater boon than two-rowed barley. The country needs a conscience and a sound public opinion quite as much as it needs a rise in the price of wheat.

We read somewhere every day that what Canada needs most is more people. Immigration is said to be the sovereign balm for all the ills that Canadians are heir to. Like the orator Principal Willis used to tell about, "We deny the allegation and challenge the alligator." Improvement of the people we have is a more important thing than the bringing in of thousands of people not any better than ourselves. The miserable delusion that numbers are of more importance than quality is eating the vitals out of church, state, school, college and almost every other institution. If a padlock could be put upon the mouth of every man who helps to make the Canadian people believe that a "crowd" is the main thing in life the country would gain immensely by the operation. Character is of more importance than numbers. Quality is a more vital matter than quantity. The character of a town, or school, or college, or church, or congregation, or country, is out of all sight more important than the number of human units that enter into their formation. There is a sufficient number of people in Canada now to make a powerful nation if we were all people of the right kind.

Look at little Scotland. The extreme length of that little country is not as great by fifty miles as the distance from Toronto to Montreal; its breadth is not as great by ten miles as the distance between Toronto and Kingston; its population is a million less than the population of Canada and yet Scotland has for a century been one of the most influential countries in the world.

Supposing we all begin this year and try to improve our quality. Let Sir John Thompson bring in some immigrants if he can, though there is great room for doubt as to whether a coaxed and purchased immigration ever did any country much good. The men who hewed Ontario out of the forest came of their own accord, and that is one reason why Ontario is such a splendid province. But whatever doubt there may be about the merits of an emigration policy there is no doubt that improvement of the people who are here now would mean the improvement of Canada. Now let us begin.

Dear Brother Boanerges, let us begin with you. Don't you think you could preach just a little better this year than you ever did before. No doubt you are a fairly good preacher, but supposing you begin your sermon a little earlier in the week and put a little more work on it, and a little more matter in it, and light it up with strong, clear illustrations, and arrange the closing part so that the people will imagine something has struck them. And, dear brother, supposing you make an honest effort to stop that woe-

ful habit you have of allowing your sermon to taper out at the end. A sermon should never taper. It should close with a rush. Now, dearly beloved brother, do try and preach just a little better this year than you ever did before.

And the elders, and deacons, and Sabbath School Superintendents and teachers, and the Christian Endeavours, and the whole body of church workers, should follow the example of Brother Boanerges and work better this year than they ever did. There is not much use in one man trying to bring about a reform if he is not well backed up by those whose duty it is to help him. Even Paul did not succeed in all places. The people must therefore do their share if better times are to come. If they do not attend church with a reasonable degree of regularity and pay with a reasonable amount of liberality and live with a credible amount of consistency there will be no improvement in this or any other year.

We often speak about the need of more life in church, and some people who might know better exhaust their own little life in groaning over the lack of life in others. If each one would begin on his own account and work and pray just a little better for a twelvemonth, the church would make great advances in 1893.

But the church is not the only institution that would stand improvement. In fact every thing we have would be greatly improved if everybody who works in any line would do his work just a little better.

There is a grand army of teachers in this country. No doubt the great majority of them do their work well, but if all did just a little better the educational interests would be distinctly improved.

We have a profound admiration for a good mechanic. We would throw up our tile higher and shout much louder for a tailor who makes a coat fit like a glove or a bootmaker who makes your number fourteens look neat and nice than we would for some members of parliament we know. If there is one kind of a man we do grow enthusiastic over it is a mechanic who can make something useful and nice and who takes an honest pride in his work. Talk about reforms! One of the reforms we need first and most is to run the ignoble army of demagogues, bogus moral reformers, hungry politicians, gabby agitators, corner grocery talkers on politics and religion, clean out of the country and put industrious, skilful workmen in their place. A man who can make a good saw-horse, or mend a pair of boots neatly, or blacken them well is worth more to this young country than any score of gabby demagogues between the oceans. But still there is some room for improvement among mechanics, and if every man who makes things would make them just a little better the country would be a distinct gainer.

There is a remote possibility that even doctors, lawyers, judges and some members of their professions might do their work just a little better. The Editor alone is perfect!

What an improvement would take place all round if we all lived and worked just a little better this year.

THE LITERARY PRE-EMINENCE AND POWER OF THE SCRIPTURES.

BY REV. D. MILLER, BRUSSELS.

The Bible is the most popular of all books; it was once, and still is, with many people, the most despised. It is God's Book: it is "the Book;" it is "the Gospel;" "the Good News of Salvation" to sinners. It is an honest book, all books are not honest. It is profound in its thoughts, at the same time it is simple in its statements. To many it is an enigma—it is paradoxical, still it is suited to the conditions of all men. Head knowledge of the Bible is to be commended, heart knowledge is indispensable to the man who would study its pages aright. It is a book which many of the wisest of men fail to comprehend, and yet the most illiterate may apprehend its truths. The subject matter treated of in the Holy

Scriptures is most complex, though its themes are suited to every mind. It affords food both for mind and heart. A knowledge of the Scriptures as a whole is to be sought after, but a simple sentence may, and often does, answer the purposes intended by its Divine Author. The beauty of the Bible does not consist in "the get-up" of the book; it would be priceless if printed upon strips of rags. A copy can be procured for a few cents, yet the world full of diamonds or rubies or the most costly pearls, could not purchase its saving power. It is a useless book, if improperly applied. To the sceptic it becomes a destroying sword, to the atheist it says, "Thou art a fool!" to the man of the world it is "dry as dust."

