

# THE CANADIAN INDEPENDENT.

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All communications for the Editorial, News of Churches, and Correspondence Columns should be addressed to the Managing Editor, Box 2648, P.O. Toronto.

Pastors and church officers are particularly requested to forward items for "News of the Churches" column.

## THE ENGLISH ELECTIONS.

THE English elections are virtually over, and the result has been one of those surprises which general elections have afforded of late years, alike in Canada and England. The anticipations of both parties ranged from a reduced Conservative majority to a small Liberal majority—not a single man, so far as we have been able to find, anticipating such a vast revulsion of public feeling as the vote would indicate. Only a few weeks ago a Conservative friend, writing to us, said: "Lord Beaconsfield is to-day the most popular man in England," and the writer had what he thought good ground for his belief, but the ruthless truth shews how completely he was mistaken. We do not bring politics, much less Imperial ones, into the pages of the INDEPENDENT ordinarily, and if we did we should hesitate to express very much hope from the anticipated new regime, for experience has shewn us that men in office are very different to the same men out of office; and in fact they must be so, whatever their personal convictions and desires may be; office brings with it certain inexorable positions; the country is often committed to a policy that it is all but impossible to abandon or change. For instance, the Liberal Government will go into office with the Afghan difficulty still unsettled. What will they do? As a matter of principle they might feel that it would be right to withdraw our troops from that country and put things in an *ante bellum* status; but, looking to the people with whom they have to deal, who understand nothing about a change of policy in the Home Government but who would certainly attribute the action to fear, it would be dangerous to the peace of the Indian Empire, and might involve an expenditure of blood and money frightful to contemplate. They will have therefore to continue to some extent a policy which they have bitterly condemned while out of office, and will, no doubt, be taunted and badgered accordingly. Very much of the action of the impending Liberal Government will depend upon who is premier; if Lord Hartington, there will be few changes that will be thought radical; if Mr. Gladstone, we may look for a bolder and more energetic course of action. So far as regards Canada, and our connection with the mother country, we do not suppose that a change of ministry will make any difference to us; our position is so well defined, the quasi independence we enjoy is so unquestioned on the one side and so satisfactory on the other, the points of contact that might prove irritating are so few, that in all probability we shall be unaware practically of any change. The Eastern question is without doubt the one on which, just now, the most interest is felt, not only in England but throughout the continent of Europe. Mr. Gladstone has been so undiplomatically outspoken on this subject that there is a large amount of uneasiness in some capitals and a corresponding amount of rejoicing in others at the Liberal victory. There are many home questions requiring to be grappled with. The suffrage, church establishments, the land laws, with other anomalies and evils, have to be disposed of; and as this election has shewn that beer, which was supposed to be king in England, is not by any means so mighty, we hope that the new Government will still further weaken its influence, by, at the least, giving a hearty support to the Local Option Bill, if they do not go any further.

Although, as we have said, much must not be expected, at first, at any rate, from the new Government whoever may be its leading mind, yet we have the satisfaction of feeling that they, as a body, are men of true principles, and will endeavour to shape their policy in accord with the eternal principles of right

and truth. The costly, illusive, unrighteous regime of pyrotechnics is over in England for the present, and we trust that a Government based on righteousness is at hand.

## CREEDS.—THEIR RELATION TO UNITY.

THE Westminster standards of the Presbyterian Churches are among the most elaborate and thorough-going of the creeds of Christendom. The so-called Athanasian creed is mere child's play compared to them. In the terms of subscription thereto at present authorized by the Established and Free Churches of Scotland, not only does the subscriber declare that he sincerely owns and believes the whole doctrine contained therein, but that he also "disowns all Popish, Arian, Socinian, Arminian, Erastian, and other doctrines, tenets, and opinions, whatsoever, contrary to and inconsistent with the confession of faith." What has been, is, the practical result as to unity in the country where perhaps more than in any other a creed has had opportunity to manifest its binding power? A.D. 1647, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland approved of these standards in terms as above, yet in less than two centuries we find Seceders, Burghers, Anti-Burghers, Old Light and New Light Burghers, Synod of Relief, reunions and subdivisions, the "Marrow" controversy, and the bitterness between Moderates and Evangelicals, until the great Disruption movement of 1843, which movement has passed into history. And now, does not the state of theology in the Established Church of Scotland exemplify how the narrow Church has become the mother of the broad; and the unhappy state of the Free Church on the supposed tendency of its younger theological professors is not far from the antipodes of unity. Rigid creed subscription has not saved the Scottish Churches, under most favourable circumstances, from strife and division. Nor have they saved any Church, past or present, that manifested the least vitality. On the title page of every creed to which subscription is demanded should be written, so far as unity and charity are concerned, *Tekel*. The so-called Athanasian creed may be interpreted as Socinian or Sabellian, according to the meaning given to the theologically ambiguous words, *person*, *substance*, and so with them all.

