

BOOK REVIEWS.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL HISTORY OF CANADA. By Samuel James Watson, Librarian, Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Toronto: Adam, Stevenson & Co.

In this small volume of 157 pages, Mr. Watson, commencing with the British conquest, brings down the constitutional history to the Constitution Act of 1791, and adds a slight sketch on "Canada, Past and Present." Our history has hitherto been chiefly written from a French Canadian point of view, and we have had to look at the past through spectacles that did not quite suit the sight. Mr. Watson writes from a British stand-point, and judging from the present instalment, his work will be creditably performed. Every one may not agree with him in thinking the Quebec Act of 1774 was "the worst Act which the British Parliament ever imposed on an American colony." In placing Canada under a Governor and Council, that Act was not only a breach of faith in withholding the promised representative institutions, but it was regarded as a menace to the other colonies. It is proper, however, to note the exceptional position in which Canada was placed. The colony, a recent conquest, was chiefly peopled by French settlers and their descendants; and if representative institutions had been given to it in good faith, and the oaths of abjuration had been dispensed with, the English population, to whom representative institutions had been promised by the proclamation of 1763, and for whom they were more particularly regarded as desirable—the French colonist never having lived under such institutions—the effect would have been to place the entire Legislative power in the hands of the new subjects, and it is quite conceivable that the colonists of British origin might have been worse off than under a Governor and Council. The change made by the Constitution Act of 1791 was much less real than apparent. The ultimate power was still in the Governor and a Crown appointed Legislative Council, which could always be successfully played off against the elective chamber. The extent to which that power was used to counteract the popular tendencies of the Assembly is familiar to every reader of Canadian history.

While writing in a clear and forcible style, it may be doubted whether Mr. Watson has exhausted all the materials bearing on his subject. We miss all mention of the contests that arose between the authorities at Quebec and the merchants over the right of the new Government to levy the same rate of import duty as the old Government had collected; disputes which occupied the attention of the English courts and made much noise at the time. Perhaps the author may not consider them as belonging to the constitutional history of the Province; though it would be difficult to class them otherwise. Nevertheless we welcome this new contribution to our history; and we believe that those who peruse the first volume will look forward with interest to its successors.

SUB-TROPICAL RAMBLES IN THE LAND OF THE APHANAPTERYX. PERSONAL EXPERIENCES, ADVENTURES AND WANDERINGS IN AND AROUND THE ISLAND OF MAURITIUS. By Nicholas Pike. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1873.

We give the full title of this work, since, probably, not one in a thousand would know what was meant by the "Land of the Aphanapteryx," or in what portion of the habitable globe this favoured region might actually be. Nor do we suppose that many people would know with any accuracy what the "Aphanapteryx" is; whether it is some valuable gem or mineral, some wonderful vegetable production, or, perhaps, something to eat, just as we speak of the land of the sugar-cane or grape vine, or the "land o' cakes." In truth, however, the Aphanapteryx is nothing more than a peculiar wingless bird, which formerly inhabited the Island of Mauritius, along with the still more singular Dodo, and which has become extinct within a comparatively recent period. We are bound to add, also, that nothing beyond the merest mention of the Aphanapteryx, together with its portrait on the title-page, will be found in this work; so that the title of the work is only justified by the author's announcement that he intends to publish a second volume, in which he will describe fully this and the other remarkable natural productions of Mauritius.

Mr. Nicholas Pike, whose name has a strangely familiar ring, was appointed United States Consul in Mauritius in the year 1866; and the present volume is the result of his stay on the island for some years. The work has little literary excellence to recommend it, and its arrangement is such as to render its perusal a matter of considerable difficulty. This difficulty is enhanced by the enormous amount and miscellaneous character of the material collected by Mr. Pike, and here presented to the public in a concrete form. It does not seem possible to mention any subject, having any conceivable connection with the natural or acquired peculiarities of any given country, which is not more or less fully treated of in these pages. The general reader will find himself agreeably entertained with the account of Mauritian life and society; the naturalist, the botanist and the geologist will all meet with matter of special interest to them; the physician has a chapter on the causes and nature of the Mauritian fevers; the meteorologist can revel in the details of cyclones and hurricanes; the ethnologist is presented with a long account of the various elements composing the mixed population of the island; the historian, the statistician, the educationalist, and the student of theology are one and all liberally cared for; and the financier or man of business can study at length the industries and commerce of the island. Upon the whole, however, Mr. Pike, though a keen observer and a fair recorder of other matters, appears to most advantage as a naturalist and botanist; and we shall look forward with interest to the promised second volume of the work, in which the rich fauna and flora of the island are to be described in detail.