

THE
CANADIAN QUARTERLY REVIEW.

No. I.

FOR JANUARY, 1856.

OUR MISSION.

The history of human progress presents a continuous conflict to realize a few truths, seen in the abstract, by an endless multiplicity of wrong agencies, and wrong methods of application. This is no where more conspicuous than in the diversified means employed to fit the young for the business of manhood. While, in the aggregate, there is a unanimity of purpose with regard to imparting in early life the precepts, the habits and professional talents that qualify the individual to perform creditably and profitably the duties of his earthly mission, and the teacher no less than the parent aspires zealously to mould youthful character into the desired conformation, there is still an acknowledged* inadequacy of the means employed to the end sought to be attained, in the contrast between the actual man, who is the matured result of educational labor, and the ideal type which governs the successive stages of the educational process. And this disparity is not limited to isolated cases, to local causes or sectional influences; but is common to the human family, in all its forms of civilisation. Educational professions are much the same everywhere. They aim in all cases to make men what they should be, to improve the race and to benefit society. There is a solid stratum of goodness, a spark of the divine essence planted deeply and irascibly in the being of every human creature that works for good, and, amid even the darkest nurturings of depravity, glimmers forth to show that there is a forlorn hope, notwithstanding that education and circumstances may have conspired to make the individual what he would not otherwise have been. So far there is no difference regarding the object to be accomplished, for the professions and intentions of both parents and teachers, under varying systems, unequivocally aim at the most benevolent results. But when, with a critical eye, we come to look at the practice and to examine the instrumentalities of education, the work seems a series of contradictions throughout most of its details. Both the teachers and the pupils appear the victims of a system or systems, at once arbitrary and irrational. The former hold on by a series of canonized formularies, to depart from which would be

open heresy; while the latter are dragged, parrot like, through a course of committals and rehearsals of themes and learned phrases, the natural elements and structure of which they are not taught to understand. The memory is made paramount to the reason. Whatever is acquired is by rote. And this, as we have said, is not an exceptional practice; it is the general rule. And so one generation succeeds another; men grow up, enter life and perform their part on its busy theatre according to one set form; and when they quit, it is to make way for others who are prepared, by similar parental and scholastic instruction, to pass through the same undeviating routine, without questioning or knowing the rationale or ground of their inherited misconceptions.

If the disparity thus manifested betwixt the abstract truth and the practical result, is attributable to miscalculated means and to a misconception of the required conditions, it requires no great faculty of perception to indicate the course which ought to be pursued in order to make the means and the end harmonize. It becomes necessary, in short, to go back to first principles and to make use of a mathematical mode of procedure, in distinguishing between what should be rejected, as belonging to the old established regimen, and what, in the new series of suggestions, is worthy of adoption. By so doing we arrive, at once, at the fact that the most important errors and defects of the present mode of teaching lie at the very threshold, when the child first enters on the rudiments of his native tongue; that they extend to the more advanced branches in the English department; and farther, that they make the study of foreign languages an affair of the greatest difficulty and, in most cases, altogether impracticable. These are grave reflections which, nevertheless, appear still more serious when they come to be minutely examined.

And the evil is not confined to the difficulty of acquiring even an imperfect acquaintance with native or foreign languages. It has of late years assumed a form pregnant with a latent and expressed desire and intention to circumscribe the department of ancient languages; if not, eventually, to suppress it altogether. The most recent indication of the popular mind, including the feeling among a respectable class of educationists connected