

CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE.

THE LAST FORTY YEARS: Canada since the Union of 1841, by John Charles Dent, 2 vols. 4to. Toronto: George Virtue.

THE completion of Mr. Dent's survey of Canadian history from the period of the union of the two older provinces, calls for a few words of comment, in acknowledgment of the successive issues of the work from the publisher. In THE MONTHLY for December last, we took occasion, in a resumé of "Recent Canadian Literature," to direct the attention of our readers to the publication, and to congratulate its author in his successful venture, of writing a picturesque narrative of contemporary history. The plan of the work, as we then described it, is that of grouping the main incidents in our recent history which illustrate the formative periods of the country's growth, into a succession of entertaining chapters, rather than the setting forth in minute detail of the history from year to year. Not only is this method, which Mr. Justin McCarthy has made familiar to us in his *History of Our Own Time*, acceptable to the reader, and we should say easy of accomplishment to the writer, but it marks off the history into transitional periods and, if the narrative be well strung and the author's style graphic, groups it into well-remembered chapters. If Mr. Dent's style is lacking in some of the higher qualities, and his work unequal, the history runs on very smoothly, and his portraiture is generally accurate and well-drawn. His prevailing fault, if we may speak of it as such, is the effort to be judicial, and to narrate the events of which he treats in a dispassionate and unpartisan mood. This deprives his history of much of the life and colour it might otherwise have, though many will say this is how our annals ought to be written. For ourselves, we would forego a little of the honest plodding to have the spice and ginger of the vigorous and independent thinker. Mr. Dent's work, it ought to be said, however, is far in advance of the sort of historical writing we have been accustomed to meet with in Canada, and his

volumes consequently deserve to take high rank in Canadian literature.

The history is largely political, and its chief topics, as a matter of course, are those which had their scene of action in Parliament. These events, on the whole, are carefully and laboriously dealt with, and include the historic questions of Responsible Government, the Rebellion Losses, Clergy Reserves, Secularization, Seigniorial Tenure, etc. In connection with the discussion of these topics we have a series of portraits of more or less interest to Canadian readers, embracing sketches of Earl Cathcart, Sir Charles Metcalfe, Lord Elgin, Sir Edmund Head, and Messrs. Baldwin, Mackenzie, Papineau, Lafontaine, Hincks, and other worthies of ante-confederation days. The social and industrial history is little dealt with, though reference is made to the opening of the Grand Trunk Railway in 1851, to the transfer of the Hudson Bay Company's possessions, and to a few other kindred topics. The more recent political history, for obvious reasons, has not been touched upon, the narrative closing with the Red River affair in 1870, the San Juan Boundary matter in 1872, and the "ever memorable" Pacific Railway Scandal of 1873.

In the concluding section Mr. Dent devotes some forty pages to a summary of the literary results of the time in journalism and literature. To the reader, fed upon the brain of politics, and whose love of letters does not extend beyond the margin of a party newspaper, this chapter may supply the place of a personal acquaintance with his country's authors. If it does more than this, and shall incite the reader to further research in the field of Canadian literature, to Mr. Dent, and not to any Royal Society, will he owe obligation. In the space at his disposal, Mr. Dent has made a painstaking enumeration of the literary workmen of the Dominion, a force which, if it had the stimulus of public recognition and favour, might win for the country many and unfading laurels. That Canadian literature has hitherto not had this