

CHILDREN OF CANADA

"BRINGING THEIR LAURELS HOME TO CROWN HER."

Some Remarks, Appreciative Rather Than Critical, on New Books by Mr. Archibald Langman, Miss J. Elizabeth Gostwycke Roberts and Prof. Roberts.

"You have no brains!" "You'll never be able to earn your salt, long as you live." "What, in the world, do you think you can do?" Such are some of the stimulating comments and queries with which all-believing parents are sometimes wont to encourage their too-aspiring youth.

And what is most remarkable but the fact that these hopeless scions do occasionally surmount such taming prophecy, accomplishing somewhat, and being somebody, after all? But this benignly self-respecting example extends beyond family limits, and whole peoples—nations, if you will—avail themselves of it—loudly inspiring, by such sage observations as those set down, all who have the temerity to do something of unusual merit, if they can and dare.

It is ever the merit of genius to distinguish itself under disheartening circumstances; as the Burnses, the Miltons, the Fultons, Pallsseys, Haydons and Stephenson's of mankind bear witness: the rose and lily flourish in the sun, and respond to the nourishing care of love that prizes them; but the trodden and beclouded blossom of the superior heart seems to flourish most by neglect; let us not fail of that, O brother cavalier, or we shall want through your too sunny blandishment, the incentive that scorn or oversight only furnishes.

Well, the boys do get on, and surprise the sage fosterers of native ability into silence, at least. Supercilious conceit in Britain (and is more of it there than elsewhere?) has ceased saying: "Who reads an American book?"—making up for long abstinence, doubtless, by devouring Irving, Longfellow, Harte, Miller and their compeers as fast as it greedily can.

And the curse of literary sterility would doubtless fall on this Canada of ours, if mentors would really cease bidding the upstarts down, saying—"You cannot write, and if you could you dare not publish, and if you did you cannot compete; we have, on one side of us a large empire, and on the other a wide republic, to furnish to us the finest that human brains can give,—and the yield of foreign poets is amazing.

If a few more poets were born, this would be no world for them." But it is, indeed, a tame mother, almost to nausea, who will not have some warmth and partiality for her own, and who prefers her neighbor's rosy buster, even, to the spindling of her own bosom. Verily, the claim of nature will present itself, and that son who is fit for something more than checking sneer and frown, and smuggling himself into a corner, will occasionally ask you to honor his draft with maternal love and pride.

Will Canada ignore the fact that she had a Heavysage, and that he wrote Saul, a Miltonic drama, on which Hawthorne and Longfellow lavished no stinted praise? Will she have no honest pride in her Sangster, nor read, amid the poetic influence of The St. Lawrence and The Saguenay, a throbbing record of a sore-trying heart that loves her? Say, when a moiety of our intelligent people—one or two in some hundreds—shall seek out and purchase a true, indigenous book of belles lettres, then shall our worthy editor of The Dominion Illustrated, who recently averred that "if clever and successful writer wants to put forth a book he ought to have pride and trust enough to do it, out of his own pocket" (provided he has one,) will have something still more encouraging to say.

But Canada has poetic children, who have won, and are winning, recognition beyond her border, and they are bringing their laurels freshly home to crown her withal; for never do they look so fair or seem so sweet as when, twined with mayflower or maple leaf, they gleam on "Kanata's" brow. Her Roberts, her Reade, are true to her, as were her Howe, and her McGee. We begin to look and listen toward a Mair, a Lighthall, a Lesperance, a Weir, a Duvar, and other worthy ones, who shall enrich still farther a literature well begun. Have we not a Curzon, of nobly-patriotic tone?—a Spencer, late-declared author of a sweetly-natural lyric, that has gone the world over?—a Carman, rich and full with the blood and hope of youth, casting his tender fancies in moulds of Provençal song?—an Eaton, shaping to imperishable form the legends of Acadia?—these and others who, difficult as it is to predict the future of an author, may reasonably be expected to add some honorable gift to the artistic and intellectual wealth of their native land. And still other stars are rising, to a few of which we give particular attention.

Other voices than of the torrent-river, the forest, the halls legislative, begin sounding at or around Ottawa. One, clear and distinct, has lately spoken; and I marvel much if our wakening sons and brothers do not hear it. Here is a book of song,* in part unquestionably Canadian, and wholly genuine and powerful. Whether the author has reached the elevated table-land of middle age, with its width of horizon and fullness

of power, or whether he is yet on the morrow slope that leads to prime, we cannot say; but should infer from the tone of several pieces that his heart has been long at school, since he has touched so worthily and so loftily some of life's noblest themes, and shows so much maturity of thought and feeling. His genius is lyrical and pastoral; and in all shades of feeling, from the serene to the passionate, with which poets have dwelt upon nature, he betrays sympathy, blending the sensitiveness of Keats with the beautiful spirituality of Shelley. His descriptive phrasing is very rich, and his diction is musical, while his themes and verse-forms and cadences are various enough to relieve all sense of monotony. If not so distinctively as Sangster a painter of the Canadian landscape, he has yet some touches, unique and indigenous, in which no native author has excelled him. He stands Among the Millet, at the time when earth rejoices:—

The dew is gleaming on the grass, The morning hours are seven, And I am fain to watch you pass, Ye soft white clouds of heaven.

