

THE PHILOSOPHY OF POLITICS.

What is the destination of the Canadian Dominion? This question has been prominently obtruded upon the attention of Canadians within the last few months, by circumstances to which no reference is needed here. But it has not been always observed that the question has a two-fold bearing; it may refer either to the actual or to the ideal destination of Canada. For it is one problem to try and discover the actual destination to which the young Dominion is doomed by the sheer force of the laws that govern human history; it is another problem to discover the ideal destination which the Dominion ought to take upon itself, and endeavour to work out as far as the actual condition of things may allow.

What the future fate of Canada is to be, I must leave to the decision of those who profess a wider and deeper knowledge than I dare claim, of the causes which control the course of human events. It seems to be generally agreed, and it may be accepted, perhaps, as tolerably certain, that the existing political relations of the Dominion cannot be permanent,—that the connection with the Imperial Government of Great Britain must become either closer or more remote. But whether we are to be absorbed in the American Republic, or to form a new state with some of its more northern sections, or to assume a novel position in a reorganized confederation of the British Empire, or to establish an independent nationality, or perhaps, after all, to drift on with our present organization unaltered,—these are questions on which all may speculate who have leisure and taste for such an intellectual exercise. The problem of chief interest to us and to all men concerns, not the form, but the spirit, in which our political task is done.

What then is the political task which is set for us to work out in our history? It is a task which is imposed, not upon Canada in particular, but upon all nations alike; it is the task of organizing and managing a government which will secure the highest welfare of the people. Only there is an intenser sacredness in the task as it is imposed upon Canada, owing to the peculiar circumstances in which she has entered upon her work. The young Dominion begins her history with an inheritance such as few, if any, colonies have ever received from a mother country. The political constitution, given to us by Great Britain, places us, at the outset of the career, in a position of inestimable advantage for solving many of the problems of national welfare. Surely such an inheritance is to be accepted as a sacred trust, imposing a sacred obligation to use all the appliances at our disposal, by which that trust may be honourably fulfilled. Have we shown a sufficient sense of our privileges, sufficient earnestness in endeavouring to draw from them all the advantages they afford?

In seeking an answer to this question it does seem, at the first glance, as if it were possible to charge us with almost any political offence rather than with indifference to our political duties. The quantity and the fervour of the discussions in our periodical literature, the exuberance of energy which bursts out at elections, the keenness of competition for public offices—all these symptoms appear to indicate the vigour of political life in Canada. But is this a correct interpretation of these symptoms? It has been remarked, perhaps cynically, about modern Geneva, that it produces many theologians, but no theology; may it not be said, without any cynicism, about Canada, that she produces many politicians, but no politics? The abundance of activity on her political arena it is impossible to ignore; most on-lookers might be inclined to believe that such an amount of political activity is superfluous, perhaps even perilous to the peaceful development of the national industries. But what, after all, does this excessive activity imply? Does it arise from the intellect of Canada being largely absorbed in the earnest solution of problems affecting the national welfare; or is it not rather mainly due to the fact, that an unnecessarily large number of men have adopted political occupations as a profession—as a means of making money? The activity of such men in political life is certainly not a matter of surprise: but it is not an indication of political zeal in the truer and nobler sense of that term; it is merely a misdirected manifestation of that spirit which finds a less pretentious, but more appropriate, outlet in commercial enterprise. It is for this reason that our political discussions assume the aspect which they commonly present to foreigners, and even to Canadians who have no desire to make a living at the expense of their fellow-countrymen. For it is a significant fact, that nearly all outsiders who have endeavoured to master our political condition, have come to the opinion that it resolves itself into a meaningless contest of factions, who are opposed to each other only because of their common faith in the desirability of occupying the Treasury benches.

In this condition there is no room for the discussion of political questions on their own merits; political leaders are obliged to stave off all problems, however urgent, which may disorganize their respective parties. Does Mr. Blake, in a moment of generous speculation, broach theories of an advanced political thought which have not been accepted by his party, which might even lead to the dreaded consummation of dispensing with parties altogether in our government? the organs of his own party criticise his utterances as disparagingly as those of his opponents, and only his indispensable services save him from political ruin. Does Sir Alexander Galt, or any other liberal thinker, point out the perils to which constitutional government is exposed from the advances of clerical absolutism in Quebec? either party is equally ready to disclaim any suspicion which might direct the influence of the Quebec clergy against itself.

The time has come when the country must rise and protest against this tyranny, which sacrifices the national interests to those of the party politicians. What is it to us whether our Government be dubbed Conservatives or Reformers, provided they honestly endeavour to conserve all that is conducive to the welfare of the people, and to reform every institution that has become liable to abuse?

"Ah God, for a man with heart, head, hand,
Like some of the simple great ones gone
For ever and ever by;
One still strong man in a blatant land,
Whatever they call him, what care I,
Aristocrat, democrat, autocrat—one
Who can rule and dare not lie!"

