

A LAYMAN ON THE RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF THE AGE.

All religious reforms may be said to have had a uniform object, viz., to secure absolute religious freedom in connection with absolute purity of faith. Hitherto, these reforms have failed, in that the idea of absolute purity of faith has been associated with, or, in an early stage of the reform, has become associated with a supposed necessity for absolute uniformity of belief. This mistake we are beginning to correct; and the true work of religious reform, which it is the mission of our age to accomplish, can only be fulfilled by a *bona fide* and practical recognition of the absolute right of every individual mind to worship God in its own way.

I will try to point out, as far as I may be able, the manner and the degree of the efforts being made by the Church to conquer this its holy mission. The age is on this point conscious of its duty to God, to truth, and to itself. The two greatest characters in society are the Prophet and the Statesman. The one stands to the Church as the other stands to the State. In both alike two elements should be found in combination—foresight and administrative skill—sagacity and practical command. A statesman should see what a nation wants and what it needs. The necessity and the wish must be well balanced, and then the result must be achieved. The Prophet should see the aspiration and the necessity of the Church. In both, genius and ability are requisite; wisdom and power. Just now, if it may be said that England wants a statesman, it may be more truly said that Christendom wants a Prophet. We say in relation to the State that every man should be a politician; that is, that he should cultivate and exercise his faculty of statesmanship. So it is in relation to the Church. Some say leave all ecclesiastical administration to the officials; i.e., clergy. How would it be if in the State this principle were acted on? We should get no Reform and no Progress. The active patriotism of ruling statesmen is always regulated by the active patriotism of the people. Popular quiescence soon breeds official irresponsibility. So is it in the Church. A thoughtful, faithful, devout laity will never be the best standard by which to measure the godliness of the clergy. Nobody will deny that this is an age of immense religious activity, and it would be unjust to ascribe the activity which prevails to the force of division. The Church is split up into many sects, but it is not too much to say that beneath its myriad faces there beats one heart. The divisions are real, but they are real because they really involve so many earnest endeavours after unity. The whole Church has a common purpose, motive, and inspiration. Indeed, I hold that all men really believe alike, if they only knew it. All grand systems of philosophy are the same in moral significance and importance. All are partially true, therefore none are exclusively true. Shall any one say that Epicurus taught falsely? Yet were the Stoics right and wise in creed. You say you are a Positivist, or you are a Spiritualist. Now, is your positivism anti-spiritual? Or is your spiritualism anti-positivistic? One man says he believes in facts, another in fancies. Yet the man who stands up for facts often falls down under the weight of fancies, and the man who stands up for fancies is often knocked down by the force of facts. It is pretty much the same in reference to religion. You are a Calvinist? So am I. You are an Armenian? So am I. You believe in Fate? So do I. You believe in Free Will? So do I. Never was yet any doctrine seriously propounded by a wise man which had not in it some germ of truth. No sane man could ever believe in an utter absurdity. So, whatever has received the honest faith of any sane mind must have in it some element of wisdom. Everywhere there is a dawning recognition of this principle, and consequently there is everywhere an aspiration after unity. Hence we see that every dividing dogma is urged as the true basis of a pure fellowship, and in proportion as the division is wide the urgency is bitter. The Roman Catholic boasts of fellowship in a common recognition of the divine authority of the Church; the Protestant in the common recognition of the divine authority of the Bible. The world and the Church, however, have been accustomed to distinguish between truths as either fundamental or secondary, supreme or subordinate, absolute or relative, essential or non-essential. Curiously enough, we often find that the fundamental truth is a mere invention of necessity; not a grand deduction from facts or phenomena. The fundamental truth—that on which all the whole Popish economy is based—is the authority of the Church. But would this ever be believed by intuition? Is it revealed? Is it stamped on the brow of the universe, or inwoven with the consciousness of man? Now, it is the peculiar misfortune of those who thus set up a dogmatic basis of communion that it requires much more skill to prove the basal dogma than all the rest of the scheme.

We have nearly one-third of the people who have nothing to do with religious organizations. Why? This is an important question. Some say it is because they are depraved. I believe this to be a gross calumny. Evangelical Christians say it is because they are indifferent to religion. This is a monstrous absurdity and a gross misrepresentation. It is because they are sick of the intolerances and dogmatisms, the pompous commonplaces, the sickly formalisms, the sectarian rivalries, and the arbitrary restrictions on thought which make up so much of Church life. Religion instead of being a large and warm-hearted thing, is associated with all narrowness, illiberality, and pharisaical exclusiveness. Instead of Christianity being represented as the patron and sanctifier of every good thing, nearly every good thing comes under its ban. The drama, the fine arts, gymnastic relaxations, the innocent dance, the hearty joke, all earthly, carnal, and all exuberant of life, are frowned on and denounced as worldly, carnal, and devilish. If I am really pressed for an answer to the question how it is that so many have no interest in the Church and its worship, I would say that, instead of fervent prayer and solemn adoration, they hear a drawing out of endless cant, and a soulless flippancy in communion with God. Instead of hope and joy, and love and resignation receiving a manly encouragement from the pulpit, life is represented as an unavoidable misfortune, misanthropy is fostered by the doctrines eternally babbled about of original sin and the utter depravity of human nature, and this fine world, which God hath so richly adorned with every beauty, and crowded with the resources of every form of happiness, is lazily and imperingly lamented over as a vale of tears and a waste howling wilderness. The working, reading, and thinking men of a great and free nation will never believe in a gospel

of vulgar damnation and narrow-minded malevolence. I account, then, or so many people keeping aloof from the Church, not by the fact that they are irreligious, but by the fact that they are religious. They will not be insulted, therefore they withdraw. They will not hear the good and holy misrepresented and maligned, therefore they stay at home. Many of these men are men of earnest purpose and habitual thought; they aspire nobly and believe honestly. They read to learn, and learn to live. They are too brave to be frightened at ecclesiastical frowns, as they are too wise to be captivated by ecclesiastical gew-gaws. They are men who, loving truth, pant for fellowship. But in the churches the love of truth is superseded by the zeal of sectarian exclusiveness, and that is why so many thousands of our countrymen find no home there.

