

## Canadian Department.

Toronto Liberal Association.  
SUNDAY, DEC. 10, 1876.

The regular weekly meeting of the above Society was held in Albert Hall, when Mr. Cook, the 1st Vice-President, delivered a lecture, and took for his subject, "Is man responsible to God or man for his belief?"

The well-known power with which Mr. Cook is known to treat his subject, brought together a choice gathering of the deepest thinkers, and the lecture was listened to during its extended length with profound interest.

In a clear and lucid argument, Mr. Cook took the ground that in every attempt made by Orthodoxy to meet the objections of the Freethinkers, there was always a semblance of fairness in the statement of the case without at all really touching the real facts upon which Materialism bases its dissent, and in putting forth the real arguments against the truth of Christianity, the question must naturally arise, Is Man accountable to any outside power for the conviction within him often produced by the surroundings of circumstances? as, for instance, if a man is born in Turkey and of Moslem parents he would most likely be a Mahomedan, and the same with every known species of religion under the sun.

Mr. Cook strongly urged the contemplation of the above subject upon Freethinkers as being one striking at the root of **sectarian dogmas**, and conclusively showing that if condemnation forced an error of belief in the ages of mortality will suffer unjustly, inasmuch as no man can regulate the chances of his birth or choose the surroundings by which he is rocked in the cradle.

We have much pleasure in reporting the continued success of this rising Society, and their Rooms are now open at ten o'clock every Sunday morning for social intercourse and mutual improvement. Books and papers for the Library will be thankfully received.

MR. EDITOR:—Please reprint the following in the "Canadian Department," and oblige a  
CONSTANT READER.  
Ontario, (Canada), Dec. 10, 1876.

### Canadian Characteristics.

The Chicago Times indulges in the following criticism of the Canadian people:—

"If there is any trait in the thorough-bred Canadian more strongly marked than that of persistence, it has never been brought prominently into play. In this essential particular he excels all other animals whatsoever that walk on two legs, and almost that double-jawed beast, the turtle, but-tortoise. Once let him take a grip upon a thing, and until that thing is completely done, or done for, he will never let it go. Under the pressure of strongly-adverse circumstances, he may cease for a time to grow; but not for an instant will he lose his hold."

There is some truth as well as force in the above remarks, and this is probably one amongst several reasons why Canadians who migrate to the other side of the line have no trouble in securing the best situations they are going. The fact that they are so much sought after is, on the other hand, one among a number of causes which induce Canadians, and especially young Canadians, to go to the Western States in the hope of bettering their prospects.

### Spain and the Papacy.

Spain is the last stronghold of Roman Catholicism in Europe. There is probably no other country in which the Papacy exercises so powerful and unquestionable an influence, and Protestants are justified in pointing out that there is no other European country which can show a greater amount of ignorance and superstition. And yet in Spain a liberal spirit is struggling for breathing space and light, and has acquired sufficient power to make itself felt as a motive force in politics, and to call forth the protest and assent of the representatives of the Papacy. According to the treaty between Spain and the Pope, dating as far back as 1851, the Romish Church is established as the sole and supreme religious authority in Spain. No "heretical" teaching is permitted; even private as well as public schools are to be under the supervision of Roman Catholic Bishops; and the secular power is pledged to support the bishops in whatever measures they may adopt to oppose the spread of non-Catholic teaching, and especially to prevent the printing, introduction, and circulation of books which, according to the peculiar ideas of the Papal authorities, are "bad and perverted." Lately, however, in a new "Constitution," introduced by the Spanish Government, a clause has been inserted, to the effect that "no one who respects Christian morality shall be punished on account of his religious opinion, or for worshipping in his own way."

But even this modern concession is qualified by the addition of a statement, which may mean much or little according to the spirit of those who interpret it, that "all ceremonies and public manifestations other than those of the State religion, are forbidden." What constitutes "ceremonies and public manifestations?" has not been authoritatively defined, but some lawyers have expressed the opinion that the expression applies to the holding of public worship by Protestants. Nevertheless, this slight concession to liberty of religious opinion has thrown the clerical party of Spain into a fever of indignation and alarm, and has evoked from Rome a rebuke and remonstrance couched in those terms of invective, alternately direct and mystical, which the hierarchal Papal power knows so well how to use. The Pope has addressed a letter to the Cardinal Archbishop of Toledo, in which referring to the article in the new Constitution, the substance of which we have quoted, he says:—

"We declare that Article XL, which pretends to be able to give freedom of worship to the country, violates every right of truth and of the Catholic religion, annuls illegally the Concordat between the Holy See and the Spanish

nation, lays the State open to the charge of wrong doing, and opens the door to error—error which is but the precursor of a long succession of ruinous ills to the nation, so long and true a lover of Catholic unity."

