

civilized world. Again—we have had as yet in Canada none of those public political circumstances that often produce a marked effect upon the literature of a country. In explanation of this remark two illustrations may be referred to. Almost immediately after the conclusion of the wars with Persia, Greek art and letters attained their highest development. This successful struggle had such an inspiring effect upon the Athenian intellect, that it resulted in the ushering in of the most brilliant epoch of literary and artistic activity that the world has ever seen. It is well known that all great historical dramas, non-Shakspearian ones included, the material for which is taken from English history, were created by the English stage in not much more than one decade, in the happiest moment of the happy age of Queen Elizabeth, when a rare national elevation pervaded the whole English people. Gervinu remarks, how eloquently, in Shakspeare's dramas of *Richard II.* *Henry V.* and *VI.*, does not only the patriotic spirit of the poet speak, but also the self-conceit of a people who have again learned to know themselves in the midst of successful events. The whole age influenced the creation and spirit of these historical pieces, and these again had a corresponding influence upon the patriotic spirit of the people.

It will readily be seen, therefore, that in Canada we have had, as yet, none of the causes predisposing to the creation of a classic national literature.

We may enter now upon the question, does Canada offer any subjects of interest peculiar to herself, and favourable to the elaboration of such a literature as we have above referred to?

In order to deal with this question appropriately we shall require to glance briefly at each wide and varied field which the domain of letters presents.

We may consider then first, that which is universally regarded as offering the highest and most sublime arena for the display of the powers of the gen-

uine poet—the Epic. Does Canada then present any materials for the production of a great national Epic? This question must be reluctantly answered in the negative. We can refer to no hero or heroes of even respectable antiquity; heroes whose doughty deeds or brilliant achievements would evoke the enthusiastic admiration of all future Canadians; celebrate no fabulous contests of giant warriors; perpetuate no memories of ostentatious potentates, magnanimous in their condescension to friends, in their clemency to foes; cherish no remembrances of inspired bards, chanting with impassioned fervour the lays and deeds of other times. We have, in fact, nothing to correspond to the heroes that form the theme of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of the Greeks, of the *Æneid* of the Romans, or the *Nibelungenlied* of the Germans, or even of the legends of Arthur of the English. We can have, therefore, no national Epic.

We pass on now to the consideration of the Drama, and in this department it is difficult to see that Canada presents any striking facilities or advantages for the creation of a national Drama. Indeed, the production of a drama of a high order must ever remain a great difficulty to any nationality that has retained the language of Shakspeare and Ben Jonson. The creation of a classic drama is a fact now almost universally regarded as one of the lost arts. Of course, it is not impossible, years hence, for some great Canadian to arise and reflect honor on his natal soil by the productions of a genius so peculiarly adapted and gifted as to meet successfully the vast and varied requirements essential to the creation of the highest triumphs of the Tragic Muse. But, it must be confessed, that there is little likelihood of such a phenomenal appearance in Canadian literature for many a year to come.

We shall turn our attention now to the department of History, in which prose literature may attain its highest and most enduring excellence. On a retrospective of the early history of our country,