

THE WORLD OF BOOKS.

Some Recent Canadian Poetry.

De Roberval, a Drama, and Other Poems, by John Hunter Duvar. St. John: J. & A. McMillan. 1900.

The author of De Roberval has given us a companion piece to Mr. Mair's "Tecumseh." These are two noble dramas, on purely Canadian themes, and set in purely Canadian surroundings and atmosphere.

The story of De Roberval, as historians give it, is faithfully adhered to in its essentials; but the details Mr. Duvar has added to and emphasized to give the story life-like completeness. The interwoven tale of Ohnawa is, so far as we know, fictitious. It gives occasion for some of the choicest poetry in the drama.

ACT V, SCENE III. Off the coast of Newfoundland. Long sea rolling in after a storm. Mermaids singing.

A gallant fleet sailed out to sea With the pennons streaming merrily. On the hulls the tempest lit, And the great ships split In the gale, And the foaming fierce sea-horses Hurl'd the fragments in their forces To the ocean deeps, Where the kraken sleeps, And the whale.

The men are in the ledges' clefts, Dead, but with motion of living guise Their bodies are rocking there, Monstrous sea-fish and eels Stare at them with glassy eyes As their limbs are stirred and their hair. Moan, O sea! O death at once and the grave, And sorrow in passing, O cruel wave! Let the resonant sea-caves ring, And the sorrowful surges sing, For the dead men rest but restlessly. We do keep account of them, And sing an ocean requiem For the brave.

The other poems contained in this volume are "The Emigration of the Fairies"—an exquisite bit of sustained *jeu d'esprit*, in a style of which this generation has well nigh lost the secret—and "The triumph of constancy, a romance." This is a gorgeous-colored, passionately romantic story of chivalry, white magic, and fair women, it is told in antique fashion of speech, and is no less interesting than poetic.

Fleurs de Lys is a volume of first-fruits, and derives its chief importance from the richness of its promise. In it the poet learns well the technicalities of his art; and he displays a tendency to the objective treatment of his themes—a tendency which augurs well for his poetic future. In a second volume I should expect to find much more work of the quality of such a line as: Still calls the sea along the darkening shore.

There are bits, here and there through the volume, of this rare and fine poetic quality; but one feels, for the most part, that the singer is as yet feeling for his true voice. That the voice is that of a genuine singer is made plain by a few poems and a host of detached passages in this volume. Instance this, of a sea-shell:

In a lady's hand it will snugly lie, 'Tis as thin as a rose-leaf, Yet it holds the sea-gull's sorrowing cry, And the roar of the tide-lashed reef.

The lines I have italicized are imaginative in the highest sense. And the following have that nice aptness which make sayings memorable:

O! happy period of my early youth! When Love was master, Reason but a slave, When friends seemed heroes, woman crystal truth, Success the certain portion of the brave.

But the same poem from which I take these lines contains an instance of what is a common fault with Mr. Weir—an indulgence in words which are out of tune with their surroundings. For instance—"again the changeless stars began to peep," which seems to me a procedure quite unworthy of the changeless stars. Mr. Weir tells a story with power and pathos. "The Spirit Wife" is a simple, delicate, and touching bit of narrative verse, and "Dauntless" has a noble sincerity and directness. The ballads on subjects from Canadian history, which make up the department called "Fleurs de Lys," are vivid and simple, but they are too much what the author calls them in the notes, *resumes* of what the historians have said. They do not seem to

have been infused in the full flame of the author's imagination. They are manly and stirring, and should be popular; but to some extent they lack the indefinable something which "Dauntless," for example, possesses. The lyric called "My Treasure" is one in which promise is already fulfilled. It is original, dramatic, excellently wrought and deeply suggestive. The note of human experience is in it. Mr. Weir has few specimens of sonnet music, but he does effective work in this most gemlike of metrical forms. The sonnet called "Remembrance" is wholly admirable; and the sonnet sequence on "The Maiden, the Wife, the Mother," certainly shows small sign of juvenility. What simple beauty of scene, what fervent and natural human feeling, one finds in this sonnet called "The Wife":—

There stands a cottage by a river side, With rustic branches sloping eaves beneath, Amid a scene of mountain, stream and heath. A dainty garden, watered by the tide, On whose calm breast the queenly lilies ride, Is bright with many a purple pansy wreath, While here and there forbidden lion's teeth Uprear their golden crowns with stubborn pride.