When "April" is waking the world from wintry sleep; and— The grey song-sparrows full of Spring have sung Their clear thin silvery tones in leafless trees; The robin hops and whistles, and among The silver-tasseled poplars the brown bees Murmur faint dreams of summer harvesties; The creamy sun at even scatters down A gold-green mist across the murmuring town;— he goes abroad to listen to the frogs that "by the slow streams" make their wonted music,—

And ever with soft throats that pulse and thrill, From the pale-headed shallows trill and trill, Tremulous sweet-voiced, flute-like, answering One to another, glorying in the spring;— to look on the "ever-cloven soil," "the brown, clean layers," and see the— Curled flower buds, white and blue, In all the matted hollows of the wood, where— In the warm noon the south wind creeps and cools, Where the red-budded stems of maples throw Still tangled etchings on the amber pools.

In "Morning on the Lievres," the canoe bears him with sporting companions:— Softly as a cloud we go, Sky above and sky below, Down the river, and the dip Of the paddles scarcely breaks, With the little silvery drip Of the water as it shakes From the blades, the crystal deep Of the silence of the morn, Of the forest yet asleep, And the river reaches borne In a mirror, purple grey, Sheer away To the misty line of light, Where the forest and the stream In the shadow meet and plight, Like a dream.

On a sudden seven ducks With a splashy rustle rise Stretching out their seven necks, One before and two behind, And the others all a-row, And as steady as the wind With a swivelling whistle go, Through the purple shadow led, Till we only hear their whir In behind a rocky spur Just ahead.

But no one of these pieces, from its pathetic beauty and its fulness of human interest, more completely captures the heart of the reader than "Between the Rapids," which, redolent of memory and pensive regret, is, in its locus et personae unmistakably French-Canadian. We wish we might give every line, but must make an abridgment. The voyagers are floating down the river at evening, when they pass a scene consecrate to one of them by some heart-history:— The shore, the fields, the cottage just the same, But how with them whose memory makes them sweet? Oh if I called them hailing name by name, Would the same lips the same old shouts repeat? Have the rough years so big with death and ill, Gone lightly by and left them smiling yet? Wild black-eyed Jeanne whose tongue was never still, Old wrinkled Picard, Pierre and pale Lisette, The homely hearts that never cared to range, While life's wide fields were filled with rush and change.

And where is Jacques, and where is Vergine? I cannot tell; the fields are all a blur, The lowing cows whose shapes I scarcely see, O do they wait and do they call for her? And is she changed, or is her heart still clear As wind or morning, light as river foam? Or have life's changes borne her far from here, And far from rest, and far from help and home? Ah comrades, rest, and let us rest awhile, For arms grow tired with paddling many a mile. They cannot pause; they float by. The shores grow dim, and he waves a goodbye: Once more I leave you, wandering towards the night, Sweet home, sweet heart, that would have held me in.

Blacker and loftier grow the woods, and hark! The freshening roar! The chute is near us now, And dim the canyon grows and inkly dark The water whispering from the birchen prow. One last long look, and many a sad adieu, While eyes can see and heart can feel you yet, I leave sweet home and sweeter hearts to you, A prayer for Picard, one for pale Lisette, A kiss for Pierre, my little Jacques, and thee, A sigh for Jeanne, a sob for Vergine. Some songs, brief and sweet, there are, as "Passion," "One Day" and "Unrest"; some fine narrative poems, such as "The Three Pilgrims," "The Organist" and "The Monk," who bears in the folds of his mantle some of Keats's spicery; but most excellently perfect are some of the sonnets, than which none finer have been written by any Canadian. We conclude our observations with just one instance:— A PRAYER. O earth, O dewy mother, breathe on us Something of all thy beauty and thy might, Us that are part of day but most of night, Not strong like thee, but ever burdened thus With glooms and cares, things pale and dolorous

Whose gladdest moments are not wholly bright; Something of all thy freshness and thy light, O earth, O mighty mother, breathe on us. O mother, who wast long before our day, And after us full many an age shalt be. Careworn and blind, we wander from thy way: Born of thy strength, yet weak and halt are we: Grant us, O mother, therefore, us who pray, Some little of thy light and majesty.

