

THE CANADA
EDUCATIONAL MONTHLY
AND SCHOOL MAGAZINE.

JANUARY, 1889.

THE ART OF QUESTIONING.

J. A. M'LELLAN, M.A., LL.D., INSPECTOR OF NORMAL SCHOOLS AND DIRECTOR
OF TEACHERS' INSTITUTES, ONTARIO.

OF all the qualifications that go to make the successful teacher, ability to question well is probably the most important. The prime object of teaching is to get the pupil to think for himself. This means that his mind is in the proper attitude, that the material for thought is properly presented, and that there is secured the proper relation between the prepared mind and the presented material; or, in other words, that the material has really entered into the structure of knowledge, and at the same time enlarged the structure of mind. To do this and to test the efficiency of the work, judicious questioning is the surest means. It may be said, indeed, that the art of questioning is the art of teaching. Whoever can question well can teach well; whoever fails in this point fails in all. Natural endowments, scholarship, professional knowledge and experience, are all, in a greater or less degree, manifested in the act of questioning. In view of

its importance it is strange that, in training teachers, so little should be made of skill in putting good questions. It seems to be taken for granted that if a teacher knows a subject well he can question upon it well: an outgrowth, or perhaps a modified form, of the error that knowledge of a subject is identical with ability to teach it. Every inspector of school work knows how fallacious is this assumption. Learning, energy, enthusiasm, wide knowledge of the theory and practice of teaching, will prove of little avail without this Socratic qualification, ability to question well—the rarest of attainments—the *master art* of the teacher's calling.

PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE.

Skill in the art of questioning is to be acquired as skill in any other art is acquired, by long and patient practice; one learns to question by questioning. But here, as everywhere, the wider and sounder maxim has its place: *by knowing learn to do*. Mere