

FRENCH-CANADIAN LITERATURE.

BY W. D. LIGHTHALL, M.A., F.R.S.L.

WHEN I promised to contribute a paper on the literature of the French Canadians I fell upon an evil hour, for that which makes cowards of us all soon extracted the confession that I was ill equipped to render the necessary justice. All my life I have had to deal with this people, their language, and their institutions, and still I hold that no man who is not born to a speech can judge it with perfect truth. It has seemed to me, therefore, that of attempting the whole subject, I should have no pretence at anything but some personal impressions and considerations, in the hope of lending the reader my own pair of spectacles.

In a former paper before this Society I advanced some ideas on the conditions of colonial literatures. The same principles apply to French-Canadian writing. It is an outgrowth of the application of the instinct of art in its form of the literary art, to a new and distinctive field of scenes and emotions.

In 1608 Champlain founded Quebec. During his generation the tiny population were chiefly birds of