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## The Canada Presbyterian

O. BLACKETT ROBINSON, MANAGER.

TORONTO, WEDNESDAY, NOV. 6TH, 1895.

THERE are some things many times worse than war. The system of lynching that prevails in the Southern States is one of them.

THE Sabbath is the bulwark of Protestantism. No man should pose as a Protestant and at the same time hold and practise loose views in regard to the Lord's Day.

THE Rev. Alexander MacMillan, B.D., late of Mimico, asks all who may wish to communicate with him in regard to the music of the new hymnal to note his new address, 87 Metcalfe St., Toronto.

AT this season of the year cities on this side of the Atlantic take a fit of municipal reform. It does not always seem to strike the reformers that the best municipal system may be worse than useless without capable honest men to work it.

LAURIER learned his English from Shakespeare, Milton and other standard English writers. Most of us learned some of ours in the street and in schools that were not specially classical. That may be one reason why Laurier's English is so much above the Canadian average.

IF all the sluggers in the American Union could be induced to meet in some quiet spot and destroy one another in a reasonably expeditious way their removal would add immensely to the sum total of the morality of this continent. The trouble is that they fight their battles in the newspapers and the reports of their sayings and doings are thrust every morning under the eyes of decent people. Surely the public have heard enough about the two ruffians and their friends who profess to be anxiously looking for a place to fight. The authorities should give them a place on condition that they fight until there is not one of them left alive.

THE Presbyterians of Claysville, Washington County, Pennsylvania, had a great celebration the other week. The occasion was the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Presbyterian congregation of Claysville. Among other things it was stated that this congregation "had raised up and sent out sixteen ministers of the gospel." The Presbyterian congregation of West Zorra, has in about fifty years sent out more than twice sixteen ministers. When it is seventy-five years old we venture to say it will have raised fifty ministers. The re-

cord of Claysville is good but in the business of raising ministers Claysville is simply nowhere compared with our West Zorra.

THE *Interior* says:

We send loving greetings to THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN. If Lord Salisbury keeps on his present course, our General Assembly will gather in all the good Presbyterians from Nova Scotia to Vancouver Island. We will hold the grand reunion in Chicago. There may be a little noise and scolding among the ships and batteries for awhile, but it will end in a sunrise which will make an amber glory of the smoke of the cannon.

The "greetings" are most gratefully received and most cordially reciprocated, but what has Lord Salisbury to do with the Presbyterianism of Canada. His Lordship has not the good fortune to be even a member of the Presbyterian Church. He belongs to the Historic Episcopate, the church with which the American Presbyterians have been unsuccessfully dickering about organic union for some years.

LAST week brought the nearest approach to war excitement that the present generation has seen. If the facts are as stated by the *Times* correspondent in China war would be inevitable. Great Britain and her allies cannot afford to allow Russia to turn the Pacific Ocean into a "Russian lake," as one of the leading English journals had it. The report may have been nothing more than a "feeler." If so Russia now knows exactly how Great Britain feels on the question. Russia endorsed for the Chinese loan and if the consideration given for the accommodation is the right to run railways to the seaboard and the use of harbors for the Russian fleet in Chinese waters there is certainly trouble not far away. The only question is are the facts as stated in the *Times*. If they are war may almost be taken for granted.

IS a judge above criticism? That is a question with which the press of this country wrestles occasionally. Some of our contemporaries seem to think he is, and one modifies that opinion by saying he is "virtually" above criticism. Nobody in England would ask, much less discuss, any such question. The press of England assumes that every public servant—any official in the realm who receives public money—is a fit subject for criticism. Even royalty does not escape. One reason why the administration of justice in England has become almost an exact science is because the press of the empire never hesitates a moment to criticise the proceedings in the courts. The morning after the verdict in a great trial has been given, any journal feels at liberty to publish a column of criticism and the presiding judge often gets his share as well as all the other parties in the trial. Why should it be otherwise in Canada. Are our judges so perfect that they need no criticism or so weak that they cannot stand it? Or is the main difference in the newspapers? The other day one of the judges was reported as saying that the decision of his learned brother in the court below was "nonsense." If judges criticise each other in that way, it seems absurd to say that the press of the country should consider them above criticism. The English plan is the safe one. John Bull dares to criticise any man that serves the public and takes public money for his work. John knows his business.

## THOUGHTS ON RELIGION.\*

OUR limits will not allow of our entering into any detailed examination of this book; we purpose, therefore, simply to indicate its contents, give some illustrative extracts, and state the general impression produced upon our mind by reading it. It possesses to us no little personal interest from the fact that, the writer of it was the son of the minister under whose preaching we sat when but a boy, over fifty years ago, and that both the uncles after whom he was named were also then known and are still distinctly remembered.