There is no trace of a creed in the Apostolic Church nor for a century after the last Apostle had departed from his labours, unless we accept, as well we may do, Mark viii. 27-29, Rom. x. 9, and the baptismal formula, Matt. xxviii. 19. It is somewhat more than doubtful whether such expressions as "form of sound words," 2 Tim. i. 13, etc., have more than a general reference; certain it is that no traces of such form as the advocates of creeds desire can be discovered earlier than the period A.D. 175-200.

Pliny the younger, in his celebrated letter to the Emperor Trajan, about the beginning of the second century, speaks of hymns sung to Christ as God, and in such passages as Rom. ix. 5, 1 Tim. iii. 16, we may discern lines of such hymns; but hymns are not creeds as we may well know seeing "just as I am without one plea," finds its way into the Unitarian hymnal along with "Rock of Ages," even as the Unitarian hymn "Nearer my God to Thee" is sung passionately by the rigidly orthodox.

We freely grant that faith, in a thinking man, must assume some objective form—become formulated for himself at least—hence no surprise need be expressed at the development of a dogmatic form of sound words, but even after such forms appear it does not seem that they were made to assume an authoritative form. As the late principal Cunningham, of the Free Church College, Edinburgh, expressly states, "There was no church, which, during the first three centuries, attempted to exercise, or was recognized as entitled to exercise, authority to impose a form upon the other churches of Christ."

Of course matters change when we arrive at the Nicene age when Christian consciousness grows out of its childlike faith into a critical opinionativeness. For those who disown tradition and cling simply to the Scriptures, the battle-ground of antiquity, however, is passed with the Nicene age.

We may then conclude this necessarily fragmentary paper with one or two conclusions, drawn from the facts of the case.

In the first place: The right to formulate the Christian faith and demand assent thereto as under authority, has no foundation in the Word of God, nor any countenance from early ecclesiastical history. Let this be noted.

Secondly: The history of creeds has been that of bitterness and division, so that the experiment, even if allowable, has utterly failed in cementing in one spirit the Christian Church. Formulated doctrine may have their use—but certainly in promoting unity they utterly fail.

Neander's reflection may well bring this article to a close, "Christianity shewed itself in doctrines as well as in human life to be no constraining, dead, and killing letter, but a spirit developing itself freely, and promoting its own free development,—a living spirit that made alive also. It was left to each man to appropriate Christianity to himself in his own individual mode, and when once appropriated, to exhibit it again, in his own individual mode, in his spiritual life."

Would the present churches be the worse for the learning of these lessons?

## CONCERNING A LATE VISITOR.

THERE are Infidels and Infidels—men, on the one hand who are honest doubters; surrounded by the mystery of life, called, perhaps, to pass through its darkness, or to drink its bitter cup, they doubt everything, doubt a Divine Providence, doubt a wise and loving order in the world, doubt the Divine authority of the Word of God, doubt the very existence of a God. There is no pleasure in their unbelief; they would believe if they could, but they cannot, and they go on carrying their load of sorrow until light breaks in upon their mind, as it always does, sooner or later, and they marvel that they should have remained so long in the thralldom of darkness. To all such every true Christian will extend a fraternal hand, will bear with their doubts and unbelief, and patiently help them to an understanding of the light and truth.

There is a second class—cold, calm, logical men, who say that they will only believe what they can see, touch, prove, but who by a strange perversity are exercising faith on a vast number of the concerns of everyday life, as in fact they are compelled to do—men who would examine mind with a scalpel and anatomize the soul with a dissecting knife. They have traced life to its primordial manifestations; what is behind that they neither know nor care. With these even, we can have some sympathy, for it is truth they have deified, albeit an abstraction, instead of Him who is Truth itself, the source of all truth in the universe.

There is yet a third class—men of the Ingersoll stamp, though but few with a tithe of his ability—men whose minds are essentially coarse and cruel, who can find in the hallowed associations of the vast majority of their fellow citizens, matter only for ridicule and jest—men who take the most sacred feelings of the best and ablest men who walk upon the earth and make them the subjects of horrible ribaldry, who can see nothing in devoted and sanctified lives but hypocrisy, in pure and elevated teachings but cant, in the faith that prompts to the grandest self-sacrifice, and the hope that fills the humblest lot with peace and joy, but an absurd delusion—men who turn away from every principle in the Word of God that is ennobling, and from every manifestation of it in the lives of men and women that is heroic, and stoop down into the gutter for some debauchee who is as blatant an unbeliever as they, and then endeavouring to hide his pollution with the tinsel of rhetoric, exclaim, "These be thy Gods O Israel!" Yet, further, these men are utterly dishonest; many of them are totally ignorant of the Bible; they have caught a few ideas as to its contents, but in reality they know just as much (and just as little) about the original of the Assyrian inscriptions; and even with such men as Ingersoll, who may know more of its facts, either they fail to understand what multitudes of the scholars in