

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

THE GENIUS AND DISTINCTION OF CANADIAN POETRY.*

SOME tell us that Canada has no "national" literature. I take these critics at their word, and I remark that, in the sense in which they apply the epithet, no other country has, or has had, a "national" literature.

The question, "Has Canada a national literature?" meaning by that, "Has this country a definitive quantity of imaginative prose and poetry which in substance and form differs wholly from any other literature?" is a nonsense question! One might as well ask, "Do Canadians differ in body and mind wholly from other races on earth?" Just so a literature which were so "national" as to be like no other, would not be human and would therefore not be literature at all; it would be something else and would have to be categorized as a new species of artistic expression.

What these critics are attempting to ask is a quite proper and important question, with a definitive answer,

*This is the companion essay to another on "The Social Basis of American Prose," published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, May, 1901.