IV. A maiden offering* of a maiden singer, somewhat coyly given, as a woodnymph might drop before us a spray of cedar, or bit of arbutus, and dart bashfully into her native shades again. The songs of Miss Roberts are songs that may be sung, for they have the lilt and music in them—that living soul that can never be made to infer "the most cunningly devised rhetoric" merely cut into lines. It matters not whether that sweet mottled songster goes up with the lark or not, we cannot read—

Sip softly, Nashwaak water, Where thrushes sing and soar, without feeling much of the same sensations that the flowing river and winging birds convey; and "A Secret Song" has a clearness of note like that of the songster's own, floating out of the gray wood, over the barren snow drifts, ringing on the frosty air: O Snow-bird! Snow-bird! Welcome thy note when maple boughs are bare; Thy merry twitter, thy emphatic call, Like silver trumpets pierce the freezing air, What time the radiant flakes begin to fall. We know thy secret. When the day grows dim, Far from the homes that thou hast cheered so long, Thy chirping changes to a twilight hymn! O Snow-bird, Snow-bird, wherefore hidest thou thy song?

O Snow-bird! Snow-bird! Is it a song of sorrow none may know, An aching memory? Nay, too glad the note! Untouched by knowledge of our human woe, Clearly thy crystal flutings fall and float. We hear thy tender ecstasy and cry: "Lend us thy gladness that can brave the chill!" Under the splendors of the winter sky, O Snow-bird, Snow-bird, carol to us still.

With this joyous music, she has the vision and faculty divine; with the poet's liquid harmony, the poet's penetrating imagination: not that alone which is diffusive, informing gently the whole, but that which concretes itself goldenly in a part; as where, in "Reveilli," she writes: Behold the rising splendor of the East, Now molten light where iron darkness lay Herald the conquest, hail the victor, Day.

As breaks the ethereal gold across the crest Of yonder hills, and turns the trees to flame. When in the first blush of womanhood she gives such first-fruits, what may we not hope from a riper experience and a more practiced art, when time shall have opened new and deeper fountains? The airy grace, the soft music, the intellectual grasp, the richness of diction, as well as the strength, must grow to more and more; while she weaves her Penelope-web of song, so perfectly that she nor Chronos will need to unravel it. We had at our pen's point other citations from "Welcome," "A Light Withdrawn," "By the Campfire," etc., but must pause with some bracing, noble lines from "The Song of Climbing":

Ah, better steadfast-eyed to scale The awful hill-side hand in hand; For never yet without avail Did one true striving soul assail The barriers of the Mountain Land. Rouse we our spirits to the race, Friends! Brothers! From the walls above Leads many an forgotten face Still wearing through its new-born grace The old sweet look of human love. There, watching by the open door, Shine Cuthbert's heavenly eyes of blue; There Mariel leans to meet once more The earth-born loves she hungered for, To clasp our hands and lead us through.

V. Gracing a time fruitful of anthologies, which poets join with their inferiors in multiplying, appears this neat little volume in the Canterbury Series,† with an introduction, which is a bit of criticism, apt, comprehensive, felicitous. The compiler has needfully excluded very much that might have come under his title; as, for example, the medieval lays and epics, the world of voluminous folk-balladry, and the pieces, otherwise fit, too tritely familiar; selecting his material from recent authors, very largely, and conspicuously from that prince of wild-life poets, as he is called, Joaquin Miller. Several Canadian authors appear, to the book's manifest advantage; for the names of Charles Mair, Hunter Duvar, Arthur Wentworth Eaton, and Miss Agnes Machar, are worthy of classification with many of England or America's minor singers. We regret that Prof. Roberts should have excluded any of his own pieces which, from their subject and mode of treatment, were suitable to appear; but we are also glad to find the fine Indian ballad, that lately appeared in the Century,—"How the Mohawks Came to Modocet." Several things, quite appropriate, and highly excellent, we hoped, but failed to find; but on the whole discover more to delight in than to regret. The work is printed on fine-tinted paper, with red lines; and it is a neatly-bound pocket-volume, and a well-assorted companion of Douglas Sladen's Australian Ballads, now existing, and W. D. Lighthall's Canadian volume, soon to exist, in the same series.

ARTHUR JOHN LOCKHART. *Poems. By J. Elizabeth Gostwycke Roberts. For private circulation. †Poems of Wild Life. Edited, with Introduction and Notes, by Prof. Charles G. D. Roberts, A. M. London: Walter Scott.

FREDERICTON'S BAD BOY. He Devotes Attention to the Farmers' Convention and Yeomanry in General. Being's teacher said my last composition was good and our teler pasted it up in his store for the boys to see, and our minister was mad 'cause I 'luded to the "eternal fitness"—he thought bein' such a tall man he was above criticism, I suppose,—now then I guess I'll just mention a few more things round town what seems to haunker after wentlatin'.

