

THE CANADIAN INDEPENDENT.

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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.

THE SABBATH.

THE spirit of "how not to do it" should meet with little sympathy among men who aim at a righteousness higher than that of a slave-gang service. We shall never reach a healthy morality by endeavouring to reduce duty to a minimum.

"In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle,
Be a hero in the strife."

In the spirit of one inquiring, "Lord what wilt thou have me to do?" would we approach the question of the Sabbath.

Paley opens his "Evidences of Christianity" with this very commonsense remark: "I deem it unnecessary to prove that mankind stood in need of a revelation, because I have met with no serious person who thinks that even under the Christian revelation we have any too much light, or any degree of assurance which is superfluous." Nor can we, as yet, nationally, socially, or otherwise, pride ourselves on having attained to that eminence in righteousness which will justify us in neglecting any aid to our growth and strength therein.

In these remarks it is not our purpose to argue the identity of the Jewish Sabbath with the Lord's day, or enter the arena of wordy strife regarding the change from the seventh to the first day of the week, which latter would be profitless at any rate, it being impossible absolutely to determine either first or seventh, but we would learn what the Jewish Sabbath has to teach concerning our Lord's day as to its observance and blessing.

The first conception of the Jewish Sabbath is *rest* (Gen. ii. 2-3). Interpret creation days as you please, the consecrated seventh was consecrated rest. God rested from creation to redeem and bless, for thus noble natures ever find rest. The fourth commandment also enjoins this rest, slaves and cattle were to share therein, no servile work was to be done on that day. Neither tyrannical master nor avaricious employer could destroy the poor man's Sabbath; wealth and power must cease from exaction on that day and leave the nation in the enjoyment of Sabbatical rest. Business gain, servile work must cease. Cursed be the love of rule and lust of gain that would gather its sticks now on the Sabbath day and break a rest which may be made a habinger of heaven.

Tradition made the Sabbath formal and burdensome, but the Sabbath of the Old Testament was a boon and a joy. Wearied with labour and worried with care, rest is sweet; blessed Sabbath that came with its imperative hush to shut out care and weariness with its hallowed rest. In a day, when with some measure of truth the poet can say a nation's "one sole god in the millionaire, and commerce all in all," we can ill afford to boast of having outgrown the need of the old Hebrew law-given Sabbath.

A sacred principle of the Jewish Sabbath was *remembrance* (Exodus xx. 11) of creation, and (Deut. v. 15) of deliverance. As a nation, as well as individuals, we do well to keep in remembrance these two facts. The purely Jewish element of remembrance may be laid aside, but the nation that forgets God lies under a curse. One has only to recall the horrors of atheistic France, of Imperial and godless Rome, to understand in some degree the hell of the people that forget God. Experience, moreover, teaches that the claim not constantly kept before the mind becomes practically ignored. Blot out the nation's Sabbath and where would be our remembrance of a God and a Redeemer? It was a happy reminder to the Jew as he viewed the glories of the heavens and the beauties of the earth—My Father

made all these; a strength in the way of righteousness, when in the presence of saddening evils, he, remembering past deliverance, could raise an Ebenezer and say, God is my refuge and strength. I know that my Redeemer liveth. We, too, shall not be the sadder, but more blessed and strong as we are by our Sabbath reminded of creation's story and redemption's wondrous tale.

As already mentioned, Rabbinical traditions rendered the Sabbath odious and burdensome, but the Sabbath of the Jewish Scriptures was a blessed rest and season of joyful remembrance; not a fast but a holy day; and if we truly believe that man has some higher destiny than to be dressed in cloth and lace, gain titles which may mock his grandchildren's poverty; some greater aim than a large credit with his bankers, and a safe stored with bonds and securities; if man cannot live by bread alone and owes some allegiance to a God that made him and who rules, we can learn some useful lessons from the old Jewish Sabbath, and we submit that a teachable spirit in view of the earnestness of life, is more becoming than the arguing "how not to do it." It is no small matter that one day each week comes in to speak of rest and faith. May it never be our lot to awaken to a sense of its worth, as many do to a realization of health by losing it. Picture a world such as this—full of want and sin, wretchedness and woe—without a Sabbath! Though it had been gained as a growing privilege it should be retained as a right even in this its Jewish aspect, and still more as the Lord's day pledge of love and life must it be endeared to our hearts and made sacred to our homes. The growing fashion of ignoring the Jewish Sabbath in its application to our own wants rests upon an entire misapprehension of its true character; search and see if it has not many blessings we can ill afford to let go.

CONSOLIDATION OR DISINTEGRATION.

