

Professor Wrong's Address.

THE first meeting of the Historical Society was held in Convocation Hall on Friday evening, Nov. 13, and gave fair promise for the success of this Society in the work it has attempted. Professor Wrong, of the University of Toronto, was the speaker of the evening and his subject was, "The Meaning of History."

Professor Wrong began by saying that a society that has no history has no depth. Canada, just because she is young, lacks the stability, the veneration for human institutions, the dignity that characterizes the old world.

The law of change, he said, works in human society as in none other. Indeed, human society develops only as the result of ceaseless effort. Is it possible for us to-day, in the light of the record of this change in man, to get a philosophy of history?

Sixty or seventy years ago men had explained history quite readily, but from a prejudiced or partisan point of view. Since then men have reacted from this dogmatism in explaining history and looked at history as simply a "bald, accurate chronological record of facts." But history must have a meaning, an interpretation; for, a mere chronological record of facts and events is not history. We seek a philosophy of history. We want to know if history can answer such questions as these: "What is human organization; has man fallen or risen; what element is it in man that determines his development?" These questions must be answered in accordance with the best scientific knowledge of our time. For example, a philosophy of history must begin with the study of anthropology. History means the development of man's capacities and the science of anthropology confirms this, that man everywhere begins with the outlook of a child. Compared with primitive man, the speaker said, there had been development. But this development was due to a large extent to the influence of external nature, of environment. As to man's progress on the moral and aesthetic side of his life, history is silent. It tells us nothing.

These results teach us that we must come to the study of history with as few pre-conceptions as possible. We must get rid of the pre-conception that there has been and will be an indefinite and illimitable progress. Indeed, history has proven that forms pass away, and that "apparent success is the signal of dissolution."

But although the time has not come for summing up of the results of man's history, yet a study of it is of great service to society in bringing out the truth, and to the student himself in giving power to his intelligence, balance to his judgment and a clear eye for truth.