

Our Contributors.

ABOUT STANDING UP FOR OUR RIGHTS.

BY KNOXIAN.

"One of the inalienable rights of a British subject is to do as he pleases, and if he does not do as he pleases he should be compelled to." This is part of the peroration with which an Irishman is said to have closed a speech on the rights of the British subject. That Irishman would have made a good Canadian. He could have fallen into line with the rest of us, and indulged in that peculiar operation called defending our rights. Canadians are a good deal given to that sort of thing. A large number of them are everlastingly defending what they call their rights against the alleged assaults of somebody. If you examine closely many of the questions that cause trouble in Church and State, it will be found that a large proportion of them, when sifted to the bottom, are substantially the contention of somebody for what he calls his rights.

But somebody may say, "Oh, well, this jealousy about our rights and this readiness to defend them is a good sight. It shows we have British blood in our veins. It shows we are a spirited people and, like our forefathers, never allow any one to trample on us. It is a tribute to our national character."

Ah, indeed! That is a fine rhetorical flourish, but, like a good many other rhetorical flourishes, it does not bear examination. Against whom are we generally found defending our rights? Against our own neighbours. We are rarely called upon to defend our rights, personal, national or ecclesiastical, against any one outside of Canada. If our rights are assailed every time we shout, our own neighbours are the assailants. For every Canadian defending his rights there must be at least one Canadian assailant. There may be half a dozen leagued against the one. If this everlasting clamour about rights really means anything, in many cases it means that a large number of Canadians by force, or fraud in some other way, are trying to deprive their fellow-countrymen of their rights. For every brave defender of his rights there is at least one assailant. For every man ready to die on his doorstep, so to speak, in defence of his rights, there is at least one citizen of "predatory instincts" as Sir Richard would say. Where does the compliment to Canadian character come in? It would be a far higher compliment to our young nation to assume that a large number of people who clamour about their rights in Church and State are talking nonsense than to assume that they have any real grievance. If they have a real grievance—if their rights are really in danger—there must be an immense number of people in this young country who desire to assail the rights of their neighbours.

From Sir John Macdonald down to the last-appointed pound-keeper every official in the Dominion is ready to defend what he calls his rights. From the Federal Government down to the last committee formed for any purpose on the banks of the Saskatchewan, every corporate body is sensitive about its rights. Societies of all kinds are ready to go on their muscle about their rights. Conventions nearly always spend a considerable part of their time in defining and defending their rights.

When the world is so sensitive about its rights the Church is sure to be sensitive in the same way. Hence we have in the Presbyterian Church never-ending discussions about the rights of General Assemblies, the rights of Synods, the rights of Presbyteries, the rights of Sessions, the rights of managing boards, the rights of committees, the rights of Church members, the rights of adherents, in short the rights of everybody. The other religious bodies are exercised on similar questions. Is this a good sign? If the Churches were as busy as they should be in the great work of saving souls, would they find time to discuss such questions? Men usually discuss the machinery of a locomotive when it is cold and standing still. When it thunders past at the rate of sixty miles an hour they have no chance to wrangle about the nuts or bolts, or the symmetry of the smoke-stack.

If the Church and the corporate bodies of the world contend so much about their rights, can we wonder that individuals are becoming unduly sensitive about individual rights? Somebody describes the present age as one of "fierce individualism." Fierce individualism is good. That is to say, the phrase is

good. The thing itself is bad. It strikes at the root of constituted authority. It saps the very foundations of law and order. If carried out to its logical results, it must lead to the disintegration of society and the destruction of the Church. Perhaps the individualism would not be so fierce if Church courts contended less for what they call their rights, and gave more of their time and attention to the real work of their Master. If a man sees a Church court contending long and fiercely for some small point utterly invisible to the unclerical eye, can we wonder if he contends fiercely for some alleged personal right which, perhaps, nobody sees but himself?

The fact is, a fierce contention for all our rights would make life intolerable. A passenger who feels too warm has a right to put up the car window. His neighbour who feels a draught has a right to put it down. The window cannot be up and down at the same time. The British Constitution makes no provision for such a case. There is nothing in the Magna Charta about car windows. An appeal must be taken to the second table of the Decalogue, or the twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans.

Once upon a time we saw, or rather heard, what came very near being a collision between two men who insisted on exercising their rights as British subjects in a sleeping car. The occupant of one of the berths snored loudly. His was a marvellous snore. He could run up the scale and come down again without the slightest difficulty. We never heard an octave like his. Sometimes he went up and down the scale in a graceful sort of way, and then all at once he would skip from the lowest to the highest notes. When he had performed for half an hour or so the occupant of an adjoining berth put in a protest that was not particularly mild in its form. Now here was a case in which both had about equal rights as Canadians. Certainly the one has a right to sleep. Probably the other had a right to snore. There is nothing in the Confederation Act about snoring, but Canada is a free country, and if a man cannot use a first-class snoring apparatus in a sleeping berth that he has paid for, our forefathers fought for liberty in vain.