IN a letter of greeting from the first Editor of the INDEPENDENT, which appeared in our issue of January 15th last, occurred these remarks, "The outlook for Congregationalism, as I saw it from the watch-tower of the INDEPENDENT more than a quarter of a century ago, was very different from what it is as I now see it. I viewed it then as an organized denominationalism, which was to spread mainly by the multiplication and enlargement of local churches. Now I view it, rather, as a set of principles, a little leaven which is yet to leaven the whole lump." These remarks led us to a careful examination of our position as a denomination as compared with others, with a review of such circumstances as we were led to believe tended to the results indicated, with the inquiry if these results are inseparable from our system—if, in fact, the "organized denominationalism" was to be a failure, and only the leavening principles to remain.

Without giving figures specially in detail, not always the most interesting reading, we may say, that, taking the five leading denominations, Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists and Congregationalists, we find, on comparison of the number of ministers in connection with each body in 1855 and 1880, that the first four have increased from (speaking roundly) two hundred to four hundred per cent., (the lowest of them has increased two hundred, and the greatest four hundred); on the other hand we have only increased fifty per cent. in the same period, or, to make it plainer, for every ten ministers we had twenty-five years ago, we have now only fifteen, while of the other denominations, that which has increased least rapidly has now thirty for every ten ministers of 1855, and the largest increase is fifty for every ten. This may not be one of the best tests of increase, but it cannot be very misleading, and it is the only one that we can at present apply. It leaves untouched the membership, which, we take for granted, has increased in the same ratio.

Here then we are face to face with a fact that should cause serious questioning and examination. How comes it, if, as we believe the system of Congregationalism is on the whole the most in harmony with New Testament teaching and practice, that it alone

has so slowly increased during the last quarter of a century? We comfort ourselves with the thought that if it has not increased as a denomination its principles have permeated other bodies; true, unquestionably, Episcopalians, Methodists and Presbyterians alike, are far more in accord with us than they were. It used to be sufficient to condemn any liberal suggestion in the meetings of these bodies to say that it was "Congregational," but that bugaboo is fast losing its terrors, and it is convenient now to regard such views as within the elasticity of their system. Admitting this to the fullest extent does not, however, remove the difficulty; we should say that it increased it, for if the salient features of our churches are being introduced into other denominations, why do they not more succeed when presented in the concrete form in Congregationalism? Undoubtedly the very manliness, self-reliance, and personal responsibility that it imposes are a barrier to its popularity. "Humanity," says Dr. Holland, "is constitutionally lazy"—as true a sentence as was ever penned, and if men can get their thinking and acting done for them in ecclesiastical matters, there will always be a large proportion who will prefer that. Hence the hold that Romanism has on the masses, and hence the growth of Episcopalianism and Methodism. It is so much more comfortable to sit at home and give what we can, and find everything arranged, than to have to do one's share in the arranging; and only as men get quickened to a sense of their responsibility and rise above their constitutional laziness will our Congregational system be appreciated at its true worth.

But this consideration, although an important factor in the solution of the problem we have proposed, is far from being the principal one. That we take to be the great difference which is sometimes exhibited between Congregationalism in its working, and Congregationalism in its proper conception. Here is, we believe, the main reason of our slow progress—the imperfect understanding, and the still more imperfect practice of some who are called by our name. Congregationalism has been supposed to mean, or, at any rate, it has often appeared to mean, isolation—repelling, not attracting; Independency indeed, but without unity. Churches and members, like globules of quicksilver without cohesion, flying apart on the first occasion. Churches have stood as aloof from each other as though some great principle was at stake in so doing, and as though they would cease to be Congregational if they did otherwise. The fault of such a state of things rests, no doubt, largely upon some of the teachings that our churches have had, not unlikely sometimes upon the want of teaching altogether. As to the character of the teachings, perhaps there is not much wonder in that when we remember that some of the teachers came from a land where their principles have had to fight for existence, and where, even to day, a dominant hierarchy dares to do and say things which are an outrage upon religious decency.

Some may think that we are manifesting a needless anxiety about our body, that it is going on well enough; while others, not feeling quite so sure on that point, may yet, perhaps, differ from us as to the causes which have produced such an unsatisfactory outlook. Perhaps the latter are right in some instances, as one cause will operate more powerfully in one locality, or at one time, than another, and sometimes influences not felt in one church are potent in another. Yet, broadly speaking, we think that we are correct. To the former we would say that we have carefully looked at the past and present of our churches as a whole, and we see that for years a steady course of disintegration has been going on, nearly equal to the additions we have received, that it continues, and that unless there is somewhat a change of action—not of principles—there is no improvement likely to occur. The first question for us then is this, Shall we allow the disintegrating process to be perpetuated, or shall we endeavour to arrest it, to consolidate, to weld our churches into a homogeneous whole, and make them as far as possible a unit for life and work?

How can this be done? By embracing Presbyterianism? Certainly not! While we respect our brethren in that body for much that they are, and much