

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

### FORCES WORKING TOWARD A TRUER AND RICHER THEOLOGY.

This paper follows up one on the same subject which appeared in THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN of June 11.

Another force working in this direction is the faith of the Church, new conditions call for new truths, and as the young sapling sending its rootlets in all directions, to search for appropriate food according to its exigencies, gathers strength and texture both in summer and winter, in storm and in calm, so does the Church, sustained by her Divine Head, find appropriate truth according to her circumstances. We are not to forget that God's Word was prepared not simply for the age of the apostles, but for all ages and all conditions—the rude and the coarser states as well as the more refined; and forasmuch as our conditions are always changing, requiring new truths and new adaptations, those truths specially needed will come to the surface at the proper time. In this respect the Bible is a seed-bed containing much that has not yet germinated. The great universal truths needed for all time and all men are patent enough, but many of a secondary character have not yet appeared, because not wanted; but as surely as the seed, feeling the balmy air of spring, bursts into life and lifts up its head, will the incorruptible seed of the Word come to the surface when its time comes.

The well is deep and we have nothing to draw. That is what the pure rationalist may say, or the soul that has never felt its great needs, or seen itself in the clear revealing light of heaven. Not so with the believer. In communion with a living Fountain he will ever be coming upon fresh truth, brighter views of Christ, deeper insights into the mysteries of the kingdom; and his faith toned and touched in a thousand ways by his outward circumstances, will turn to this or that truth, this or that promise, and find there, it may be, for the very first time, the very blessing needed.

"Sometimes a light surprises."

And this is not to be wondered at, for the same spirit that inspired holy men of old to write the Book, pervades that book like an electric current, and when the spirit of man is *en rapport* with the Spirit of God—when brought into sympathy with Him and stumbles upon the special texts and truths which it needs, these, like so many charged batteries, open at once upon it and fill it with that strange sweet joy which we call a revelation. The cases of Cowper, Augustine, Luther, Spurgeon, and scores of others might be cited as illustrations. The truths which ultimately brought light and cheer to them had always been there, but not till they had come into such and such conditions did those wells of salvation unseal their fountains.

And if all this be true with the individual it is no less so of the Church at large. In her warfare which she has to accomplish with the world—now in this controversy, and now in that—she is ever thrown back upon the Word, and ever finding truths and defences for truth of which she never dreamt before. The Deity of Christ, work of the Holy Spirit, the resurrection of the body, sin and grace, justification by faith alone—what conflicts and controversies have gathered around those high themes! And how has the attack in every case resulted? In great gain to the Church—led on by her living Head—led to apply a living faith to an enduring standard she has gathered much spoil; and the result is that our theology is not a collection of cut and dry dogmas encompassing the circle of belief, but a body of living convictions. It is more like a chain of outposts successively conquered. Each theological achievement in the past has been the result of a great outburst of spiritual life, enabling the Church to evolve into distinct and permanent doctrine what was furnished her in Scripture in its element and essence, though not suspected before. On the field of Culloden is to be found a small blue flower, which was never seen, it is said, until the battle took place—not that the seed was not there, but that it lay in a state of dormancy because never meeting with the appropriate element necessary for germination, but the moment that the blood of fallen men touched it, it sprang up into life and has ever since borne a plentiful crop. So there may be many seeds in the Bible that are lying dormant and will continue to lie dormant until the appropriate emergency arises that will start them.

The doctrine of justification by faith alone, though

clearly enough taught in the Scriptures, lay dormant for ages—lay till touched by the blood of the Reformation; so with the doctrine of toleration in matters of religion—the right that every man has to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience—till touched by the blood of 30,000 Covenanters; so with the doctrine of anti-slavery, the right that every man has to personal freedom—till the horrors of the middle passage began to bulk out before the world. Think of such a saintly man as John Newton, of Olney, as a slave-master! So will the doctrine of Total Abstinence—the doctrine of the fourteenth of the Epistle to the Romans—the doctrine that the strong should help the weak, deny themselves for the weak. Certainly, our forefathers who drank of the vine and who did not see any incongruity in asking a blessing from Almighty God on the bread and whiskey they were about to partake, had no such light on the question as we have. And what are we to say on the doctrine of that bearing on Foreign Missions, "Go ye into all the world," etc.? The generation is not yet gone that heard grave men raising their voice in the Church-courts against any such measure, maintaining that the heathen world had no claim on the Church till every man within our own borders was furnished with the ordinances of the Gospel. Who does not know that the first overture presented in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland—1796—praying for some action in behalf of the heathen world was negated on a division? The numbers were: *for*, 44; *against*, 58. How different the feeling now in the Scottish Church—in every Church. Such is a specimen of the way the good spirit that leads into all truth has been guiding the Church into deeper and larger interpretations of the Word. It is a larger book to-day than ever it was before, and who can tell what revelations are yet in store for us—not that new truths are to be communicated but that old truths are to be unfolded and that, too, not in the hazy atmosphere of an elaborate scholarship, but in the clear revealing light of Heaven. What is wanted is not a new revelation, but illumination—illumination as to old truths which we have had from the beginning. When the Great Teacher began His work of revealing truths to the souls of men, He took for the most part old truths, truths that had been overlooked or obscured by the glosses of the scribes, and held them up in the sweetest pictures which even the foolish could comprehend. Take, e.g., His commentary on the law in His Sermon on the Mount: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time thou shalt not kill, etc., but I say unto you," etc. And so on through the whole sermon. These are not so much a new revelation as they are explicit exhibitions of truth that had always been revealed. These things were always in the Word, though it was not in man to see these things, and not only in the Word, but in the mind, written deeply there by the finger of God on its fleshly tablets. It has been said that the whole of Euclid is in every man, and that it only requires a competent teacher to present his truths to awaken a favourable response. This may be the case with natural truth, but we know it is not in ordinary cases with divine truth. We can sympathise with the prayer of the Psalmist: "Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold the wondrous things of Thy law!" But when the Holy Spirit that inspired the Word becomes the teacher, how quick is the heart in which so many unconscious beliefs are slumbering, to feel the force of His instructions! What a power there was in the word of Christ! The common people heard Him gladly, and all were ready to say: "Thy Word, O God, is truth!" Around the Lake of Killarney, in Ireland, there are certain spots where the echoes that can be waked up are wonderful. It takes strangers some time to find out the best spots, but the guides can point them out at once to the tourist who is delighted with the long reverberation which breaks again and again with a long swell upon his ear; so Christ who knows all the chords of the human spirit, knows precisely what and when to touch in order to fill the soul with heavenly music.

