

CANADIAN CELEBRITIES.

XX—DR. A. H. MACKAY, EDUCATOR.

THE history of education in Nova Scotia is very interesting, reaching back, as it does, nearly three hundred years. It is closely interwoven, moreover, with the history of the Province. More than one of the changes in provincial development have hinged upon phases of educational importance, and not a few famous Nova Scotians have been prominent as educators. We may trace a ceaseless struggle to obtain the best results—a struggle early begun and faithfully carried forward against all sorts of discouragement. Limited means, isolated districts and sparsely scattered population—these and the like have operated against the spread of good educational methods. The greater credit, then, to those who from the thorn disheartenment have plucked the flower success.

Among the men who aided in the consummation of the work one stands out especially prominent. It is chiefly owing to his strong guiding hand, his impartial methods and stimulating personality that the Public School system of Nova Scotia is to-day in a state of unexampled efficiency. Dr. A. H. Mackay is a Nova Scotian by birth, sympathies and work. His life is a record of indomitable labour.

He comes of Scotch stock on both sides of the family. His grandfather emigrated from Scotland in 1822. Emigrants in those days were of a different type from many that reach our shores to-day. They came out to an unknown country under conditions that only rugged strength could have endured and sturdy courage brought to a successful issue. Such successful issue was reached in the case of the Mackay family, for, some twenty years later, they had a large farm and homestead at North Dalhousie in Pictou County. Here Alexander Howard Mackay was born on May 19th, 1848.

In those early days educational advantages were few and far between. But the lad began life under a father who had very good ideas upon the value of mental training, and a strong determination to put them into practice. From this father young Mackay received what was beyond all price—strength, mental and physical, the *mens sana in corpore sano*, that is so valuable a starting-point for intellectual advancement. Thus the home instruction fell on ready ground. One of the father's theories was that even play should have some distinct bearing upon the business of life. Such influences as this developed in the boy's character the capacity for hard work which became one of the marks of mature age. It was a severe plan, perhaps—there is a hint of the dour Scotch will—but it bore good fruit.

During this period he obtained, of course, whatever schooling he could get. But this was not of the best type. "Before 1865," to quote his own words, "the organization of public schools depended wholly upon local public spirit. Intelligent men knew that 'schooling' gave an advantage to their children in the struggle for advancement. About one thousand schools were 'kept agoing' for at least a portion of the year in the more progressive settlements. But there was no general notion of the necessity of education, nor of the duty of the community to provide for the education of all. There were no public officers like our present Inspectors to stimulate the organization of schools in backward localities, nor were there uniform standards of qualifications for teachers. Rural school houses were generally barn-like sheds, neither sightly nor comfortable, although they had whatever virtue there is in cheapness." There was little incentive to original work for the pupils under this régime.