

THE
EDUCATIONAL RECORD
OF THE
PROVINCE OF QUEBEC.

No. 5.

MAY, 1887.

VOL. VII.

Articles: Original and Selected.

PARADISE LOST AND LA HENRIADE.

BY FRÉDÉRIC DEKASTNER, QUEBEC.*

I.

In the following essay, it is the intention of the writer to examine, as concisely as possible, the conditions under which epic poetry may attain to the highest point of perfection and grandeur of which it is susceptible, and in the particular case which occupies our attention, we will endeavor to discuss why Milton, as an epic poet, so far succeeded and why Voltaire failed. It may be said at first that never did there appear on the literary stage two such great poetic spirits more dissimilar, with environments so different:—the one, English, Protestant, Puritan, religious, solemn, enthusiastic, born in the England of the first half of the seventeenth century, that is to say, amidst surroundings the most favorable to the production of an epic poem, during one of those privileged epochs in which the people (adopting the expression of a certain critic) knew how to speak as a man, before having lost the heart of the child;—the other, French, Catholic by birth, brought up among the Jesuits, with no fixed religious opinions, the deadly enemy of fanaticism, the great apostle of tolerance, born in the France of the eighteenth century, fond of innovations,

* A paper read before the Local Association of Teachers, Quebec; to be continued in subsequent numbers.