

THE CANADA
EDUCATIONAL MONTHLY

JANUARY, 1900.

SIR WILLIAM DAWSON AT MCGILL.

PROF. C. W. COLBY, M.A., PH. D. (HARVARD).

By the death of Sir William Dawson we have lost one of our most distinguished students and one of our most useful citizens. The eminence which he reached among men of science was a great thing for the country, because at the time when he began to publish his papers on Canadian geology, few native born Canadians had won even a local recognition of their scientific attainments. While favored by fortune in having a large, unexplored territory at hand, he must have been hampered during his early years by defect of means and by a certain isolation from those who were working in the same department of knowledge. His publications give proof of unusual diligence, and the honors which he received set a seal upon the quality of his performance. In 1882 he became President of the American Association, and was awarded the Lyell Medal of the London Geological Society. In 1885 he became President of the British Association. These distinctions are chosen for notice out of many, on the ground that they attest his professional standing among geologists. He was also the first President of the Royal Society of Canada and a knight, but he probably owed such marks of

dignity to his general prominence and services.

While Dawson thus won in science a reputation which brought credit to the Dominion, he did not confine himself to the labors of erudition. By his writings he gave an impetus to Canadian scholarship, and by unstinted perseverance he developed a large university out of almost nothing. It would be idle to discuss the question whether he gained wider fame from his connection with geology or education, but he certainly became a source of widely diffused good when he took charge of McGill's interests in 1855. For thirty eight years he represented Protestant education in the Province of Quebec, not only through his connection with McGill, but by virtue of his keen sympathy with the academies and elementary schools. He possessed creative talent; he never lacked a policy, and, by the sincerity of his own zeal for learning, he carried conviction to the wealthy men of Montreal. The story of his purposes and success deserves to be told in a special memoir.

During his later years, Dawson collected materials for a history of Protestant education in Lower Canada since 1791. Although he never