What we really want is a masculine and earnest love of *truth*; for there is nothing sacred, nothing beautiful, nothing useful, now and forever, but truth. If God be not truth, He deserves no worship, and can bestow no blessing. If Christ be not truth, He is no Saviour, even though He died and rose again. If your Bible be not truth, it can boast no wisdom and promote no virtue. If your life be not truth, then are you in life and death eternally damned. The Spirit of Truth is the only regenerating, edifying, and consoling spirit. Its dominion absolute is liberty absolute; its agitations constitute the very purity of peace. Truth is the only living, universal, omnipotent and eternal power. It is the energy of all life, the promise of all hope, and the consolation of all recollections. It is the poetry of history, and the substance of every grand. Prophet, priest and king, of men obey with religious submission its great instructions. It constitutes the fascination of art, the certainty of science, and the sanctity of civilisation. All government is tyranny where it does not reign; all joy turns to remorse which it has not inspired. Without it, thought is a temptation, faith a falsehood, and love a crime. It reconciles the mind to every colossal mystery, and strengthens the heart to every stupendous sorrow. Is the eye weak? it softens the dazzling splendour; is the ear heavy? it breathes music in the soul; do false men sneer? it utters a Divine and defying compliment. It is the eye of Omniscience, and the right arm of God's own Almightiness. By its magic touch sadness is converted into song; when it speaks chaos breeds light; where it lives death changes into immortality. No sceptre is so keen as its edge, no crown so resplendent as its smile. Its benediction is a title to undying fame, its curse a sentence of everlasting dishonour. There is no spot of the wide universe which it does not make sacred with its impartial glances, and under its look the vastness becomes definite, and the minute overwhelming. Through its sweet purifying presence the desert is a happy home, and the sepulchre a temple where the soul meets the only Living One. The adoration of truth is the very soul of religion.

LAICUS.

THE ST. LAWRENCE ROUTE AND OUR TOURISTS.

There are few things in which a new country like Canada is at a greater disadvantage than in a cultivated appreciation of the picturesque. Perhaps the feeling has been quite as fully developed in Quebec as in any other part of the Dominion, and this because of its comparatively long settlement and its fuller communication with European elements of life. Of recent years our American friends have become conscious of their earlier social and aesthetic defect, and have done not a little to remedy it; and their awakened passion for European travel having greatly assisted the developing process, a somewhat distinctive school of criticism of European scenery and Art treasures has sprung up on this side the Atlantic,—a school that would seem to manifest just that freshness and vivacity that the old-world notes of travel were beginning to lack. It is generally pleasant to follow an intelligent American diarist through scenes that many of us feel we ought to have made acquaintance with, but have not.

The beauty of our Canadian cities and their surroundings forms a more important part of the general well-being than is often recognized amongst us; especially of those places that are situated upon the great line of travel which the citizens of the United States in particular so largely patronize. In making and keeping these cities of ours attractive, our thoughts for a long time ran almost exclusively upon architectural advantages and novelties in building designs, and these to the extent of our means we have endeavoured to multiply. But the picturesque in natural scenery, such as our *Canadian Illustrated* journal has so largely assisted in diffusing a knowledge of, is quite as important an element, and probably even the one that will be the most considered by the tourist of settled taste. The great line of summer travel may at present be said to extend from Niagara Falls to the out-ports of Halifax and St. John, and a world of beauty and varied associations will be comprised in the few days or weeks of travel that may in this way be consumed. The Mountain Park of Montreal is itself a wonder of the world; and if its able American designer should be permitted to finish what he has so well begun (we hardly like to let any man finish his work without interference in Canada), the crowning labour of modelling the vistas through the woods, after an artistic and informed fashion, may be expected to be accomplished. If the work be left to be done by some poorly paid batch of a craftsman, the results may be irreparable in their deficiency, and a grand opportunity be lost both to the city and to the world of travel.

In Quebec (from which city we are writing), with all our artistic talk and publication, we know how to botch things on occasion. In architecture we have done well of late, as witness the beautiful spires of the Laval University, closing in the unsurpassed *coup d'œil* from Durham Terrace; and we are now making progress with our new Legislative Chambers and public offices, with a superior class of private residences in their neighbourhood. As to the style adopted for the Government buildings, the *renaissance* is hardly ranked among the purer styles of architecture; but the present example, for which we fancy our French Canadian fellow subjects have almost entirely to be credited, promises a striking elevation, with broad effects and careful details, and, allowing for the one drawback of the quadrangular form, a general suitability to the purposes to which it is to be put.

But the scenery that surrounds the city of Quebec forms its well-known and peerless advantage, compare it with what we will. It comprises the views