

THE
CANADIAN INDEPENDENT.

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STEP BY STEP.

MEN are not always satisfied with their own progress in the spiritual life. They think that it should be greater, more marked, more apparent. They think that they ought to be able to discover some change, some improvement, each time they examine, and they are disappointed to find that to-day is little else than a reproduction of yesterday.

We would not altogether condemn this feeling. Nor would we regret it in all cases. Discontent with what we are is ever a condition of our becoming better. He who imagines that he knows all truth is not likely to learn truth. He who fancies that he possesses all virtue will not labour to acquire further virtue. And we are sure that it would be the salvation of many a poor feeble, comparatively useless Christian did he realize how poor, how feeble, how useless he is.

But most of us are liable to err here. We expect too much of ourselves. Our ambition may be too intense. We may look for too great immediate results. Spiritual progress is a growth, and growth is slow. It is little by little that the slender sapling becomes a stalwart tree. It is little by little that the child becomes a man. Step by step is the Divine rule in all true progress. Men seldom become millionaires in a day. And certainly men never become sages or saints in a day. The kingdom of heaven is conquered bit by bit. We have no right to anticipate anything else than a slow advance toward perfection of character and life. Step by step does an army march on to victory. Step by step does a Christian move onward toward the "prize of his high calling in Christ Jesus." Then no one should be discouraged if, on the whole, he finds himself gaining ground. But there must be gain. If there is not, there must be loss. There is no such thing as standing still in the Divine life. Upward or downward, forward or backward, it must be one of the two. But thank God, brother, if you advance.

"THE CONGREGATIONAL CLUB" ON THE
SUNDAY QUESTION.

"The Congregational Club," composed of the ministers and laymen of the Congregational churches of New York city and vicinity, held its regular monthly meeting one evening last week. The topic discussed was, "What can Christians do to secure a proper observance of Sunday in large cities?"

A curious coincidence was mentioned by the Secretary—that on that same evening "The Boston Congregational Club" was discussing "How should Christians observe the Sabbath?" and the Cleveland Congregational Club was discussing "The Divine Law of the Sabbath."

The Rev. Dr. Lyman Abbott opened the discussion of the topic of the evening by giving a brief historical sketch of "The nature and functions of the Sabbath." It was first known at the exodus from Egypt. The Sabbath broke up the chains of drudgery for the Jews into fifty-two weeks. For 1,000 years it was a rest-day simply. The lesson then being taught was, there

is but one God, whom the Jews were convened to worship in solemn assembly three times a year. The prophets seized upon the rest day for the purposes of religious teaching, and probably pious parents taught their children religion on the same day.

The sanction for the Sabbath was found in the spiritual fibres of the human soul, not by the Divine command. It gradually grew into a day of the strictest and most pharisaical observances, until even the torments of the lost were supposed to be intermitted on that day. It became a feast day, and not a fast day, under Gamaliel and other Jewish teachers.

Christ made the new associations of the Sabbath stronger and more sacred than they had ever been before, until gradually, without any Divine command, the Sabbath died out and the Lord's day came into general observance. At the beginning of the fourth century, the Sabbath was no more and the Lord's day ruled supreme.

The morning of the mediæval Sunday was devoted to worship and the evening to drunkenness and revelry. Under Queen Bess, Sunday was the gala day of the week. The continental Sabbath is half Christian and half Pagan. But Puritanism arose and broke out stained glass windows, broke down marble statuary from cathedrals, and required that the Sabbath should be sanctified to a holy resting all the day and religious worship, except such time as was taken up with works of necessity and mercy. To me, in my childhood's days, the birds seemed to sing sacred songs on Sabbath morn, and Sabbath evening was the most charming hour of all the week while spent in singing sacred songs with my sainted mother, who, though departed this life many years, never seems to have quite left me.

The Sabbath was re-created by worship. The Puritan Sabbath is not going, but has gone. The Methodists believe in falling from grace, and the camp-meeting at Martha's Vineyard practises it. Visitors from the West assure me that New York city is a Sabbath keeping city, in comparison with Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis. We want a Christian Lord's day, the Old Testament rest and the New Testament power. We want resurrection from earthly to spiritual life; the putting of a purer, spiritual atmosphere into our homes, and an unselfish seeking for the good and salvation of others.

We must provide for tenement-house families some more attractive place than the Mission Chapel, and some more inviting spot to spend Sunday evening than a church where the rent of a first-class pew will cost more than one-fourth of the yearly income of the pew holder.