Would it not be an improvement if we all said less about our rights, and gave more attention to our duties? It is at times one's duty to contend for his rights, more especially when these rights are a trust; but strife about supposed rights often springs from jealousy, from abnormal sensitiveness, from selfishness, from vanity, from mere mulishness. It is often nobler to yield when no principle is at stake than to fight. A strong man can yield to a weakling on small matters, and make himself stronger by yielding. The golden rule is a better guide than Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.

THE MELA OF ONKAR.

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A mela! What is it? The word signifies a large assemblage of people for religious and business purposes, or what may be called a "religious fair." Hindus, like Canadians, take a great interest in their fairs, but, unlike them, they see no incongruity in uniting religious worship with business, and in combining both with pleasure. This is so successfully done in these "melas" that it is very difficult for an observer to determine whether religion, business or pleasure is the predominating element. Perhaps the Hindu is right. We will not discuss the question. Should, however, the great crowds, bent on profit and pleasure, who flock to the Toronto and other exhibitions, enter, with equal eagerness, one of the large churches, or a special pavilion for the purpose, and sincerely worship God, you would have represented the essential elements of a "mela." Still an Eastern mela, such as the one held recently at Onkar, has so many peculiar features, on account of the differences in religion, social customs, etc., that a description may not be without some interest.

The work of preparation over, we start off the bullock carts with camp equipage, and a stock of tracts, Bibles and Bible portions in three or four languages. We leave the next day by rail, and arrive at Mortakka, and from there drive to Onkar. The tents are late in arriving, so we do not get them pitched, and ready for the night until about ten o'clock. Our camp is pleasantly situated in a garden, under the shade of

large trees, as a protection from the midday sun, and is immediately adjoining the great throng of people. Everything is strange, even to the peculiarity of the smoke. Monkeys, big and little, play in the garden without fear of receiving injury, although they are acknowledged to be pests. A kind of worship is given to them as the representatives of the great monkey god, "Hanuman," whose images are found all over India. This monkey leader, according to the Ramayan, performed some wonderful feats. One will be sufficient to relate. He is said to have plucked up one of the Himalaya peaks, and carried it,

With the life it bore,
Snakes, elephants and golden ore,

to Ceylon, in order that the herbs growing on it might be used to heal the wounded monkeys of his army who were fighting for Ram against Ravan. More wonderful stories than this might be told about the gods whom the people delight to honour and worship, but we have a great deal to find out about Onkar.

First, What is the meaning of the word? It is derived from the sacred syllable, "Om," and "Kar," an ending used for forming nouns of agency. The idea, then, is one who uses or repeats the sacred syllable. One explanation, then, of "Om" or "Aum" is that it originally typified the three Vedas, Rig, Yajur, Sam, but that afterward it was used as the mystic syllable to represent the Hindu Triad, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiv. A different explanation, however, is given in the Upanishda or ancient philosophical writings. It is interpreted as "that which has been, that which is, and that which is to be. All is Om, and whatever is beyond trinal time is Om and only Om." This view accords with the Bhagavad Gita, the Hindu Book of Job. It is, then, a synonym for Brahm, the characterless primal ocean of being, out of which all has emanated, and into which all will finally return. It occurs at the beginning and end of prayers and sacred ceremonies, and the repetition of it inaudibly, and meditation upon it, are sufficient to ensure an entrance into the heaven of India, and even absorption into the fontal essence of being—Brahm. Onkar, then, means one who is seeking absorption into Brahm by means of the repetition and meditation of Om; that is, the great ascetic—the great Yogi, and was doubtless one of Shiv's names, who is the great representative of savage austerity and abstract meditation. He is said to dwell on an invisible mountain in the Himalayas called Kailasa, and is represented with snakes entwined in his matted hair, a necklace of human skulls about his neck, his body smeared with ashes, and as engaging in meditation and invocations in which the mystic syllable "Om" is so important. In his honour, then, this epithet was adopted as the name of the place which was formerly called Mandhata, and is now one of the twelve places in India specially consecrated to his worship.

Regarding his worship, on account of the variety of characters in which he is represented, it is very difficult to obtain any accurate account. He is commonly spoken of in connection with the Hindu Triad as the great destroyer, and, as a consequence, is dreaded, although this feature is more connected with his consort, Parvati, under the names Durga, Kali, etc. He is chiefly worshipped as the creative principle by means of the phallic symbol, as the austere devotee who has acquired divine powers by his austerities, and as the great ascetic who, living a life of mendicancy, shows the way to re-identification with Brahm. His followers, who are generally ascetics, if questioned, will tell you that they are Brahm, not parts of Brahm, for Brahm has no parts. He is one, one without a second. If further inquiry is made how it is we think ourselves separate individuals, they will answer: "This is the work of 'maya,' delusion, ignorance." Their aim, then, is to overcome by austerities this delusion, to realize their unity with Brahm. In other words, as they now are men through "maya," they strive, after the example of Shiv, to become gods as a means to final identity with Brahm, who is not a person, but the indeterminate infinite ocean of being, "the one and the not one" of the old Greek philosopher, Parmenides. Here we have a doctrine of works in contrast to a doctrine of divine grace carried to the extreme. This differs from the worship of Vishnu, which is that he becomes incarnate whenever the spiritual necessities of men become so dire as to call for it. As a consequence, the principle of his worship is faith, devotion for the purpose of attaining his help; not, however,