

THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION.

THE arrival of the first detachment of the members of the British Association reminds us that no time must be lost if we are to offer a hearty welcome to the distinguished body of men who are about to visit our shores. It is certainly not necessary to stir up Canadians to exercise hospitality towards visitors from the old country. There is, no doubt, a good deal of superficial jealousy of Englishmen among us. We sometimes grumble when Englishmen are appointed to posts which, we think, might be filled by Canadians. Such feelings are, however, of the most superficial character. The line which is drawn between the Englishman and the Canadian is quite arbitrary and very indistinct. Many born Canadians refuse to be called anything but English; many imported Englishmen are recognized as Canadians. The truth of the remark, that "all Canadians are English, and every Englishman who sets his foot on Canadian soil is a Canadian," is generally recognized. We are not only proud of the cradle of our race, but we are proud when the noblest children of our common mother come to visit us, to learn something from us, and to impart something to us.

Many are the occasions on which English visitors, official and unofficial, have been welcomed and hospitably entertained in Canada; but we question whether any previous occasion has been of as great interest as the meeting of the British Association at Montreal. It is the first time that this distinguished society has assembled outside the United Kingdom, and, if we remember rightly, many doubts were expressed as to the expediency of the proposed visit to Canada. It was not that these distinguished men had any doubt of their being able to learn something in a land which few of them had seen. It was not that Canada had not on many grounds the first claim to their notice, if they should resolve to pitch their camp in any portion of the new world. Any reason connected with the accumulation of new facts could have little influence with a society the object of which was mainly the discussion of ascertained facts. The principal objection arose from the fear that Montreal or any other place so far from England would prove an unsuitable centre for such an assembly. It is pleasant to find that there was no ground for these apprehensions. As far as we can at present judge, the numbers present at the meeting will compare favourably with most of the previous gatherings.

The importance of the visit of these "men of science" is in many respects very great. It is great in announcing the proud position which science has now attained, and therefore, as showing the progress of common sense and rationality in the world. There actually was a time—not yet very remote—when human beings who were not destitute of education, nor yet of intelligence in some senses of that word, professed to treat science with contempt, who certainly did treat it with entire neglect. A dignitary of the Church, a first classman of the University of Oxford, has been heard in this generation to declare that he hated science. It is possible that the dignitary in question might still give utterance to the same sentiments, for he is still alive, and it is a point of honour in some people to stick to anything they have said. But he could now be answered by a very moderately educated opponent, and such sentiments as his would now be received with derision by any assembly of adult men, and by most women.

Indeed, it is the glory of our age that science has invaded every province of thought, even those from which it might have seemed to be, by its nature, excluded, and this has resulted from a clearer perception of the nature of science. For what do we mean by this term in its most general sense? We mean knowledge that is systematic, comprehensive, complete, exact. In other words, we mean knowledge which is true knowledge. We now determine to withhold that title from mere impressions or traditional beliefs, or detached scraps of information. We hold it necessary to test all our mental possessions by careful observation, comparison, criticism, and the like. And this is science.

Science, we say, invades every province of thought. History must now be scientific or it is worthless. Historical judgments must be formed upon principles as definite, and upon investigations as exhaustive, as those which are demanded by the most exact sciences. Theology itself has had to receive science as an auxiliary. There was a time when the theologian would have shuddered at the idea of forming an alliance with what he regarded as a cold, rigid form which would have no affinity with his own living subject; but now it is only upon condition of his being strictly scientific that the theologian can claim or can obtain a hearing. Of course there are many so-called theologians who will demur to these statements, just as there are people, and very clever people, who will speak nonsense on any subject, who will use language to which they attach no meaning, who will contradict statements which they do not understand. We are

now speaking of thoughtful men, acquainted with the literature of their age, and addressing men as thoughtful as themselves: with such speakers and such hearers science has become a universal necessity.

The members of the British Association have been good enough to say that they have come to Canada as much to learn as to teach. No doubt this is very proper and very courteous on their part, and we quite believe that even these learned persons have a good deal of knowledge to acquire on the state of this Dominion.

The Bishop of Algoma has recently amused Canadian audiences by an account of the ignorance of educated Englishmen as to many localities with which they might have been supposed to be acquainted. There is no doubt that much useful knowledge will be carried back to England by the members of the Association, and that it will gradually become the property of the English people through speeches, reports, newspapers and the like. All this will be very useful not only to Englishmen but to Canadians. For one thing, it will help our relatives in the old country to know a little better the kind of men who will find it worth their while to emigrate. It will enable them already to understand that idle and incapable men and women are of no use whatever here, that an incompetent person will not be less carefully scrutinized, but more carefully and critically examined, because he is an Englishman. We believe that those persons are quite wrong who say that we want no more men from the old country. They are quite right when they say that a great many come who are not wanted. It will be something if the meeting of the British Association shall help English people to know better what prospects there are in Canada for intending emigrants. Lord Lorne, when asked whether he should advise Englishmen to emigrate to Canada, said very seriously that he should decline to give advice, because every man knew his own business best. Before a man can, in this matter, know "his own business," he must know something of the needs and circumstances of the country to which he thinks of removing.

But it is not so much of what the British Association and the English people will receive from this meeting that we ought to think; but far more of what they can give us. It is a mere truism and platitude to say that a country is ruled by its knowledge and intelligence; and it would be unreasonable to doubt that the highest class of English scholars and scientific men (we cannot bring ourselves to write that odious word "scientists") can teach us something. Much as we appreciate the solid reality of the general Canadian character, the industry and devotion to work by which all classes are distinguished, it would be sheer nonsense to flatter Canadians by ascribing to them a pre-eminence in learning, in literary or scientific attainments, or in any of their departments which require leisure for study and research. It is not reasonable to expect such pre-eminence; and for this reason we should hail with thankfulness the advent of a body of men whose circumstances have allowed of those pursuits from which most men among ourselves are debarred. It is only as this class of scholars and thinkers can be increased among us that we can take that place in the advancement of knowledge which must be desired by all who have the real interests of the country at heart. We have no inclination to disparage the men who are toiling for the needful daily bread. They are doing honest, necessary work. The intellectual and moral progress of a nation will make little way if its natural progress is impeded. But there are higher interests than those which are material, and we cannot hope that these will be permanently maintained among a people who do not cherish a love of knowledge and an enthusiasm for truth. Such sentiments cannot fail to be strengthened by contact with minds so eminent as those which will take the lead in the discussions of the British Association.

We shall not suspect ourselves of a flattery which would be even more offensive to the object of it than to our readers when we point to the distinguished President of the Association as an example of that simple, high-minded devotion to science which is characteristic of not a few of those who hold the highest places in the English world of science. Lord Rayleigh is a man who does the highest honour to the English aristocracy and to the men of science. He obtained the highest mathematical honours in the University of Cambridge. We believe he is the only English Peer who has been at once Senior Wrangler and first Smith's Prizeman. But this is not all. Since the time when he took his degree he has prosecuted the studies by which he gained distinction, and has published a work on "Acoustics," to which the highest place has been conceded by scientific men like Helmholtz; and, more recently, from pure love of science, he has accepted a Premiership in his own University, a position of no financial importance, and which necessitates his abandoning to a great degree the life of leisure enjoyed by an English country gentleman. It is by acts like these that the enthusiastic students of science do honour to their own studies, and kindle enthusiasm in others. We are far from thinking that Lord