

# NEW DOMINION MONTHLY.

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## PRIMITIVE EDUCATION IN ONTARIO.

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Nearly one century has passed since the actual settlement of the Province of Ontario began, by the hegira of the Loyalists from the rebellious colonies. During this time the wilderness and solitary places have given way to cultivated farms and haunts of civilized industry, and the descendants of those who struggled to overcome the many obstacles that disputed their right now live in the undisturbed possession of social and literary comforts of a high order. It would have been a difficult matter for our ancestors, when they landed upon the wild shores of Canada in 1784, to conceive a future of such remarkable transitions, and that, too, within such a limited period. Many of them had barely gained a comfortable home in the rebel colonies, before the angry wave of discontent rolled across the country, and left them aliens and destitute. Another effort was made, and under most adverse circumstances, which compelled them to use all kinds of self-denial in order to succeed in the discouraging contest. They were, for the most part, deficient in literary tastes, and the condition they found themselves in, after escaping from persecution, was not calculated to improve them much in this respect. It has been related, also, that some objection was urged against the general introduction of schools by the early settlers, on the ground that the encouragement of such tastes would tend to disqualify for the rough life of a pioneer, which was an imperative necessity at that time. We have no authority for this state-

ment, and shall treat it as a libel, especially so in view of the praiseworthy ambition soon shown by the settlers for improving their own and their children's education.

It is probable that the French, during the time they occupied the country, had schools for instruction at the different posts, and particularly at Cataraqui, which was their principal rendezvous west of Montreal. In the absence of facts we are unable to speak upon this point with any certainty, but it does not seem reasonable that so intelligent and enterprising a race would be content to remain in comparative ignorance for so long a period. Many of them must have spent the greater part of their lives in Canada, and no doubt were educated by those hardy, energetic Recollects, who accompanied and encouraged every enterprise, and who manifested so much zeal for the triumph of French dominion in the New World. As usual with Roman Catholic policy, religious and secular education were inseparably connected, and at that time more necessarily so than at the present time.

Immediately after the Revolutionary struggle, we find mention made of schools being established in the Province, and efforts made for the promotion of educational privileges among the settlers. The first schools were, in fact, organized about the domestic hearth of the pioneer during the long winter evenings. Here the family would gather after the day's toil was over, and attentively listen to exciting tales of