But to obtain a Government of this stamp, our politicians must be sought

among men who are able to look at national questions apart from the exigencies of party warfare, with the impartial calm of the philosophic mind; and the teaching of Plato re-asserts its truth, after two thousand years, that the competent ruler must be a philosopher.

It is true that the political theorist is apt to be ridiculed, if he is not dreaded, by the practical politicians: he is ridiculed as a man who amuses the world by his harmless dreams of an impossible Utopia; or he is dreaded as one who would shatter to pieces the existing social order for the purpose of forcing upon society an ideal order of very doubtful superiority. The *doctrinaire* is undoubtedly an enemy to the healthful development of social life; but his influence is not destroyed by inducing a people to scorn the sober lessons of a dispassionate political philosophy, and leaving them to the undirected passions of actual political life. On the contrary, there is no surer way of exposing a people to all the illusions of *doctrinaires* than by refusing them the guidance of any political school,

"But that where blind and naked Ignorance
Delivers brawling judgments, unashamed,
On all things all day long."

One of the most elementary teachings of political philosophy is the fact that society is like an organism whose growth cannot be forced by a sudden leap from childhood to maturity. The political philosopher, therefore, knows better than any other man, that to develop the social organism in vigorous health, it must not run the risk of being disorganised by the very means intended for its development. It is not the possession, it is the want, of a sound political philosophy, that would force upon any society institutions which are not the normal developments of its previous growth. In such a philosophy, and in such a philosophy alone, is found the harmony of Conservatism and Reform. It is the philosophical student of politics who knows how to combine the aspirations of youth after an advancing future, with the reverence of age for a stable past; and thus to maintain that historical connection between the different stages of a nation's growth, which forms the indispensable condition of all true progress towards the common weal.

But it is surely unnecessary to plead the value of political knowledge in the conduct of political life. In no other department of labour is ignorance regarded as a qualification for success; in no other department are the workers allowed to dispense with special knowledge. We require from our medical practitioners an elaborate course of study and examination in the various sciences of medicine; from our lawyers a preliminary training in legal theory and practice; our divines are generally expected to sweep the encyclopædia of the theological sciences, and to run through the most important branches of a liberal culture as well; even the commonest handicraft prescribes a certain apprenticeship for those who aspire to its practice. Is it too much to expect that men, who undertake political occupations, should be obliged to qualify themselves by a preliminary study of political philosophy? If such a standard of qualification is enforced among our public men, we may leave the future destiny of Canada to be decided, as it must be, by influences which are necessarily beyond our control, and of which it is impossible for us to estimate the force. We cannot determine the external form which our future may assume; but we can mould our history by such a spirit, that it shall long hold a place in the general history of the world among those ennobling records, from which the great and good of the coming generations shall find light to aspire after purer ideals, and be inspired with fresh courage in their efforts for the welfare of mankind.

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PRACTICAL SCIENCE.

I have been asked to write a series of articles for the CANADIAN SPECTATOR, on Practical Science, and in the consideration of this most important subject, I shall hope to engage the earnest attention of the public, being persuaded that its true conception and appreciation must lead to results most progressive in their tendencies and eminently useful in all the pursuits of life. That the application of scientific principles to the requirements of man is continually diminishing the rigour of labour and increasing our powers of production, is a matter of every day observation, but especially is this manifest in those departments which have to do with the Industrial Arts. A survey of the last 70 years discovers to us a change of so remarkable a character as to render it almost incredible. We see one class treading close upon the heels of another class; social conditions broken down; markets overstocked; professions overflowed, and the surface of the globe itself seems to have gone through a transformation wondrous as the variations of a geologic era. Watt, Stephenson and Wheatstone have, by their discoveries, caused a complete revolution in all our social conditions, and have totally altered the relations of every country of the world with its neighbours. Railways now run in every direction, enclosing whole countries, as it were, in a network of iron; magnificent docks and harbours of refuge have been constructed along our coasts; the ocean has become an easily travelled highway; mountain-chains have been tunneled; barriers heretofore impassable have been surmounted, and the world has been girdled with a most stupendous and intricate telegraphic system. Stephenson was born at a time when there was a widespread demand for some new method of internal intercourse, and he, by his invention of the locomotive, gave such an impulse to science and art, to commerce and civilization, that we are altogether unable to estimate its ultimate effect.

The advancement in every department of knowledge has been made with truly rapid and gigantic strides; commerce, endowed like the octopus as it were, with a multitude of arms, has drawn into its embrace all inhabited countries, and civilization is fast extending to every nation and people and tongue.

Compare the engineering or machine establishments of the present times with those which existed 70 years ago, and whose sole stock consisted of a few ill-made lathes, drills and boring-machines, and one cannot but be filled with wonder at the marvellous changes and improvements in constructive machinery. So, too, in the apartment of machine-making; an ordinary machinist can now turn, bore, and shape with facility and with almost mathematical accuracy, and mechanical operations are now possible, which in the beginning of the present century could not have been accomplished at any cost. Again, it is hardly 50 years since the lumbering stage coaches began to fall into disuse, and railway