

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

### FORCES THAT ARE WORKING TOWARDS A TRUER AND RICHER THEOLOGY.

Dr. A. Hodge, of Princeton, in an able paper on this subject, takes the ground that while progress may be looked for in the matter of criticism and exegesis, nothing important is to be expected regarding the body of revealed doctrine which sets forth the character and purposes of God; and the nature, relations, and destinies of man as a sinner, together with his duties, privileges, and destinies as a believer—that in this restricted sense no progress in theology is to be expected. Similar is the position of Dr. Caven in his article published in the *Catholic Presbyterian*, June, 1879.

But there are other names of no less note that take the ground that even in this restricted sense there is to be progress—a truer reading and a richer unfolding of divine truth on all the points referred to. There are forces at work, and have been at work for years, that are full of promise in this regard. One of these is the ever-increasing light that is falling upon the sacred page—a light disclosing deeper insights into God's truth—sounder and truer views of those great matters referred to by Dr. Hodge, and forcing upon us conclusions which in a previous age had never been dreamed of. The *Verba Scripta* is the same to-day that it was two hundred years ago, when the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland ratified the Confession of Faith and other standards, but our reading of those standards, in some respects, is not the same as their reading. The first chapter of Genesis is just what it was in the days of Ezra when he stood up in a wooden pulpit and gave the sense thereof; but how differently would even Dr. A. Hodge, with all his reverence for the old landmarks, read that chapter in the ampler vision of the present day? Or to take another case—the doctrine pertaining to the duty of the Civil Magistrate in relation to the Church. That doctrine is set forth in the twenty-third chapter of the Confession of Faith, in the sense in which it was understood by our Westminster divines. It clothes the civil ruler with supreme power, makes him a judge in matters pertaining to doctrine, gives him the sword—the literal sword which he is not to bear in vain—but to put down everything that he may judge heretical. Persecution, extermination, was the threat which he was to flout in the face of every dissenter. In short, there was to be no such thing as toleration in matters pertaining to the conscience such as we now enjoy. Is there any body of Christians prepared to accept of this chapter in the persecuting sense—the sense in which it was understood in those days? It still forms a part of our standards, but *cum nota*—with limitations and qualifications.

In the study of the volume of nature great progress has been made in reading aright the facts submitted, and so also in the volume of revelation. The astronomer who turns his glass night after night upon those silent stars that look down on the graves of many generations, is in a different position to-day from the early fire-worshippers that contemplated them simply as so many shining points scattered at random over the vault of heaven. He would be a dull scholar indeed, had he not learned to look deeper down into the sun, the moon, and the stars, than the eastern magi, and tell us something of their character and constitution. How much richer those heavens than they had supposed! What did they know about the *Cornal* of the sun, the craters of the moon, or the belts of Jupiter? And yet these heavens are the same that they were in the days of the patriarch when sitting under the palm tree he discussed of Orion, of Arcturus and his sons, and the sweet influences of the Pleiades. No change has taken place in the object of observation, but a change has taken place in the observer. The one factor is a constant quantity, the other variable. So also in Bible interpretation. The *Verba Scripta* is the same that it was in the days of Augustine whose view of the doctrine of imputation of sin was so extreme that he held that all infants dying unbaptized were damned, "which faith," he said, speaking of this and other articles, "which faith, unless everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt, must everlastingly perish."

We go all the length of the most stringent in holding to the old landmarks—the best ascertained text and dealing with the same as an unchangeable factor.

We have no sympathy with the views of Cardinal Newman, and Professor Seely, and Schillermacher, as to the principle of a successive and continuous revelation running through all the ages. Such views might at length land us in another Gospel, and carry us far away from that sure word of prophecy to which we do well to take heed, until the day dawn and the day star arise in our hearts. But while seeking to honour the Spirit of God in giving us a full Gospel in the completed canon, we must take care that we do not dishonour Him in ignoring the aids and influences which He has promised to those that He would guide into truth.

We have got an infallible record, but the question is, have we got an infallible interpretation? "Certainly," says the Roman Catholic, "for it is the interpretation of the Church." Such a view is consistent enough in his mouth, but it would be nonsense in ours; and it would be a great calamity to the Church were her theology to become hide-bound—a mere *caput mortuum*, sending forth no new shoots, and receiving no new accessions of light or learning, such as the long and laborious scholarship of ages might offer. We have been learning in the past—learning both intensively and extensively. We have been growing both in depth and in breadth, since the days of the apostles and the prophets, for much that they only saw in vision, has been actualized in history. Like letter carriers, they delivered their message, knowing, perhaps little of the import (e.g., second coming)—for it was to us and not to themselves they did minister; and so, by the increasing light and the constant teaching of that good Spirit that leads into all truth, we can now tread with a firmer step into the depths of a doctrinal statement than ever Origen or Augustine could. We have made discoveries in the sacred page of the Word, just as the astronomer has made discoveries in the astral page of the firmament. There the telescope is ever revealing new wonders, bringing within the range of human ken worlds on worlds whose existence was never suspected before. So with the spiritual firmament. The eye of faith that has received the anointing of the holy One, is ever favoured with deeper insights into old truths, and rewarded with something like new revelations, brighter views of Christ and His kingdom.