Turning to the work itself, we have first a preface by the editor, designed to introduce the reader to the author and put him somewhat *en rapport* with him by telling us of his early work, the character of his mind, and the nature of his intellectual pur-

\* "Thoughts on Religion," by the late George John Romanes, M.A., LL.D., F.R.S., edited by Charles Gore, M.A., Canon of Westminster. Second edition. Chicago, The Open Court Publishing Company.

suits. In this preface is reproduced the closing chapter of a work published anonymously by him when twenty-eight years of age, entitled, "A Candid Examination of Theism." Next are given two articles written some time before 1889 for the *Nineteenth Century*, but never before published; and lastly, as part II, with an introductory note by the editor, the most important portion of the work, entitled, "Notes for a Work on a Candid Examination of Religion." In this last part of the work are discussed such subjects as Causality, Free Will, Faith, Faith in Christianity, Regeneration, Conversion, Christianity and Pain, Plan in Revelation, Christian Dogmas, Reasonableness of the Doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity, with some others of a cognate kind.

The book, though small and comparatively fragmentary, is one of great intellectual and singularly pathetic interest. In 1873, when twenty-five years of age, Mr. Romanes gained the Burney Prize at Cambridge for an essay on "Christian Prayer considered in Relation to the Belief that the Almighty Governs the World by General Laws," an essay which the editor describes as one of "remarkable ability." He adds: "The sympathy with the scientific point of view is there, as might be expected perhaps in a Cambridge 'Scholar in Natural Science,' the logical acumen and love of exact distinctions is there; there too the natural piety and spiritual appreciation of the nature of Christian prayer, a piety and appreciation which later intellectual habits of thought could never eradicate." Three years later, in 1876, so rapidly had a change taken place in his views, "he had written an anonymous work with a wholly sceptical conclusion" entitled "A Candid Examination of Theism." The outcome of this examination he thus states: "The only alternative for any man in this matter (the existence of God) is, either to discipline himself into an attitude of pure scepticism, and thus to refuse in thought to entertain either a probability, or an improbability, concerning the existence of God; or else to incline in thought towards an affirmation or negation of God, according as his previous habits of thought have rendered such an inclination more facile in the one direction than in the other." His state of mind and feeling from this conclusion which he had reasoned himself into, is one of the saddest confessions which we have seen, and it is only one of many instances occurring in the work, illustrating a frankness and perfect honesty of mind which makes his confession all the more pathetic. "In conclusion," he says,

"I feel it is desirable to state that any antecedent bias with regard to Theism which I individually possess, is unquestionably on the side of traditional beliefs. It is therefore with the utmost sorrow that I find myself compelled to accept the conclusions here worked out. And forasmuch as I am far from being able to agree with those who affirm that the twilight doctrine of the 'new faith,' is a desirable substitute for the waning splendor of 'the old,' I am not ashamed to confess that, with this virtual negation of God, the universe to me has lost its soul of loveliness; and although from henceforth the precept to 'work while it is day,' will doubtless but gain an intensified force from the terribly intensified meaning of the word that 'the night cometh when no man can work,' yet when at times I think, as I think at times I must, of the appalling glory of that creed which once was mine, and the lonely mystery of existence as I now find it, at such times I shall ever feel it impossible to avoid the sharpest pang of which my nature is capable."

Such is the confession which he makes as to the effect upon his own peace of mind, and his capacity for enjoyment of worldly good, which results from embracing scepticism, or pure agnosticism. It is most interesting to learn what, with equal candour he tells us, he has found in his experience to be the state of others who have been trying to live without an acknowledgment of God.

"The negative evidence for the existence of God," he says, "is furnished by the nature of man without God. It is thoroughly miserable, as is well shown by Pascal. Some men are not conscious of the cause of this misery; this however does not prevent the fact of their being miserable. For the most part they conceal the fact as well as possible from themselves by occupying their minds with society, sport, frivolity of all kinds, or if intellectually disposed with science, art, business, etc. This however is but to fill the starving belly with husks. It has been my lot to know not a few of the famous men of our generation, and I have always observed that this is profoundly true. Like all other moral satisfactions, namely the recognition by the world of high achievement by ourselves, this soon palls by custom, and as soon as one end of distinction is reached, another is pined for. There is no finality to rest in, while disease and death are always standing in the background. Custom may even blind men to their misery, so far as not to make them realize what is wanting; yet the want is there."

If we enquire into the reason for this unbelief or agnosticism, he makes again this honest con-