See! There she leans upon the little gate, Unchanged, save that her curls, once flowing free, Are closely curled upon the shapely head, And that her eyes look forth more thoughtfully. Hark to her sigh! "Why tarries he so late?" But mark her smile! She hears his well-known tread.

Mr. Weir needs what riper years will, doubtless, bring him—affluence of emotion and imagination, intensity, passion. He also needs to purge his diction of inappropriate words.

My work of reviewing these four volumes of recent Canadian poetry is well rewarded by the sense of encouragement it has brought me. It is impossible to overlook the vast advance which has been made, within the last half dozen years, by Canadian thought. In all Canadian literary effort there is manifest a gain in culture, in breadth, in insight, in facility. In other words, we are ripening. At the same time, with the escape from provincialism of diction, form and method, there is an increased feeling for local coloring and for native themes. We are getting more self-reliant. We are beginning to work more in our own way, and at the same time to apply to our work the tests of cosmopolitan standards. Even a beginning of this sort is of deep significance. Such a beginning is rarely made till a people begins also to realize itself a nation.

The poems of Miss Mary Morgan have less of that most desirable Canadian flavor, are less native, in a word—than the work of Mr. Duvar or Mr. Weir. But they are remarkable for breadth of spirit, for the culture and cosmopolitanism they evince. This poet's is an intellect that draws its sustenance from all sources. Miss Morgan has enriched her thought and trained herself in the techniques of her art by the admirable exercise of translation,—and many of her translations possess a permanent value. But her original work has more significance for us. It is lyrical in form, and lyrical in mood. Its defects are numerous enough—defects of unevenness, sometimes of insufficient inspiration. There is sometimes a lapse into the commonplace; there is too often a lack of firmness, compactness, condensation in the line. But on the other hand one finds often a satisfying simplicity and completeness, a sweetness of cadence, such as are contained in these lines on seeing a child fall asleep:

"The heavy eyelids slowly droop, The eyes grow less and less, The last of languid glances flown Has left but peacefulness. 'Twas like the twilight's mellow shades, That, quivering o'er the snow, Seemed lingering glimpses from the sun, And almost loath to go. Ere long shalt thou refreshed awake, Nor ever know surprise That weariness from thee took flight In such a strange, sweet guise. As suddenly the Spring awakes Starts from beneath the ground, Once more with fresh life to pursue Its never-ending round."

Another poem I must quote as showing the intellectual quality which pervades Miss Morgan's work. Like most Canadian singers of this day, her face is set hopefully toward the future. Few equal her in the confident strength of her hold upon that healthy optimism which is sanguine without being credulous. The following lines seem to me lofty and resonant:

"O Reason, Wonder, Doubt, A trinity No true soul lives without! Reviled, ye still endure In every land— A stalwart band To keep the conscience pure.

To-day the tyrant king Shall crouch before Your temple-door; He knows the spell you bring. Immortal spirits all! Iniquity And calumny, Though others they appal, Your might cannot subdue, Who only rise With clearer eyes To wage the fight anew— The battle for the sway Of liberty, Fraternity, And light of the new day!"

That George Frederick Cameron was a lyric poet of fervor, force, and sincerity, Canadians have begun to realize only since his death. This is owing probably to the fact that he spent a large part of his life outside of Canada. It is to the loving care of his brother, Mr. C. J. Cameron, that he owes his effectual introduction to a Canadian audience. Now the dead poet's position in our literature is secure. Fame may come but slowly to his name, but he will be recognized as one of the most spontaneous and genuinely lyrical of our singers. Cut off suddenly, and in the midst of his development, he has left, of necessity, quantities of crude, youthful, or half-finished work; but every here and there is a line, a stanza, a whole poem, bearing the unquestionable stamp of lyric genius. On another occasion I hope to make a detailed and extended study of Mr. Cameron's genius, otherwise I should not permit myself to touch his work at all in such a hasty and inadequate note as this. His intellectual drift, the sources of his inspiration, his lyric measures, all these must go unestimated here, and his faults must go for the present rest unnoted. I prefer to use my scant remaining space in giving examples of his power, his swinging, free music, his earnestness. As his work is done, there is no immediate need of pointing out his defects; but it is good for us to know with as little delay as possible whatever of noble achievement is attained among us. It helps toward the establishment of our national self-confidence. It is an important part of our education.