How interesting is Church history in this respect! What conflicts and controversies in regard to the person of Christ, till the present received doctrine took shape in Chalcedon in 450 A.D. Then came the great controversy concerning sin and grace, resulting in the dogma set forth in our Standards. Then, following at a great distance, the doctrine of justification by faith, which (though not new, but which had simply been overlooked) broke upon the world with the force of a fresh revelation from heaven; still further on in history a great light came over the minds of men as to the character and constitution of the Church, how that it is not to be ruled by a hierarchy; how that in its organization it is not to take its model from the temple, but rather the synagogue; and how that we should look to the apostolic church as furnishing the principles of its constitution: and have these Scriptures that have been striking out so many new lights in the past nothing further to communicate? Is the vision sealed? Has the last word been spoken? What of that great department of Scripture called eschatology, all those questions pertaining to the resurrection, the condition of souls in the intermediate state, the reign of Christ in Hades, yes, the reign, for He has the keys of death and Hades. Those questions had all been taken up and prosecuted to some extent centuries ago, but the Reformation put its quietus on them all. Still we are not to suppose that they have received their final form, that the *status quo* which they have reached is never to be disturbed. The last word has not yet been spoken concerning them; and we are not without hope that in the warmer light, and ampler vision of a better day theology may have something more sure and satisfactory to advance regarding them. Who does not know that there are scores of splendid scholars working at them now, with no little encouragement? and no short, easy way of rulling them out from thoughtful, reverent discussion can any longer be tolerated. We have been learning and have still much to learn in the way of interpretation. And seeing the labours of a saintly scholarship have done so much in the past to roll away the mistakes and misinterpretations that have so long obscured the Word, why should we cease to hope that something more may yet be done in the same direction? and

why should we not welcome the light, come from what source it may, fearing none and refusing none, seeing it comes from the same Divine Author who rejoices in all the works of His hands and who is all glorified in them all? D. M.

*Queen's Sound, June, 1884.*

### NOTED CANADIAN TOTAL ABSTAINERS.

HONOURABLE GEORGE WILLIAM ROSS, LL.B., M.P.P.,  
MINISTER OF EDUCATION FOR ONTARIO.

BY J. B. HALKETT.

No record of the cause of total abstinence in Canada would be complete without giving prominence to the zealous, earnest worker therefor, whose name is given above, and whose labours are household words not merely in Ontario, his native Province, but wherever the agitation for prohibiting liquor forms a factor engaging public attention.

In the prime of life, having been born in the county of Middlesex, Ont., on the 18th of September, 1841, with honours and position, attained solely by indefatigable energy, it is only reasonable to expect that, if spared, Mr. Ross will, in the future, surpass what he has already accomplished for those temperance principles which have full possession of his heart.

His record, while short, has been most successful, but by no means a bed of roses, for he has risen, step by step, through a determination not knowing defeat—worthy the dogged perseverance of the Scottish race to which he belongs.

From the outset, the subject of this sketch has had to depend, mainly, on his own exertions.

His early education was the rather elementary instruction procurable at the rural school near his home. Good use, however, did he make of the meagre curriculum afforded, and in a short time secured a third-class county certificate, thus enabling him, when but sixteen, to be a teacher earning the "munificent" salary of eighteen dollars a month.

The next ten years, during which he gained second-class and first-class certificates, were entirely devoted to teaching the young. So successful was he, that he secured the confidence and esteem of parents, the affection and gratitude of many pupils.

Subsequently, he entered the field of journalism, and from then until very recently, edited or contributed to the columns of such well-known Provincial papers as the *Strathroy Age*, *Huron Expositor*, and *Canada School Journal*. While thus engaged, he by no means discontinued to take an active interest in educational matters, for, in turn, he held the positions of Local Superintendent and County Inspector, besides giving much time and attention to the establishment of Normal and Model schools—systems whose merits are universally recognized, a state of affairs in a great measure due to Mr. Ross' able advocacy of their claims.

Although thus working with a vim in these other spheres of usefulness, Mr. Ross has never forgotten that temperance creed which, from earliest years, has been his rule and guide. A friend of any method aiming at sobriety among the people, with an intense hatred of everything opposed thereto, he has in an especial manner espoused and advanced the Order of the Sons of Temperance; so much so, that no member is mere relied upon and admired in all the branches of that great organization. Very similar in this respect is his history in Ontario to what is Sir Leonard Tilley's in New Brunswick. Like the latter, he has been animated with an enthusiasm for adding to the ranks of total abstainers, and forming new divisions, thus strengthening an order to-day a mighty power for good in the land. In 1879, Mr. Ross was chosen Grand Worthy Patriarch, and with his usual energy worked night and day to make the Grand Division of Ontario the banner Grand Division of this continent—a laudable object brought about ere he vacated the chair. Immediately thereafter, he was unanimously elected to the highest office—that of Most Worthy Patriarch, presiding for two years over the deliberations of the National Division of North America, with marked ability and to the utmost satisfaction of the membership.

All temperance legislation brought before the Canadian Parliament during the time Mr. Ross was connected therewith, viz., from 1872 until lately, when he assumed the responsible duties of his present position, has had his cordial co-operation. During the administration of his political leader—Hon. Alexander Mac-