

I.—*Canadian Copyright.*¹

By Sir DANIEL WILSON, LL.D., F.R.S.E., *President of the University of Toronto.*

(Read May 31st, 1892.)

While the Royal Society of Canada is inviting the publication in its annual volumes of 'Proceedings,' of contributions designed to extend our available resources in special departments of knowledge outside the range of popular literature, and thereby to facilitate the interchange of philosophical speculation, and of the results of scientific discovery and research, it cannot be regarded as foreign to its true functions to take into consideration the facilities, and also the impediments and restrictions affecting Canadian literature. In the report of the Provisional Council, which furnished the basis on which the Royal Society was organized, it is provided in section 9 "That the advice and assistance of the Society shall at all times be at the disposal of the Government of the Dominion in all matters which may be within the scope of the Society's functions." Among the subjects on which the Society may with fitting propriety offer such advice, there are few, if any, that can be more legitimately ranked in such a category than the legislation which aims at placing on a just basis the rights of authorship and the privileges of copyright.

The definite recognition of a proprietary right in the fruits of intellectual activity and the creative powers of genius, alike in letters and in art, is one of the evidences of a matured civilization. The tardy recognition of an author's right of property in the productions of his pen and brain, along with the limitations and restrictions on such rights, furnish materials for an interesting chapter in the history of civilization. It was undoubtedly due to the absence of all recognition of an author's copyright in the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and James I. that the larger half of Shakespeare's dramas appeared for the first time in the famous 1623 folio, published seven years after their author's death, with the irreparable lack of proof-reading and final revision. From this it has followed that the text of the noblest writer in English literature is marred by numerous misreadings and blundering misprints, and has furnished the subject, not only of laborious critical acumen, but of embittered controversy to a long succession of commentators.

But at the very time when England was awakening not only to an intelligent appreciation of the rights of authorship, but of the interest of all in the beneficent results to which such protection tends, a new element of disturbance among the English-speaking race came into play. Old colonies cast off their allegiance to the mother-land, and English statute laws ceased to be co-extensive with the common race and speech. Under the circumstances in which separate and rival nationalities thus originated among those "who speak the tongue that Shakespeare spoke," but of whom it could not always be

¹ This paper was the last literary effort of the author, who died before he could revise the manuscript or see a proof. *Ed. Trans.*