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A LECTURE

ON

THE SOCIAL ADVANCEMENT OF CANADA;

Being the Introductory Lecture of the Season, before the Mechanics' Institutes of Niagara and Toronto, delivered in Niagara on the 13th, and in Toronto on the 16th of October, 1849.

BY THE REV. DR. RYERSON.

I am to address you on "*The Social Advancement of Canada*;"—a subject little discussed and less understood,—yet one which involves all that is vital and hopeful in the interests of our country, and which is interwoven with the most anxious thoughts of the Statesman, the solicitudes of the Patriot, and the prayers of the Christian.

In the discussion of this subject, I assume the existence of Society and the possibility of its progress. By Society, I mean the union of individuals for certain purposes of common interest and enjoyment—a union prompted by the original impulses of man, and imposed by his necessities. The most comprehensive and imposing form under which such association amongst men exists, constitutes what is termed "*civil society*;" which is truly regarded as an "*ordinance of God*,"—originating in his goodness and dictated by his wisdom. Every such society involves certain mutual obligations on the part of its individual members, and that which defines those obligations, is called the *constitution* of the society—embracing the fundamental principles of the social compact, either expressly stated in written document—such as the Constitution of the United States; or deduced from historical events, solemn decisions, and uncontested usage—such as form the British Constitution. Every such society requires some agency to accomplish its objects. If one object of the society be to protect the person and property of each of its members, and if person or property be violated in any instance, all the members cannot turn out to apprehend and punish the culprit. Hence the necessity of certain officers of justice, invested with the authority and power of the whole society for such and kindred purposes of common safety and interest. Again, in order to determine with certainty who the guilty party is, in any such case, and to prevent the innocent from being mistaken for the guilty, as all the members of the compact cannot take part in the investigation, a convenient and adequate number of them are selected for that purpose. Such judges of *facts* amongst us are called *jurors*: and as their decisions in particular cases should be in harmony with principles and regulations impartially applicable to all cases of the same kind, certain persons, duly qualified, are selected and appointed as the authorized expounders and guardians of these general principles and regulations. These are denominated *Judges*. But these regulations should be stamped with the authority of the whole society, in order to be binding upon each of its members; and as they cannot all meet to consult and agree upon such regulations, certain of their number are appointed or delegated as *Legislators* for the whole. The results of their deliberations constitute the *Statutes* or *Laws* of a country, and are not usually confined to the mere protection of person and property, but extend to whatever may secure and advance the common welfare of society in its various industrial and social interests—embracing all that is comprehended in the department of *Political Economy*; of which *Public education* is an important and essential branch. Then, some

power is necessary to execute the decisions of Judges and Juries and the enactments of the people through their legislators. This cannot be done by the people *en masse*; and hence the necessity of *executive officers* to give effect to the various laws adopted. But the people cannot all meet to choose these officers; and therefore there must be some selected appointing power to which all executive officers should be subordinate and responsible, and which power stands forth as the personification of the national authority, law, and order. This supreme executive power is termed Emperor, King, President, or Governor, according to circumstances; and the fact of this power being absolute or limited by law, hereditary or elective, chiefly determines the different forms and systems of civil government. But it should be observed, that, according to the nature of things, government is merely the *instrument* to accomplish the *end* for which society exists; *Society* being the *principal*,—*Government* the *agent*. It is true, that in past ages, and in some unhappy countries still, government has been viewed as the *end*, and *society* as the *means*,—the people existing for the sake of the government, and not government for the sake of the people. But the light of modern civilization has largely corrected this unnatural state of things,—has taught rulers their relations and duties, and the people their rights and privileges.

Now, when I speak of the advancement of society, I mean progress in what appertains to the nature and objects of that society; and when I speak of the "*Social Advancement of Canada*," I mean advancement in whatever is involved in the nature and objects of Canadian institutions;—I mean progress in Canadian civilization; or, to use the words of the illustrious French historian and statesman, Guizot,—"*The progress of society, the progress of individuals; the amelioration of the social system, and the expansion of the mind and faculties of man; the exterior condition of man enlarged, quickened, improved; the intellectual nature of man distinguished by energy, brilliancy, and grandeur.*"*

What then is involved in the Social Advancement of Canada, and by what means may it be effected? What are the necessary conditions of its existence, and how may the vigorous development of its life be promoted? The brief answers which a single lecture confines me to give to these momentous questions, comprises several particulars, each of which I must rather indicate than fully discuss.

I. The first is, *the Healthful state of our Country's Material Interests*. It is true that the life of a country, any more than that of an individual, does "not consist in the abundance of the things possessed." The wealthiest kingdoms of antiquity were among the most degraded; while some of the poorest were the most civilized and the most free. Neither does social advancement depend upon gentleness of climate, fertility of soil, or natural facilities of commerce. The fertile plains of charming Italy have long been the abode of squalidness and social debasement, while a high civilization has grown up and flourished on the cold swamps of the sea-deluged Netherlands, and amidst the rugged hills and mountains of hyperborean Scotland. We see semi-barbarism nestling in the more genial Styrian Alps of Austria, while it has long since melted away in the colder Helvetian Alps of Switzerland. On our own side of the Atlantic, we see the mass of the population debased to chattels and brutes in the orange and fig-bearing States of the

* Civilization of Modern Europe, Lecture I.