There was a meetin' of the horny sinners and boney-handed sons and tillers of the soil and yeomans in the Church hall. There was a young man with a eye-glass on got up and read a piece about butter. He kinder sung it like as if he was readin' the 'Piscopal prayer book and 'spected the boney ones to holler, "Ah-men, ah-men," when he cum to the end of the sentence. He said he guessed he knowed what he was talkin' about cos he took a course of lessons milkin' Percheron steers at Gelf. Then a man named Doctor Twitchem from Mane got up and said it wasn't fair for the wimmen to do the churnin', and with that ma, who was present, hollered right out, "Bully for you, Mr. Twitchem; how does that suit you, Hiram," sez she to pa, pokin' him in the side, and from that out there was a coolness fell over the face of the audience so far as pa was concerned, I could hear him murmurin' 'tex from scripser, savage like, under his breath durin' the rest of the procedins.

Then another man what owned a ten-year ole cow with one eye out and a horn busted up in Andover, got up and read a lectur on rummin' a diary, and said it was no use makin' good butter, cos if all hands made good butter the price would be the same. He said he was goin' to keep right on makin' it the same old way he was brought up to, cos if all the flies and hairs was took out the flavor would be gone and maybe there'd be a epidemic.

Secretary McLellan was on the platform. We was expectin' him to pray for the boney ones, and pa said if he had there would certainly have been a out-pourin'. But he made 'em a little speech, sayin' if there was any people that he really loved, what cum home closer to his bosom than any he knowed, it was them there boney sinners and horny tillers which he saw before him there that day. I guess he was thinkin' about election times, don't you think so? Then the president, about every minute or two, struck the table with the lamb's tail, and said as how he was prond'er'n the Czar of Russia to be a presidin' over that there noble and elevated company of toilin' yomans and backbones of the country. Pa said he was after election, too, cos when he run for Queen's county he always got licked.

Then the turney-general he just dropped in kinder friendly and sociable-like among the boney ones, and bim-bye he makes a speech, sayin' as he didn't know anything about farmin', but when it came to raisin' colts he was all there. Ma laffed at that and said she thought so, too. Then Mr. Gregory slides in easy and sociable-like among the boney ones, and planks himself down in the audience as if he was one of the steady yomans himself. And you order see the way he cheered and clapped when the turney-general got up to speak. Why, you could a heard a pun drop under the seat he was sittin' on. He was so tickled to deeth that you'd thot he had done nothin' but tend funerals for a month. So I guess they was all thinkin' about elections, and the boney ones made up their minds to pack their votes on ice this year, so they'd bring a bigger price when the weather got hot.

Speakin' about ice reminds me that the boney ones had ice cream at their big dinner at the Queen the other night. One of the boney ones was eatin' some and kept hollerin' out, "Great Scott, but that's cold," and the Governor who was presidin' said it certainly was cold for such wether as we'd been havin' lately.

There was another meetin' of handy horns and yomans and backbones, called the County Council, here this week. Ma says the Governor's wife was too many for the noble sinners this time. She sez the last time they come to town they said they wasn't goin' to yearn their brownbread by the juice of their torreds and then hand em over for the Hospital. But when they come to town this week the Governor's wife bowed to 'em friendly like and sez to 'em, "Come up to the Governor's house my boney friends, and get some grub." And perhaps they didn't go. Ma says she never saw a boney one yet but was holler clear to his boots. So they went to the Governor's house and such a gettin' away with hasty dejoiners and mince pie and walin and nashin' of teeth as there was for about an hour or so! And when they come out they wiped the perspirations of honest toil from their intellex and voted the Governor's wife \$200 for the Hospital. Pa says the Governor's wife is too many for the boney ones and I think so too but ma says the damages they done at the dejoiners must a come to more'n \$200. Perhaps it did. JIMMY SMITH.

Fredericton, Jan. 21. The shapely and sagacious Lilian Russell is leading in the latest movement for theatrical reform. She won't wear tight. No one should hasten to conclude from this that Miss Russell's conscience pricks her. It isn't dread of perdition, but fear of rheumatism that makes her moral.

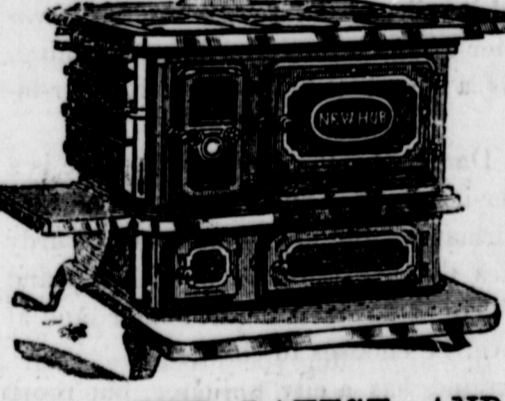
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