The Rev. A. P. Foster of First Congregational Church, Jersey City, discussed the practical part of this subject. "What can Christians do to Promote the Proper Observance of the Lord's Day?" He said he was satisfied we are in a crisis on this subject. The very life of this country depends on our observance of Christian institutions. If we, as Christians, allow the Sabbath to go as it is going, it will be lost or destroyed. When I hear that the best Christians in Germany, like Prof. Tholuck, go to church in the morning and to a beer garden in the evening, we are in danger of losing the Sabbath. We must believe right. Froude, the historian, says, Calvinists have done the most good in the world, because they have faith in God. The Sabbath means rest, for one thing, and worship or spiritual power for another thing, either by communion alone at home, or in quiet walks and conversations abroad in the fields with your children. Believe correctly and practise correctly. Christians should observe it themselves consistently. They should not buy and read secular papers, and buy their meats and come home from journeys on the Sabbath. Our practices on the Lord's day are seen by all, and if we do not practise we need not preach. Have such Sabbath days at our homes that we shall leave sweet impressions on those around us. The other day the Indian chief, Standing Bear, visited Longfellow's residence and library. He said, sadly: "These are the things that make your beautiful homes, and they are such things as my people would like to have." I love to call it a Puritan Sabbath, and if we could only

show to those who come to our shores from foreign lands, how sweet and beautiful a Christian Sabbath is, they will not want their beer gardens. The newspapers and editors should advocate the observance of the Sabbath and be sustained by the people. The Sabbath Association of New York city is devoted to this object and should be sustained. We should enforce Sabbath observance justly. Let the law shut up every place of business on the Sabbath. Let us enforce the observance of the Sabbath in our own homes, and also see that the Sabbath is observed by all who are under our employ.

E. T. Milliken, Esq., a lawyer of the Rev. Dr. Storr's church, Brooklyn, discussed the question of law in regard to the Sabbath. The civil law is the creed of the country. If the city of New York were to form the creed of the country, there would be but little hope of New York city. But the city of New York is controlled by laws formed by country communities outside of New York city. In the town of Jamaica, L.I., the liquor saloons and lager beer shops are entirely closed by a fair and reasonable support and enforcement of the law. The only trouble is that the Puritan Sabbath is not respected, and this is the time to restore the law for the enforcement of the Sunday laws.

To me Sunday is the day for communion with my Maker, and I want nothing to interfere. Law is for the benefit of all classes, and the law is sufficient for the protection of the Sabbath. The present Sunday law is such that all goods exposed for sale on Sunday are confiscated to the poor. None but liquor dealers oppose the enforcement of this law. All the law wants is the united efforts of all in favour of good order to support it. Of course it wants, behind all this, the higher and more conscientious observance of the Sabbath that belongs to the true Christian. The meeting was closed by prayer.

Correspondence.

FEARING FOR THE TRUTH.

To the Editor of the CANADIAN INDEPENDENT.

MR. EDITOR,—I suppose it is allowable to criticise even so weighty an utterance as a CANADIAN INDEPENDENT editorial. In doing so you have the advantage of dealing with ideas rather than with persons. You feel far more of freedom in hurling your critical shafts.

I propose to take up some of the points in the editorial bearing date of November 20th. There is a good deal of truth in this production, but there is not a little of unwise and indiscriminate statement.

The first sentence reads: "Grave fears are often expressed by timid souls in regard to the spread of scepticism and infidelity." Though not exactly put in that way, the impression you get from this sentence is that to have "grave fears in regard to the spread of scepticism and infidelity" is to lay yourself open to the charge of being a "timid soul." Now it seems to me that these "grave fears" are by no means peculiar to timid souls. They are felt by the very bravest and best of men. No thoughtful sympathetic man can survey the broad field of human thought and action that this century presents without having "grave fears." If the doubts of the intellect are causing a relaxing of the ties that bind men to duty, and if this relaxing reacts upon the intellect and causes the doubt to deepen and become more deadly, is there no reason for "grave fears?" If—and here I quote from the editorial itself—"it is unhappily true that many of our savans have, of late years, ranged themselves on the side of unbelief, and are throwing the weight of their great influence with the educated classes into the scale of error, and even of atheism," surely a man may without the reproach of timidity express "grave fears?"

I have used this last sentence because I wanted to give the first sentence a hard rap on the head with a weapon furnished by its author. But this sentence as well as its predecessor is astonishingly pointless. The idea you get, as it stands in connection with what immediately follows, is that a number of our leading thinkers, our foremost thinkers, men who have a large