It is true that Christ came to reveal new truth, but the facts of His life and death constitute the chief revelation. What we insist on is this, that much of His discoursing was not revelation, but illumination—not unfolding new truths which had never been heard of before, but illustrating old truths and old commandments which had been from the beginning—rousing the slumbering consciousness to what had been written aforetime, or giving definite form to the dim ideals or hazy conceptions that had long floated before the

common mind. What is the parable of the Prodigal Son but a richer setting forth of the 103rd Psalm? What is the teaching of John 3, but a prolongation of the fifty-fifth of Isaiah? But our Lord indicated that in that age there were many truths which He could not reveal either in the way of illumination or revelation—either in the way of appeal to old truths that had not met with general recognition or in the way of making a fresh communication from heaven, because such would find no echo in man's spiritual nature. "I have many things," He said, "to say, but you cannot bear them now." There were disciples that followed him for a season and heard Him gladly, but when He began to go beyond their depth, and deal with the deeper truths of the Kingdom, they shrank back, and walked no more with Jesus. "I have many things to say," and He added, "Howbeit when the spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth," etc. This promise we hold is only in the course of fulfilment.

Now in this evolution of doctrine which has been going on in the past, we see that the faith of the Church, as well as the increasing light vouchsafed to the Church, has had much to do. In the providence of God—in the advancing stages of the world's history, new evils, dangers, controversies, hitherto but little known, have had to be faced, and the Church, the salt of the earth, the true conservator of the best interests of men, realizing her responsibility to her Lord, and charged by Him with the redemption of the world—over, as new troubles arose, has turned to the Word for direction and found it there—found the needed truth that has perhaps been all but overlooked for ages, e.g., that set forth in the fourteenth of Romans, out of which has sprung the greatest moral movement of the last fifty years—namely, the Total Abstinence movement. Or take that other just referred to above, set forth in the fifteenth of John, etc., the immanence of God which is promising to do so much to meet the cavils and scepticisms of our day. Let God be presented to us, not as some *extra mundane* power, ruling and reigning in some region far remote from human ken, and far removed from human sympathy—and not only so but limited and hampered by an outside stern necessity to which He too must bow,—but as a Spirit not far from any one of us, touching every heart like an atmosphere, and dwelling in every believer like a shrine—let His presence be recognized in the bounty and beauty of material nature, and no less so in moral nature—in the aspirations of broken hearts—the humble confessions of the penitent, as well as the serious moods of the impenitent;—in short, as the power at the bottom of all human history—a power that is even now, in spite of all our sins and shames, blossoming out into ten thousand beautiful forms, and how different will our outlook upon the world be! How comes it that 'tis truth is meeting with such hearty recognition in these days? The faith of the Church in her warfare which she has to accomplish with her foes has driven her to the Word and she has found it.

ONWARD AND UPWARD.

### THE SCOTCH-IRISH IN CANADA.

MR. EDITOR.—The meeting held in Belfast on the 4th of July, just after the great Council had concluded its labours, appears to have been a successful one. The speeches of Dr. McCracken, representing the Northern division of the Church in the States; and of Dr. Martin, representing the South, were worthy of the occasion. And the speeches of Drs. McCosh and Cairns were all that could be desired. The audience was large and enthusiastic. But why, it may be asked, was not Canada represented on the occasion? When the deeds and fame of the descendants of Ulstermen were celebrated, and most appropriately too, was it proper that Canada, and especially the Province of Ontario, be left out of account? Was it assumed that the Scotch proper, had a monopoly of Canada? That assumption seems to be made sometimes, and it is made in quarters, too, from which better things might be expected. In an early number of the *Catholic Presbyterian*, an article by the accomplished and genial editor, appeared under the heading: "Two Streams of Presbyterian History." The writer there, while admitting that Ulster men had much to do in founding and building up the Presbyterian Church of the United States, said that the Scotch were more inclined to go to Canada. It is left to be inferred—it is not said in so many words, that the Ulster Presbyterians did not play a large part in the