

THE
CANADIAN INDEPENDENT.

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A PERTINENT QUESTION.

OUR brethren across the lakes have been warmly discussing what Congregationalism is. And their views, as expressed in the leading journals, divide them into two schools, the one believing in a lofty scheme of organization, the other shading into independency. Each from its respective standpoint is advancing its opinions with marked ability, and the end is not yet. The Rev. James Brand wishes to see all the Congregational churches united on a modification of the famous Savoy Declaration. The Rev. Dr. Bacon is the advocate of liberalism and individualism in churches of our order.

Thomas K. Beecher, of Elmira, N.Y., through the "Advance," relates a story and asks some questions which the advocates of organization will find some difficulty in answering. The story is briefly this: Thirty-three years ago, forty Presbyterians left their Church home through the slave question, and formed an independent church in Elmira. For a time they heard Fred. Douglass, Wendell Phillips, Lloyd Garrison and others, on the proposed freedom of the slave. Then they secured a pastor, who told them that they were a Congregational church. Shortly afterwards this church became a member of an Association and a Conference. By-and-by, both Association and Conference faded out and ceased to exist. But the church continued to thrive, and for twenty years it has stood solitarily, continuing in the apostles' doctrine and in breaking of bread and prayer. Meanwhile, this nameless Church, consciously in fellowship with all who anywhere call upon the name of the Lord Jesus, has increased in the knowledge of the Scripture, and in familiarity with the works and ways and words of the Lord Jesus Christ. Unpretentious revivals have occurred from time to time. The number of declared believers in Christ has largely increased; and the number of enrolled members of the church has also been steadily growing. The church, though falling far short of the pious wishes of its more spiritual members, is, none the less, as human nature goes, an honest, intelligent, quiet, united, Bible-reading, prayerful, brother-loving, almsgiving church, with a reasonably good reputation in the community where it stands.

The questions Mr. Beecher propounds are the three following:

1. Is this church a Christian church?
2. If it be a Christian church, what will it gain in any storable particular, by what may be called "organized affiliations?" In short:
3. If there is something that this church ought to do that has not been done, or undo, that has been done, the pastor seeks informa-

tion as to the matter, and the manner also in which he shall bring it before the church.

If we might venture to answer these questions, it would be in the following strain: The church—a leaf of whose history is given—is certainly a Christian church. Christ is its hope and inspiration, and work for Him is its ambition. These are excellent criteria of a Christian church.

And secondly, affiliation with other Christian churches on the part of this church is purely voluntary. It may fellowship with others, if it wish; or it may not, if it wish. Fellowship among Christian churches as with Christian men is more a *privilege* than a *duty*, more what they *may* do than what they *ought* to do. But no one will dare deny that a voluntary, loving affiliation of churches is infinitely preferable to a voluntary, unloving solitariness of one church. And so, while we maintain that fellowship is voluntary, yet it is eminently wise to adopt it. We confess to no small surprise over the question, "What shall we *gain* by affiliation?" Rather it should be, "What shall we *give* by affiliation?" Much, very much. All the weight of its influence, all the richness of its long experience, all the wealth of its counsels, it might give. We see no New Testament law to *compel* churches to fellowship; but the lovely, genial spirit of the New Testament would lead churches to a fraternal inter-communion. Our answer, therefore, to the queries of the Elmira pastor is, you may stand aloof if you will; but you are not so kindly as you would be by maintaining a free but fraternal fellowship with others.

THE INEBRIATES' BILL.

THE British Parliament has just passed an important measure in relation to drunkards. The object of this legislation is to put it in the power of the slaves of strong drink to go into voluntary imprisonment for a certain period. Once the inebriate incarcerates himself by his own act, he cannot get out of confinement till the period fixed upon has expired. He is then treated as a prisoner. He places himself in the hands of others to be dealt with according to the powers contained in this new parliamentary instrument.

Such legislation as this makes a wonderful change in public sentiment upon this subject. It is all the more striking that it has passed the House of Lords. Up to the present moment we are sure such a limitation of the freedom of John Bull would never have been dreamed of. But the thing is now done. It is an accomplished fact, and it is the beginning of the end. It promises more and more legislation of this kind. It means that restrictions will yet be placed upon the terrible vice of drunkenness. It has in it the very kernel and central principle of prohibition. The next step is coming even in Britain of giving to a community the right of saying whether it will allow the sale of intoxicants or not.

There is great promise of relief in this measure for many a miserable drunkard. There will, of course, be many who will go on recklessly in their maddening course, and who would scout the idea of going into voluntary restraint to escape if possible from a terrible doom. But there are many others who are anxious for such restrictions being laid upon them. At the present moment their whole being is demoralized. They have no power to will. They are the slaves of dire appetite. They are the victims of social customs. They are held in a vice-grip from which there is no escape. Many such, we are certain, would rejoice in anything that would hold out even a faint prospect of relief. There may not be a great number at first. But years will tell. As one and another is saved from the fearful habit of intemperance it will encourage others to go and do likewise.

The measure is evidently intended to deal with intemperance amongst the better class. The working man who has a wife and family to support could not take advantage of this law. It would be better if he could, of course; but it would require another measure to provide for his family. There will, however, be great gain in this reform beginning with the well-to-do classes. It will spread to other classes. It may prepare the way for still more searching legislation upon a confessedly difficult subject. It gives us pleasure to learn that this measure has passed the British Parliament, and it encourages every one to look for still better things.

SABBATH SCHOOL DROPSY.

UNDER some such caption as that which we have placed at the head of this article, Bishop Gregg of the Reformed Episcopal Church, writing in the "Sunday School Times," draws attention to a disease which attacks Sabbath schools periodically, and he prescribes a remedy for it. The disease in question consists in an abnormal swelling in the attendance of a Sabbath school immediately before a festival. We believe it is quite common, and gives much trouble to superintendents and teachers. A lot of knowing boys, who may have been attending an Episcopalian, or a Congregationalist, or a Baptist, or a Methodist Sabbath school, find out that the Presbyterian Sabbath school is to have some grand doings in the course of a month or so. They are quite liberal in their views—at least they are unsectarian enough to believe that Presbyterian pastry is quite good; and so, for their stomachs' sake, they become Presbyterians for the time being. But by and by the festival is over; they begin to hear rumours of similar proceedings in connection with their own old Sabbath school; and they return to their first love, bringing along with them a number of boys, of similar tastes and dispositions, belonging to the Presbyterian Sabbath school. And thus this unnatural swelling in the attendance