

ENGLISH-CANADIAN AND AMERICAN
LITERATURE.



IN contrasting the literature of Canada and the United States, it will be necessary from the outset to keep in mind what a national literature should be, for neither our fair Dominion, rapid and prosperous as have been her strides during the past century in material, intellectual and spiritual progress, nor the neighboring republic, although eclipsing the older and richer powers of Europe, in her gigantic efforts to build up a powerful and compact nation, can be said to possess a distinct national literature, a literature in which the history of our people is reflected, a literature bearing upon it the stamp of originality, and the tone and dignity which characterize the literature of the first nations of the civilized world.

Nor should the Canadian and American people be censured because their literature is still feeble, incomplete and provincial, for whether we regard the age of these countries, the natural difficulties subsequent upon early settlement,—the various nationalities which go to make up our population, and which cannot as yet be said to have properly coalesced, we find ample apologies for the crude and unpolished condition of our literature.

A barbarous race, recognizing neither the God of nature nor revelation, had to be subjected, taught and civilized, the primeval forests, through which the deer and bison roamed unmolested, save when startled by the occasional arrow of the red man, demanded the labors of the original settlers, dwellings had to be constructed to shut out the biting blasts of our northern clime, forts erected to ward off the still fiercer onslaughts of the forest tribes, and all this before a single thought could be given to laying the foundation of national schools. "It seems but yesterday," says a Canadian writer, "since the savage Indian dipped his noble limbs in our sedgy lakes, and paddled his birch canoe along our rocky shores. Scarce two generations have passed since on the very spot where we now stand, surrounded with all that exalts and embellishes civil-

ized life, the rank thistle nodded in the wind, and the wild fox dug his hole unscared." Note the change! Across the sea came a ship equipped by a Catholic queen, and guided by a Catholic captain, bearing the seeds of "life and death." The former were sown for us, the latter sprang up in the path of the simple native. America was discovered, a new continent had risen from the bosom of the parent ocean, and towards it the eyes of Europe were turned. Settlement followed settlement, grant followed grant, strife followed strife, till America bid fair to become the battle ground of contending European powers, each claiming and asserting her rights to rule over definite portions of this new-found world. But time which delights to obliterate the stern memorials of human pride, has made all things right, and to-day peace reigns supreme from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from California to Greenland. Though young in years, yet, we are old in experience, for the peace, unity, strength and freedom, which mark both countries have been preserved despite the vindictive attacks of our unnatural enemies. Our soil, too, fruitful by nature, has been enriched by the blood of martyred priests, and much of the civilization, refinement and comfort which we now enjoy, was created for us by the zeal, self-abnegation and devotion of the provident minority, whose names are wanting on the pages of our history, and whose deeds of heroic valor are buried with the past. These facts are here stated, not because they have any direct bearing on the subject of this essay, at least under present circumstances, but because they should have, and moreover, because they should be of such vital importance, that our histories would necessarily be incomplete without them. The history of Canada, though every school-boy imagines he can write it, and the history of the United States, though many have been the recorders of American progress, remain to be written. The best histories of Canada (if we may accord them this dignified title), that have as yet appeared are little better than a "mere tissue of