Take this, for grave majesty of thought and diction:— "I have a faith—that life and death are one, That each depends upon the self-same thread, And that the seen and unseen rivers run To one calm sea, from one clear fountain-head. I have a faith—that man's most potent mind May cross the willow-shaded stream nor sink; I have a faith—when he has left behind His earthly resture on the river's brink, When all his little fears are torn away, His soul may beat a pathway through the tide, And, disencumbered of its coward clay, Emerge immortal on the sunnier side." As an instance of Cameron's rich metrical music, I will quote the lines entitled "The Way of the World." Forming my judgment by universal standards, and banishing scrupulously my Canadian prejudices, and bearing in mind the need of avoiding extravagant eulogy, and keeping my eyes wide open to the comparative imperfection of the final stanza, I do not hesitate to claim that in this lyric our literature has a priceless and imperishable possession:—

THE WAY OF THE WORLD. We sneer and we laugh with the lips—the most of us do it, Whenever a brother goes down like a weed with the tide; We point with the finger and say—Oh, we knew it! We knew it! But see! we are better than he was, and we will abide. He walked in the way of his will—the way of desire, In the Apian way of his will without ever a bend; He walked in it long, but it led him at last to the mire— But we who are stronger will stand and endure to the end. His thoughts were all visions—all fabulous visions of flowers, Of bird and of song, and of soul which is only a song; His eyes looked all at the stars in the firmament, ours Were fixed on the earth at our feet, so we stand and are strong. He hated the sight and the sound and the sob of the city; He sought for his peace in the wood and the musical wave; He fell, and we pity him never, and why should we pity— Yea, why should we mourn for him, we who still stand, who are brave? Thus speak we and think not, we censure unheeding, unknowing— Unkindly and blindly we utter the words of the brain; We see not the goal of our brother, we see but his going, And sneer at his fall if he fall, and laugh at his pain. Ah, me! the sight of the soul on the coffin-lid, And the sound, and the sob, and the sigh of it as it falls! Ah, me! the beautiful face forever hid By four wild walls! You hold it a matter for self-gratulation and praise To have thrust to the dust, to have trod on a heart that was true— To have ruined it there in the beauty and bloom of its days? Very well! There is somewhere a Nemesis waiting for you.

CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS. The Magazines. In *Lend a Hand* for September are interesting special articles by Winnie Louise Taylor, Hon. Seth Low, Frederic Woodrow and William Schuyler. The departments are as readable as usual. Progress heartily commends the magazine to people who desire to learn the best way to help their neighbors and the public. Published at Boston. Price \$2 a year, 20 cents a number.

That clever little publication, the *Writer*, of Boston, contains in the September number some articles of value and interest to those who live by their pen. Eugene L. Didier discusses whether literature pays. Kate B. Sherwood writes about "Newspaper Social Personalities." "New York Newspapers," "The Story of a Rejected Manuscript" and "Two Common Errors" are all worth reading and full of suggestion.

Notes and Announcements. The clamor of the nations in their desire to read *Ben-Hur* each in its own tongue is unceasing. *Ben-Hur* has been translated into German and Italian, and application has been made for translation into Spanish and Polish.

Mrs. Stowe's death will probably bring to a climax the unseemly feud that has gathered about her, in view of her failing health, as to which of two ladies will write her biography, and of which allusions pro and con have from time to time gained access to the newspapers.

The seventh volume of Lecky's *History of England* is now with the publishers and will appear early in the season. It deals exclusively with Irish questions at the close of the last century, including the last years of the Irish Parliament, the rebellion of 1698, and all the events that led up to the Act of Union.

