

FREE THOUGHT JOURNAL



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ADDRESS:

Delivered by W. D. Le Sueur, Esq., at a *Conversazione* of the Progressive Society of Ottawa, held on the 27th December, 1877.

Some years have now passed since a few scattered individuals in the City of Ottawa and its neighbourhood, became aware that they agreed in dissenting from the views entertained by the mass of the community in regard to theological matters. Something more than mere agreement in dissent drew these persons together; their desires and aims were in a great measure concordant; and naturally they "spoke often one to another," sometimes enquiring when the opportunity would arise of enjoying the benefit of regular intercourse. They were sensible of the vast advantages resulting from association, and often wished that their number might some day be such as to make it possible for them to hold regular meetings for purposes of mutual instruction and edification. In addition to those to whom I now more especially refer, there were others of similar views, but less favorably situated, as being more isolated, and scarcely in communication with any one to whom they could look for sympathy, or even unreservedly express their opinions. I need hardly say, that there is no one who needs sympathy more than the Free-thinker. Broadly speaking, he has the world against him, he has the whole force of tradition against him; he has against him to some extent his own organization, moulded as it has been by the institutions and creeds of the past. On the other hand, of course, he can take himself to witness, in the fine language of Matthew Arnold, that he has

"Loved no darkness
Sophisticated no truth,
Nursed no delusion
Allowed no fear."

* "Empedocles on Etna."

Still he cannot thoroughly enjoy his liberty alone; and when he sees a hostile world, he wants to know and to feel that some one stands abreast of him,—that he is not all alone. Cut a man off from all congenial companionship, make no demands upon his social faculties, and there is much danger that his moral nature will either wither or harden, that everything will fall away from him, but the impenetrable little nucleus of self. We all need the discipline of common work carried on, not in the spirit of competition, but in the simple spirit of good-fellowship. This alone will place us in right relations with our fellow-men, this alone will enable us to regard the world with all its varied activities in a spirit of broad humanity. Do you say that, in the very act of associating upon special lines, we form ourselves into a set apart from the rest of society? I answer, yes; but by partaking, ourselves, of the benefits of association, we learn to respect more or less every institution, every influence, that binds men in the bonds of good fellowship, and educates them in the science of society. We shake off our individualism, and learn that men were made for one another, and that the highest happiness any man can realize is that which comes from social harmony. To have felt this even once, is to have been a man in the highest sense of the word; to have felt it never is to have missed the chief glory of life and of humanity.

At length, to those who were waiting and hoping, an opportunity such as they desired presented itself. An attempt which was made to establish a Unitarian Society in this city, brought them together. Some were at first disposed to assist the Unitarian scheme; but after a free interchange of views, it became apparent that a freer and less formal organization was what they really desired. A very informal meeting of half a dozen persons was held in the street after one of the Unitarian meetings, and it was then and there determined to organize a Liberal Society. What precise shape it would take, no one then knew; but every member of that little assembly knew that something was wanted; and all seemed to think that they were agreed as to what that something was. Well, that was eight months ago, and the result of the brief conference then held was the organization of the Progressive Society.

There are several questions concerning our organization which