

THE CANADA
EDUCATIONAL MONTHLY
AND SCHOOL MAGAZINE.

MAY, 1887.

ON THE ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE.

BY PROFESSOR WILLIAM CLARKE, TRINITY COLLEGE, TORONTO.

(Continued from page 131).

HUMILITY is the foundation of all true knowledge of nature, of man, or of God. Except we become as little children, we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. God hides the truths of His kingdom from the wise and prudent, and reveals them unto babes. And it is the same with knowledge. "It is a point fit and necessary," says Lord Bacon, in his "Interpretation of Nature,"* "in the front and beginning of this work, without hesitation or reserve to be professed, that it is no less true in this human kingdom of knowledge than in God's kingdom of heaven, that no man shall enter it *except he become first as a little child.*"

There is nothing paradoxical or difficult in this statement. If men have associated the possession of human knowledge with high-mindedness, it has been because they have been influenced by prejudice or by

jealousy, or else because they have selected some isolated examples, and made them typical of the whole class. If we proceeded in this matter with careful and deliberate examination, we should speedily discover that conceit and self-sufficiency, wherever found, are powerful hindrances to the attaining of solid and accurate knowledge. It is the man who knows his ignorance, his small capacity, the boundlessness of knowledge, the extreme difficulty of perfect accuracy, the labour needed for the acquisition of any real knowledge—it is such an one who will always make the most successful student. And as a matter of fact, the greatest thinkers, scholars, discoverers, and inventors, have commonly been the men of the deepest humility. The story of Sir Isaac Newton is well known. Whatever he might seem to others, to himself he was but as the child upon the sea-shore, finding perhaps some pebbles more beautiful than those which

* Works, iii. 224.