

JOURNAL OF EDUCATION.

FOR THE PROVINCE OF NOVA SCOTIA.

SUPERFICIAL EDUCATION.

THE progress of knowledge has given birth, within the past century, to so many useful arts and sciences that a man of liberal curiosity finds both sufficient occupation for his time and sufficient exercise for his understanding, in acquiring a superficial knowledge of such as are most inviting and most popular, and consequently has much less leisure and inducement than formerly, to dedicate himself to these abstract studies which call for more patient and persevering attention. In olden times, a man had nothing for it, but either to be absolutely ignorant and idle, or to take seriously to theology and the school logic. When things grew a little better, the classics and mathematics filled up the measure of general education and private studies, as pursued at the present time. Philosophy received little addition. Some few individuals might attend to other things; but a knowledge of these was all that was required of men of good education, and was held accomplishment enough to entitle them to the rank of scholars and philosophers. Now-a-days, however, the necessary qualification is prodigiously raised, at least in denomination, and a man can scarcely pass current in the informed circles of society, without knowing something of political economy, chemistry, mineralogy, geology and etymology,—having a small notion of painting, a taste for the picturesque, a smattering of literature and the languages; some knowledge of trade and agriculture, and a far more extensive knowledge of existing parties, factions and eminent individuals, both literary and political, at home and abroad, than ever were required at any other period of society. The dissipation of time and of attention that is occasioned by these multifarious occupations is, of course, very unfavorable to the pursuit of any abstract or continued study; and even if a man could, for himself, be content to remain ignorant of many things, in order to obtain a profound knowledge of a few, it would be difficult for him, in the present state of the world, to resist the impulse and the seduction that assail him from without. Various and superficial knowledge is now not only so common, that the want of it is felt as a disgrace; but the facilities of acquiring it are so great that it is scarcely possible to defend ourselves against its intrusion. So many easy and pleasant elementary books, such tempting summaries, abstracts and tables, —such beautiful engravings and ingenious charts, and *coups d'œil* of information, that a taste for miscellaneous and imperfect education is formed almost before we are aware, and our time and curiosity irrevocably devoted to a sort of encyclopedical trifling. In the mean time, the misfortune is, that there is no popular or royal road to the profounder and more abstract truths of philosophy, and that these are apt accordingly, to fall into discredit or neglect, at a period when it is labor enough for most men to keep themselves up to the level of that great tide of popular information which has been rising, with such unexampled rapidity, for the past century.

Such, we think, are the most general and uncontrollable causes which have to some extent depressed the study of those sciences which require thought and earnest application, far below the level of the importance attached to them earlier in the century, and produced the singular appearance of a partial falling off in the intellectual enterprise and vigor of an age distinguished, perhaps, above all others, for the rapid development of the human faculties. The root of what may be called the "smattering evil," takes firm ground here, and spreads with great rapidity, until the world is filled with men whose education exhibits but partially the triumphs of educational culture.

A PROVINCIAL UNIVERSITY.

The subject of Colleges and collegiate education is, very naturally and properly receiving, just now, an unwonted share of public attention in this province. By the extent of the interest in the subject, although not in the excitement it causes, one is reminded of a period in our Provincial history about thirty years ago, when the great battle of Denominational Colleges was fought out. The tide of public opinion now, too, unquestionably sets in a different direction from what it then did.

The establishment of Denominational Colleges, of course, by the popular wish, was owing, nevertheless, rather to a series of circumstances, over which the great body of the people have no control, rather than to any decided feeling on their part in favor of such institutions. We have no wish, nor would this be the place to re-open the old controversy of the period referred to. It is sufficient for our present purpose to remark that Denominational Colleges were founded, whatever the cause; and that they have now, as such, been all in full operation for about thirty years. We must add that there is a rapidly growing opinion in the community that these institutions are not up to the present requirements of the country.

A calm and careful view of their position will, we think, lead any impartial and intelligent observer to the conclusion that it could not be otherwise. These Colleges have unquestionably done good work in their day. They happened to be suited to the time,—probably much better than if their place, during the period mentioned, had been filled by a single Provincial University, of the best class of the time. But they did this at a terrible personal sacrifice to many gentlemen who were mainly instrumental in keeping them up. As was natural to suppose, there was a rivalry between these institutions, but neither an unseemly, nor a malignant one. The Colleges were many and the candidates for matriculation were few. Consequently the cost of Collegiate education was reduced, through competition, to the lowest possible rate—we should say to an impossibly low rate if the Colleges were expected to be self-sustaining. Extensive private contributions had to be made for their support. This state of affairs, could not long continue, since even the most intense denominational zeal, when its exercise necessitates continuous pecuniary burdens is apt to flag.

But even during the most cheering and most successful periods of the Denominational regime down to the present moment, every one familiarly acquainted with its working cannot but know that the professors and tutors have been most miserably paid. The men whom we are bound to suppose are among those possessing the best native talents and the highest intellectual cultivation of any in the land, and who, too, as the instructors of youth, have the most solemn obligations resting upon their shoulders, are more meanly remunerated for their labor than any other men in the community possessing like or even much inferior, attainments. This should not be unless these gentlemen prefer it. But further, every one of these Colleges is meagrely provided—and because under the existing system, it cannot be otherwise—with a staff of instructors to teach the various branches embraced in its curriculum. Given, a certain number of branches to be taught in a college, or any other high class institution of learning, the Professional faculty can manage and instruct five hundred students quite as efficiently as it can fifty; and because there are only fifty students in the college, a staff of instructors inefficient as to numbers or attainments, can do no more justice to that fifty than it could to five hundred. In nothing more does the principle of the necessary division of labor to produce good results, apply than in the Art of Educating. We believe that we are safe in saying that the average annual attendance of students in each of the Colleges in Nova Scotia, for the past thirty years, has not exceeded thirty. Still again, our Colleges in this Province, are, from the very necessities of their sectional position, all meagrely supplied with libraries, apparatus, and such like facilities to aid in high toned intellectual development.

We cannot but think that the time has arrived when a new movement should be made relative to Collegiate Education in