We pause when we have read this sentence, to take breath; for, indeed, the mingled audacity and blindness implied in such a declaration is strange to whites, even in the Romish Church. Spain, alas! has already had to endure, in spite of her love for "Catholic unity," a "long succession of ruinous ills," and to lookers on, not gifted with the infallibility of the Vatican, it seems that one of the first conditions of her recovery is that she should shake herself free from that moral and intellectual despotism which has darkened her life for many generations. The Jews are just about to present a memorial to King Alfonso, praying for the revocation of the Edict by which, in 1492, the members of their race, to the number of 200,000, were driven forth from the country. Their expulsion was not only an act of shameful cruelty and wrong, but it inflicted an injury on Spain from which she never has fully recovered, depriving her as it did of a multitude of her ablest and most useful citizens. And yet this decree of exclusion remains in force to the present hour. This is but one example of a policy which has been as short-sighted as it has been inhuman, inspired by a cowardly terror of any reproach to freedom of opinion.

Those who think that the Church of Rome has modified or altered her imperious assumptions and cruel intolerance, may be undeceived, if they will open their eyes to what is going on to-day. To their assurance that the Romish spirit of persecution is dead—that it belongs to men not to the system—it is only needful to give one reply, Look at Spain!—[London Christian World.]

### Voltaire's Opinion of God.

"In my opinion, the most fitting homage that can be rendered to God is to stand foremost in His defence, without anger; as the most unworthy portrait that can be drawn of Him is to represent Him as vindictive and furious. He is truth itself; and truth is without passion."

A noble expression, and worthy to be written in letters of gold. In another place Voltaire remarks:—

"A father who kills his offspring is a monster; a king who conducts his subjects into a snare, in order to obtain a pretext for delivering them up to punishment and torture, is an execrable tyrant. If you conceive God to possess the same kindness which you require in a father, the same justice you require in a king, no possible resources exist by which, if we may use the expression, God can be excused. And by allowing Him to possess infinite wisdom and infinite goodness, you in fact render Him infinitely odious. You excite the wish that He had no existence. You furnish arms to the Atheist, who will ever be justified in triumphantly saying to you: 'Better by far is it to deny God altogether than to impute to Him such conduct as, in man, you would punish to the last extremity of the law.' Hence it is unbecoming in us to ascribe to God human attributes. It is not for us to make Him after our own image. Human justice, human kindness, and human wisdom can never be applied or made suitable to Him. We may extend these attributes, in our imagination, as far towards infinity as we are able. They will never be other than human qualities, with boundaries perpetually or indefinitely removed. It would be equally rational to attribute to Him infinite solidity, infinite motion, infinite roundness, or infinite divisibility. These attributes can never be His."

Whatever name we choose to call this great power or principle of Nature, which directs its vital forces and processes, and presides over all of fixed and unchangeable laws,—this idea is expressed by Voltaire in the following manner:—

"Either the world subsists by its own nature, that is, by its own physical laws, or a Supreme Being has formed it, according to His supreme laws. In both these cases the laws are immutable. In both cases everything is necessary.—Heavy bodies tend towards the centre of the earth, without having any power to resist it. Pear trees cannot produce pine apples. The instinct of a spaniel cannot be the instinct of an ostrich. Everything is arranged, adjusted, and fixed."

And in speaking of elementary heat, which formed the subject of so much discussion in his time, Voltaire advances opinions upon the origin of organic existence which are in entire harmony with the more advanced thoughts of the present day. He says:—

"If I dare hazard my doubts, I confess I do not think it impossible that this element of heat may be the substance which, in part, animates nature and holds a certain relation between bodies which we know, and others which we do not know, just as certain organized plants serve as a passage between the vegetable and the animal kingdoms. Everything tends to make us believe there is a chain of beings rising by degrees from lower to higher forms. We only now know imperfectly certain links in this immense chain. In this opinion I only expose my doubts; and we ought to cultivate philosophy, which teaches us to doubt about everything which lies beyond the province of mathematics and actual experiment."

Voltaire looked with little favor upon a religion whose head and founder declared He came not to bring peace, but a sword, into the world; a religion whose foundation rested on supernaturalism; whose sacred records were poisoned with fable and superstition, and filled with conflicting and inconsistent statements; whose whole career was marked from the earliest times, with the noise of warring sects, with cruelty, bloodshed, rapine, and slaughter. "What are we to think of human reason?" he exclaims, "when we reflect that Newton, Locke, Clarke, and Leibnitz would have been persecuted in France, imprisoned in Rome, and burned at Lisbon?"

It is hard to tell whether the gall and bitterness that overflowed his pen is greater when he describes the barbarous wars waged in defence of such a religion, or when he recounts the persecutions it inflicted on innocent individuals. He judged the tree by its fruits; and when he saw the Church of his time bringing forth such a crop of calamities to man, he turned away his head, and cried out in the bitterness of his soul, "Infamous! infamous!"

**Canadian Department.**

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