

ROYAL SOCIETY OF CANADA.

ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT, DR. DANIEL WILSON.

OUR NATIVE LANGUAGES.

WE meet to-day after another year of work as a Society, to report progress, and to submit, in the various Sections, the contributions of the year to the departments of letters and science embraced within our comprehensive organization. In fulfilling the duty that now devolves on me, I might be tempted to follow the example of some who, in analogous positions, have surveyed the whole field of work, with its possibilities and opportunities: I might aim at a *résumé* not only of the actual achievements of Canadian science and letters, but of all that lies within the compass of its most ambitious aims. But such an attempt would involve a review of the intellectual life of the age. Physics and metaphysics, palæontology, archæology, history and *belles-lettres*, all alike claim our attention; but amid the wide diversity of intellectual activity which marks the era, a disposition is increasingly manifested to give the foremost place to questions which directly affect humanity. The speculations of science more and more converge towards one centre; and along with this it is impossible to overlook the growing tendency among one class of enquirers to translate hypothesis into scientific dogma. It is well that we should ever bear in remembrance that "Evolution," which is the magic word assumed for the present to solve all difficulties, necessarily implies progressive change; and so points to a beginning—a Creator. This novel hypothesis of the great English naturalist of our century, which offers for its acceptance a new science of life, has revolutionized the whole course

of scientific speculation. The geologist, responding to its appeal, undertakes, on strictly scientific evidence, the significant problem of the antiquity of man. The biologist unites with the palæontologist, in a renewed search for his pedigree. The psychologist has embraced within the sphere of his philosophic speculations the evolution of the intellectual powers, the conscience and the will; and assumes no less dogmatically to determine the descent of mind.

With so vast a range of speculation thus comprehended within the field of scientific research, the most gifted student might well hesitate to cope with the theme, in this its revolutionary stage. For me, the attempt would be altogether presumptuous; and I shall best fulfil the duty now devolving on me by limiting myself mainly to one department of research, which, as I conceive, has special and urgent claims on the attention of this Society at the present time.

The Science of Language, itself among the youngest of the sciences, has not escaped the influence of the new revolution; and novel theories of the evolution of language itself supersede earlier enquiries into the origin of letters. In one respect the Royal Society of Canada differs in its constitution from older kindred societies of the mother country, in so far as it includes, within the recognized work of its Sections, both French and English literature. Here, accordingly, language finds its legitimate place; and without embarking on the seemingly shoreless sea of speculation and hypothesis that I have indicated, there are certain aspects of comparative philology