Use the Bible aright, and it becomes instinctive with light, because its author, Jesus Christ, is "The Light of the World." Use the Word aright, and it becomes instinctive with love, because "God is love." "It is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth."

Let me illustrate. Philosophers have for ages been troubling their minds as to what constitutes "the highest good," "true happiness." The little child answers this knotty query when she sings the simple gospel hymn:

"Gentle Jesus meek and mild,
Look upon a little child."

The highest good is God incarnate—the Christ—the Saviour of the world. Power and meekness and mercy in Him are the highest qualities of goodness. True happiness is exemplified in humble, child-like faith in God, in the Saviour, and in the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit: "Except ye be converted and become as little children," says Jesus, "ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Theologians stumble upon the rocks of "election," "effectual calling," "perfection," and such like doctrines. It is said that a poor woman once appeared before an old Scottish divine as a candidate for church membership. In those days a faultless mental knowledge of the "Shorter Catechism" was the avowed criterion of discipleship, and a sure passport into the Church militant. The old divine looked over his "specs" at the candidate with an air of wisdom and solemn awe, and asked in a most profound tone of voice, "What is Effectual Calling?" "What is Adoption?" "What is Sanctification?" "What is Justification?" "What is Faith?" The old lady hung her head; she could not answer one of those profound queries. At length the minister said, "I am afraid, dear woman, I cannot admit you to the Lord's Table." Tears gently stole down the old lady's cheeks, and, as she was leaving the audience chamber of the stern man of God, she meekly ejaculated: "Well, sir, if I cannot answer these questions, I can feel the meanin' o' them a' the same."

The foregoing story, if not the actual words, is at least the substance of the incident as originally recorded, and goes to show that the poor woman was far ahead spiritually of most of our profound theologians. She felt the truth, because she lived the truth; "the truth had made her free." The good old minister said, in reply to the poor woman's avowal, "That is enough." The old lady partook of the Lord's Supper; and few indeed celebrated on that communion occasion the Saviour's dying love with a deeper sense of unworthiness and inward joy and peace.

We hear some men speak as if the Bible is easy of comprehension. Is it? And others imagine that they know all that is to be known about the way of salvation. Do they? Without the Bible where would be the main force and beauty of our English literature? Perhaps, without exception, stripped of Bible quotations and scriptural ideas, the writings of most men would become mere intellectual skeletons. Eliminate the Bible from Shakespeare, Tennyson, Burns, Longfellow, for instance, and the remaining ideas in their works might be found to be commonplace enough. The thoughts of Biblical writers—otherwise, the thoughts of God Himself—permeate, more or less, all literary productions; and the best of

our writers have found food for the growth of their noblest expressions from the much-despised Word of God. And has not the man of science also been put upon the track of investigation from the same source; and from which light has been gained which led up to the production of many of our modern improvements?

Let me illustrate. Where did Shakespeare learn the true nature of mercy which he puts in intelligible form into the mouth of "Portia," in "The Merchant of Venice?" He says:

"The quality of mercy is not strained;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath; it is twice bless'd;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest. It becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown;
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings.
But mercy is above this sceptred sway;
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings;
It is an attribute to God Himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest
God's
When mercy seasons justice."

Jesus in Matt. v. 7, teaches this truism expressed by Shakespeare, when he says: "Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy."

Again, instance Longfellow, who taught him to write, "Blessed are the dead!" and of "the blessed dead" thus to sing:

"Christ has wiped away your tears for ever;
Ye have that for which we still endeavour,
To you are chanted
Songs which yet no mortal ear have haunted.

"Ah! who would not then depart with gladness,
To inherit heaven for earthly sadness?
Who here would languish
Longer in bewailing and in anguish?"

"Come, O Christ, and loose the chains
that bind us!
Lead us forth, and cast this world behind us!
With thee, the Anointed,
Finds the soul its joy and rest appointed."

Does Longfellow in these verses not probably draw inspiration from the apostle Paul, when he exclaims: "For me to live is Christ; to die is gain."

Des Cartes' idea of God was not self-originated. He says: "By the name of God I understand a substance infinite, eternal, immutable, independent, all-knowing, all-powerful, and by which I myself, and every other thing that exists, if any such there be, were created."

How did Spinoza arrive at his pantheistic conception of God, erroneous though it may be? Was it not also culled from the Word of God, and misapplied? He says: "God is everything; and it is the overwhelming grandeur of the one conception which makes it impossible for him to admit a distinct existence for any other being."

In like manner do we not find philosophers speculating as to the origin of evil and the immortality of the soul? Apart from the Bible they can know little; and their surmises must indeed fall far short of the mark. But philosophy, theology, literature, and science will never fully lay bare the secrets of God, the mysteries of the incarnation, the omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence of Jehovah.

Just another quotation, and this time from Burns' "Cottar's Saturday Night:"

"The priest-like father reads the sacred page
How Abraham was the friend of God on high;
Or Moses bade eternal warfare wage
With Amalek's ungracious progeny;
Or how the royal bard did groaning lie
Beneath the stroke of heaven's avenging ire,
Or Job's pathetic plaint, an' wailin' cry,
Or rapt Isalah's wild seraphic fire;
Or other holy seers that tune the sacred lyre.

"Perhaps the Christian volume is the theme,
How guiltless blood for guilty man was shed,
How He who bore in heav'n the second name,