

SUPPLEMENT

TO THE

FREETHOUGHT JOURNAL.

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A SHORT, HISTORICAL SKETCH OF FREETHOUGHT IN CANADA.

Some time in the fall of 1873 Mr. Allen Pringle, of Selby, Mr. A. H. Roe, of Napanee, and a few other bold spirits amongst the Freethinkers of Canada, invited Mr. B. F. Underwood, of Boston, to take up a debate in the town of Napanee with the Rev. Mr. Marples, a gentleman of ability and good standing in the Presbyterian Church of Canada.

The subject of debate having been selected, Mr. Marples took the affirmative, and Mr. Underwood followed with such marked ability that soon after another meeting was arranged in Toronto, when a very interesting debate took place between these representative men, and the circumstance of this debate disclosed the fact that there were many Freethinkers in Toronto, especially amongst the educated. Mr. T. P. Thompson, of the *National*, and very widely known as "Jimuel Briggs," assisted by the late Mr. Hoskins, of the *Mail*, undertook the task of forming in the Queen City of the West, and which may be termed the beautiful city of elegant churches, what was then called the Liberal Association of Toronto. Mr. Thompson became its second President, a gentleman who was first appointed abdicating and leaving the post of honor, and, indeed, one of some danger to Mr. Thompson. Our friend "Jimuel" ably and honorably discharged the then arduous duties of the office, making, contrary to general expectation, many friends, and when at length called away to a high position on the *Boston Traveller*, a very handsome testimonial in good words was presented to the father, friend, and able leader of Freethought in Toronto. Upon the retirement of Mr. Thompson, Mr. J. Eck Evans was elected President, and the Association had by this time become sufficiently strong to be able to appoint able men to the several offices of the First and Second Vice Presidents. Mr. Robert Green and Mr. W. B. Cooke were the first to take office, and these, with an excellent business committee consisting of five members, by their able management placed the Liberal Association of Toronto upon a footing which has since ensured its splendid success. The office of Secretary has during the whole time been ably filled by Mr. R. B. Butland, who gives every Sunday evening before the lecture a short scientific reading from Haeckel and other scientific authors of equal ability, thus ensuring at every meeting of the society an interesting insight into this important and highly edifying literature. The office of Treasurer of the Association has been held by a young but very promising member, Mr. R. F. Riley, who also acts as Librarian and discharges the many duties of his several offices with advantage to the society and with infinite credit to himself.

In connection with the library of some three hundred valuable and highly interesting volumes, where all have done so much, it would perhaps be invidious to mention names; suffice it to say that the members and friends of the Association, by their gifts, loans, and subscriptions, have performed a work the value of which to progressive Freethought in Canada it is impossible to overestimate. This library now contains scientific, theological, historical, and philosophical works, making with others a collection such as could perhaps not be matched north of the forty-ninth parallel.

Soon after the formation of the Toronto Liberal Association it was determined to procure Mr. B. F. Underwood to deliver a course of lectures, and Albert Hall, Yonge street, Toronto, having

been permanently rented by the Association, Mr. Underwood delivered his first course of three lectures in that beautiful hall to crowded houses, and this circumstance no doubt forms the turning point in the affairs of this highly progressive society.

We need not remark upon the manner, urbanity, or ability of Mr. Underwood. His subjects were chosen for him by the management of the Association, and although he was bound by the selection thus made, he succeeded in pleasing and instructing his large audiences of both Christians and Freethinkers in such a manner that his lecturing in Toronto is now come to be looked upon as an intellectual treat of the very highest order, and both Christians and Freethinkers hail his advent amongst them with feelings of unmingled pleasure and delight.

This fact carries with it an importance which may be easily overlooked. The easy, gentlemanly, and non-combative style of Mr. Underwood is calculated to do more for the advance of Free Thought in a few years than could be done by centuries of aggressive or violent denunciation. There is a pleasing, logical, convincing manner in the delivery of Mr. Underwood that makes him equally beloved by Christian and Freethinker, and we trust there is a future for this gentleman pregnant with long life, happiness, and success in a higher degree than that usually falling to the lot of the inhabitants of this mundane sphere.

The lectures in Toronto of Mr. Underwood brought as hearers, gentlemen from all parts of the country, in addition to those of long known Freethought proclivities, many of these latter communicated their desire to the officers of the society to have established some means by which they could become more intimately known to each other, and by which they could so communicate their desires that the large Freethought element of Canada could unite in social harmony, and this desire was the more ardently expressed from the fact that the general press of Canada was so much afraid of its own bigoted support that it dared not to publish report, communication, or advertisement from the pen of any Freethinker. The only instance to the contrary was when a narrow-minded, intolerant, and canting communication to the *Mail* had been inserted calling upon the Street Railway Company to disallow the advertisement of the Underwood lectures, this being the only means of advertising then left open by the ill-advised bigotry of superannuated Puritanism. This paper had the manliness to allow one reply, and this brought the hero of Puritanism completely upon his knees, the severe rap which he received over the knuckles has been held ever since in lively remembrance. The author of this attack, together with others of the same ilk, have kept at a respectful distance. The rapidly growing intelligence of Canadians has outgrown the operations of fanaticism, which now hides its head under the mantle of floating time.

The natural consequence of this fanatical action of the press of Toronto made it incumbent on the Freethinkers if possible to provide a means of inter-communication amongst themselves, and a convention of the Friends of Liberty having been proposed, and receiving the assent of the Toronto Liberal Association, steps were taken to advertise as much as possible its first meeting in Albert Hall, Toronto, on April 14, 15, and 16, 1877.

Previous to the meeting of this convention the President had paid a visit to Boston and made arrangements with Messrs. Mendum and Seaver by which a Canadian department was established in that valuable old liberal advocate, the *Boston Investigator*, and a means of advertisement in this and other liberal papers was