

SUMMER SCHOOLS.

On another page of the REVIEW will be found the programme of the Nova Scotian Summer School of Science for this year. The staff of instructors is a competent one, and the work outlined of a practical and comprehensive character. Over forty teachers attended the school last year. Its promoters look forward with confidence to a decided increase this year both in numbers and interest.

The arrangements for holding a Summer School in New Brunswick are not yet completed, but they are sufficiently advanced to enable us to state that the School will meet in St. John, probably during the first week in July. A circular is being prepared, giving the limits of the course of study to be pursued, an estimate of expenses of members while attending, with the names of instructors in the different departments. This circular will be issued with the next number of the REVIEW.

The Summer School involves some sacrifice on the part not only of the instructors, but also of students; but we feel assured that those who make the sacrifice are greatly benefited. The laboratory work alternates with excursions to the seashore and other places of interest to the student, so that the time goes all too quickly, and the stimulus imparted quickens both the mental and physical pulse. We think no one will question that the teacher who spends at least a portion of his vacation in some inviting field of research, one that takes him into the open air, is much better equipped, both physically and mentally, for his year's work, than the one who aimlessly wanders about without any fixed purpose, or in the "rest" that is gained by entire absence from any occupation. If natural history is to be taught successfully in our schools, it can only be done through communion with and study of nature; and when can the foundation for this successful teaching be laid more leisurely than in summer, and where more pleasantly and profitably than at the Summer School?

ENGLISH LITERATURE.

If the attention which is devoted to this subject in the advanced classes of our high schools and colleges may be taken as evidence of the existence of a desire to become acquainted with the history of our literature, and of a laudable effort to gratify it, we are justified in acknowledging the presence of both. English literature is prominent in advertisements of the curricula of public and private schools. It is the pet subject to be presented on special occasions, such as

public exhibitions or the advent of a distinguished visitor, when the marvellous familiarity exhibited by particular pupils with the characteristics and influence of our great writers calls forth the admiration and rapture of the listeners. At such times one cannot help observing that if the study is not successfully prosecuted, it is not owing to any want of effort on the part of the teacher, or of assiduous application on that of the scholar.

Nor are the means at the command of the teacher limited or inferior. The number of works, large and small, elaborate treatises and elementary text-books, intended to aid him in his labors, is simply prodigious. Not a year passes but books, booklets, primers, hand-books, charts and annotated editions are published to facilitate the labors of both teacher and student. And many of these are of distinguished excellence. They are not the productions of book-makers, but of the most eminent literary men of the day. The names of Arnold, Stephen, Chambers, Morley, Masson and Taine, are sufficient warrant for the character of their works.

But the question is forced upon us, and in such a manner that it cannot be evaded:—Is English literature, as it is generally taught, productive of permanent benefit? Is the knowledge contained in text-books, in the way in which it is most frequently acquired, of positive value to the student, or, from an educational point of view, is it an instrument of culture? Does the ability to name the principal English writers in prose or verse, to narrate the incidents of their lives, or repeat, after the class-book or lecture, a criticism of the work and the reasons for their place in the history of English literature, cultivate the intellect or elevate the taste? Does a course of instruction in this subject, as it is most frequently presented at the present time, appeal to or exercise any faculty of the mind but the memory? We fear that these questions admit only of an answer in the negative. Such instruction, as final, in this department of knowledge, is in most cases evanescent, and even where part of it is retained in the memory, the acquisition is of little value. We fail to observe, under this mode of procedure, any brightening of the critical faculty, any assimilation of knowledge or even an awakening of the curiosity.

We remember reading, some years ago, of the visit made to a normal school by a distinguished nobleman, high in office, and eminent as a man of letters. The class of young ladies that was called up for recitation, to present to his lordship a specimen of the work of the institution, and, perhaps, out of compliment to his literary fame, was examined in English literature. The questions were such as would