Mr. Whittier has recently said to a friend that there were drawbacks to his enjoyment of the scenes he so happily described in "Snowbound." They recall to him his sufferings from cold, the snow beating through the crevices of his father's house and falling on his head. His lack of robust health he attributes to the privations of those days.

Vernon Lee, whose real name is Violet Paget, lives in Florence with a lame and musical brother. She is not handsome, is masculine in appearance and in her attitudes, and smokes cigarettes. Much more important are the facts that she has written several volumes on medical literature, and has contributed for eight years to the leading English reviews, besides writing *Miss Brown*, a novel that literally reeks with cleverness. She is said to have accomplished only 25 years.

HOTEL MEN ARE VEXED. They Complain that the St. John Post Office is Somewhat Behind the Times. Tuesday was a warm day, for the season. Several of the hotel proprietors waxed as warm as the day while they talked with PROGRESS.

The subject was the St. John post office. "The absolute closing of the office on Sunday is a very great inconvenience to the travelling public," said the clerk at one of the leading hostels. "The mails arrive here on Sunday morning, and it is often a matter of great importance for strangers to get their letters on that day. They sometimes suffer a loss of both time and money, because they either have to go without them or are detained another day."

"But are not such instances exceptional?" "By no means. They are much more frequent than people in general would suppose. Not only are we unable to get letters before the Sunday evening train leaves, but we cannot get them before the Flying Yankee leaves on Monday morning. Indeed, there are times when we cannot get them even in time for the Intercolonial train. Sometimes it has happened that the mails due on Saturday night have been too late to be assorted before the office closed. In one instance of this kind, a man who was on his way to New York, and whose journey depended on the receipt or non-receipt of a certain letter, was put to a great deal of trouble. A day, or half a day, meant a great deal to him, but there was no help for it. A request to be allowed in the lobby one moment, to see if that letter was in the box, was peremptorily refused by the postmaster."

"It's an outrage," said one of the proprietors of another leading hotel. "I don't know of any other city in America, unless it may be Toronto, where such a state of things exists. The public pays for the postal service, and it has a right to get its letters when they arrive." "I know of many instances of loss and inconvenience to travellers by this system," said the proprietor of another leading hotel. "It is especially a loss to commercial men, who have either to lose a day needlessly or take the risk of going on a route when there are letters in the office which would wholly change their plans. If the mails were sorted when they arrive and the office were open to box-holders for half an hour on Sunday morning, no possible harm could be done to anybody, and a great deal of trouble would be saved."

Further inquiry disclosed the fact that the office was formerly open to boxholders at certain hours on Sunday, but was closed by order of the department. This order was due to a petition signed by several citizens of St. John.

How a New Opera is Rehearsed. The new Gilbert and Sullivan opera which is to be produced at the Casino shortly, is now being rehearsed at the Savoy Theatre, London. Manager Aronson, of the Casino, says that Sir Arthur Sullivan usually composes first the different choruses, especially the finale to the first act. The quartets and trios come next in order and the songs and duets last.

At the rehearsals the ladies and gentlemen of the chorus are seated in a semicircle on the stage, in the midst of which is a cottage piano. Mr. Gilbert attends all the musical rehearsals, takes notes of the style of composition, time and rhythm, and then invents his groups and stage business.

Mr. Gilbert is, as is well known, a very strict disciplinarian, and he will stand on the stage at rehearsals and repeat the words and action of a part over and over until they are delivered as he desires. All the arrangements of color and the groupings are designed by him.—*New York Herald*.

A New Species. English-American (in dime museum, a few years hence).—D'ye know, I can't see any curiosity about that man. It's w'at you call a "fake," I fahncy. German-American.—Dot show was no goot. French-American.—Zat ees not von bearded lady; eet ees not von living skeleton; eet ees not von vild man of Borneo. Vat he is?

Dime Museum Manager.—Fake, is it? Sure thot mon's the finest curiosity in seven countries; an' a har-rud toime we had foin'din' him. He's an American-American, begobbs.—*Puck*.

Done Smoking. Mrs. Flysparrow (to new acquaintance).—"You seem to be an inveterate lover of the weed, Mr. Nicotine. May I ask if your father smokes?" Mr. Nicotine—"I trust not, madam. He has been dead some time."—*New York Sun*.

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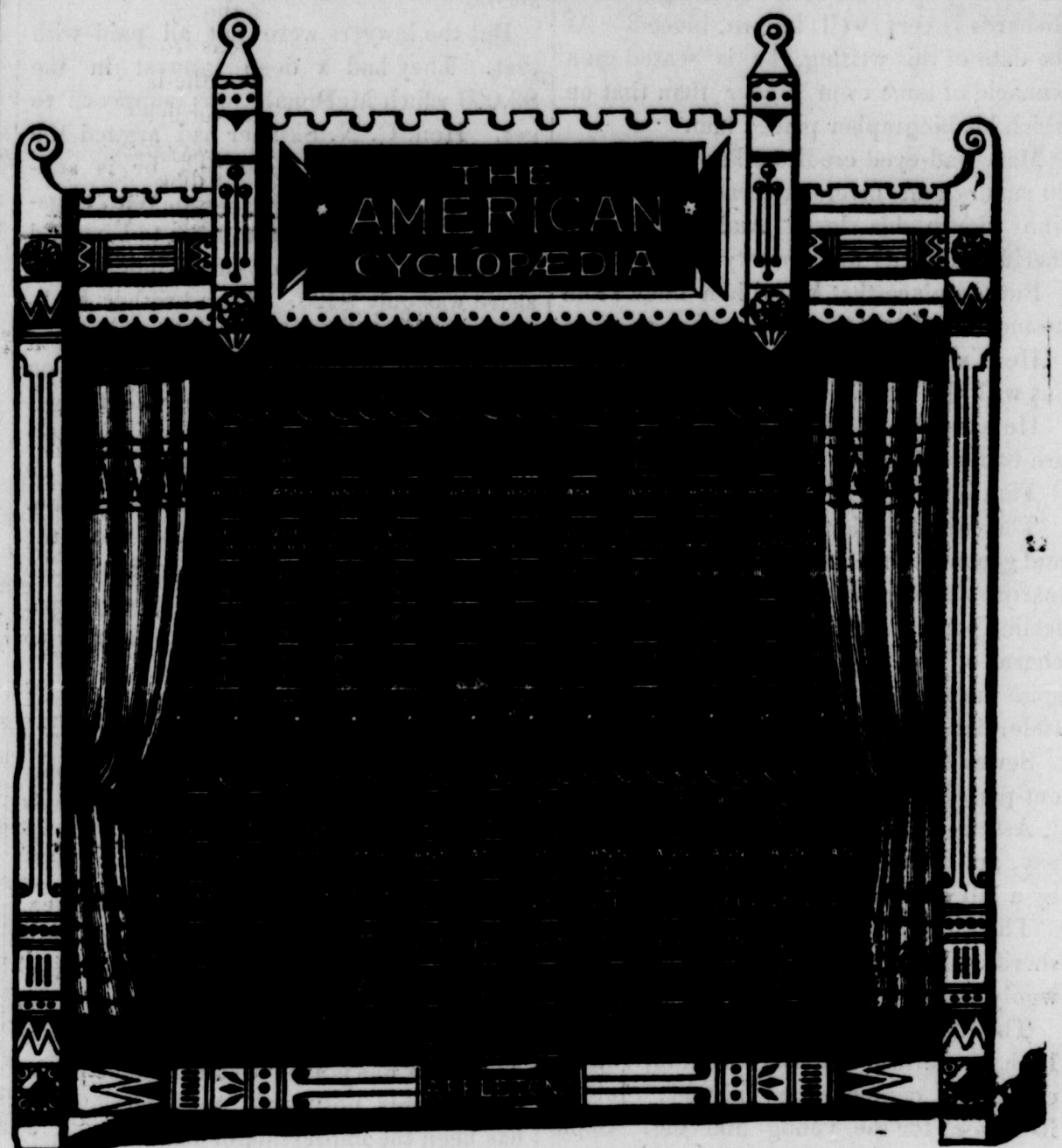
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