

Notches on The Stick

If Archibald Lampman is the Canadian Wordsworth, or, as some aver, the Canadian Keats; and if Alexander M'Lachlan is the Burns of Canada, (though we conclude one of a kind is enough); then, surely, Heavysege is the Canadian Milton, Campbell is the Canadian Coleridge, Frank Waters, the Canadian Moore, Robert Kirkland Kernighan, of Rushdale Farm, Beverly, Wentworth County, Ontario, the Canadian Riley, and—if we filled the page up, as we might, would it not then sound fine? Nonsense? Of course; but not nonsense for which we wish to hold responsible. Several Longfellowes there doubtless are,—if you will but take the trouble to run down the catalogue, and accept the classification.

We count the author fortunate who is himself, and the only. Of course we expect a glimpse of resemblance, for souls gather in light from many sources; and as there are faces that seem strangely like others, so there are minds. But no one, except a masquerader, has his personality entirely hidden,—and surely Robert Kernighan, better known as "The Khan", is no literary masquerader, though his "Canticles" do remind us sometimes of Whitcomb Riley, of Eugene Field, and sometimes of David Barker, of Maine. Yet, at the root, and in every respect, he is Kernighan, or he is nobody.

In the introduction (which is not written by the poet,) we learn with pleasure and surprise that Mr. Kernighan is "Canada's best gifted poetic genius," and that his productions, hitherto found only in the columns of the daily newspapers are "known from Vancouver to Halifax." After such a flourish of trumpets, concerning one of whom for the first time we have very recently heard, we naturally look for a magnificent entry; and, though it is neither a dance of wood-nymphs nor a procession of nuns, we are not altogether disappointed with the motley lines that dwell before us. The man on the farm has his eyes opened to the beauty of his world, and through these rustic measures there leaps betimes the live light of poetry, the electric thrill of true song. He gives us the complaint of the farm hireling,—a complaint sometimes, we doubt not, justly founded:

The Hired Man.

He upward looks upon the sea-deep
Liquid of the splendid sky;
He sees the cattle standing knee-deep
'Neath the sheltering cedars high.
A beast of burden, yonder he
Can hear an insect chirp with glee,
While in the twenty-acre field,
Without a shelter or a shield
See him through the tall wheat swing.
He envies every little bug
Beneath the cool and grassy rug:
The beast afraid, the bird awing—
He envies every creeping thing.

He hasn't time among the stubble,
Or on the parched and burning sod,
To harken to the brooklets babble,
Or lift his old straw hat to God.
If Christ was preaching somewhere near
He couldn't spare an hour to hear!
His little joys are somewhat rare:
The summer circus and the fair.
He pitch-forks life aside for food;
A slaving tired and humble elf,
He weds a worker like himself.
Their creed is easy understood,
That God, though very great,—is good.

More terse and vigorous are the initial lines of the volume:

I heard the sudden binder roar;
I heard the Reaper shout;
God flung me on His threshing floor—
His oxen trod me out!
And here I lie, all bruised and brow—
Beneath the tramping feet—
The Ragweed and the Thistle-down;
The Cockle and the wheat!

If we were disposed to give Mr. Kernighan a characteristic name, we might call him The Farmer Poet of Ontario; for never surely did the affairs of the Agricultural Department have a better setting forth in happy-go-lucky rhymes. The book abounds in such pieces, as indicated by the following titles: "The Fall Fair," "My Summer Fallow," "When the Old Cow Calves," "Dolly's Foal," "The Old Cow Bell," "Bunchin' Hogs," "Filling the Barn," "The Depredating Hen," "The Sheep-Killing Dog," "The Orchard By the Barn," "The Old Nest." Here are some lines from "Morning on The Farm":

Afar the coming steeds of day
Are shaking out their manes of grey,
And thro' the clouds of sullen dun
The gleaming threads of silver run;
The distant woods seem creeping near,
The morning star shines cold and clear;
The house-dog from his kennel bounds;
The steaming pig forsake the stacks,
With piles of chaff upon their backs;
The milk cows hear the cheerful call,
And each one rises in her stall;
For pleasant sleep they moor their thanks
Tien shake themselves, and lick their flanks;
And all, a tip-toe, silent wait
To hear the hired man at the gate—
To hear him move the sliding bar
That lead to where the turkeys are.
The handsome gelding pricks an ear—
He knows that feeding time is near;
He knows that morn is almost here.

Here is a picture of rustic hospitality in some Ontario farmstead:

Draw up to the fire, stranger;
You can't go out on a day like this
When the drifts are high an' the blizzards hiss;
Yer comfortable with us, I wis—
Stranger, draw up to the fire.
Dinner'll be ready in half a minute;
Th' old woman's billy' the halfer a ham;
'N thur's thurmot's, 'n cabbage, 'n taters, 'n jam;
Load up the stove with hickory, Sam—
Stranger, draw up to the fire.
Jim, hang up the gentleman's overcoat;
Ye come from the city I see, like's not—
Ye'r welcome to stay an' share what we've got.
Mother, what's that bubblin' top of the pot?
Dumplings? Dumplings!
Stranger, draw up to the fire.
Kind o' hard weather for March, ain't it?
I pities the folks in town, say I,
With pork 'n pert-ters, 'n coals so high,
Mother, is that custard'er punkin—that sorrel pie?
Punkin? Punkin!
Stranger, draw up to the fire.

I was warmed and fed in that grand o'd kitchen;
They tucked me up as I went away,
And I felt as I drove thro' the winter day,
The heartiest words a man can say.
Ar, "Stranger, draw up to the fire."
Mr. Kernighan is a bohemian of the Bohemians, and, as he tells us on his first page, has been such for twenty years. As to his style, he gives us the clear birdseye throughout, with little finish, and no varnish. We get not songs alone, but sermons; and when he lectures us Sam Jones himself cannot use plainer, not to say ruder, speech. Here is a view of things slightly tinged with pessimism, though not unreasonably so:

"Thur's too many cock robin doctors,
While there's scarce a good hired man;
And pee-wee lawyers are thicker
Than dust on a grist mill ben.
Bob-o-luk preachers air numerous;
This yer I boldly asserts;
This kentry"—his visage was humorous—
"She cultivates too many squirts.
"Thur's too many agents and drummers;
I reckon thur's peddlars galore;
Taur's too many tiddy-wink farmers
A-keepin' hotel er a store,
'Taint thistles, ner yet 'taint ragweed,
Ner dooken, ner witch grass, wot hurts—
Our crop as a nation's tectually
Smothered with too many squirts!"

We find many qualities to put us in love with our author. There are touches of rare tenderness; and a chivalric sympathy, without flattery, for womanhood and childhood that speaks from many of these pages. His love and understanding of the dumb creation reminds us of Burns, as does his direct expression of all the primitive emotions and sentiments. To illustrate, we might, if we had space, quote such poems as, "Peepie is not dead," "Kiss her every day," "Be merciful to the horse," "Let daddy in," "When the old dog died," "Your mother died last night," "When I go home tonight," "At night," "Lady Lilac," "Mick's baby," "The children in the streets." The following is unexceptional, in spirit and manner:

Her Father's Dinner Pail.

I see her every day at noon slip thro' the crowded street
Like some sweet spirit clad in black, so noiseless
as her feet.
Her eyes of brown are soft and sweet, her pretty
figure's frail;
She carries in her little hand her father's dinner
pail.
How serious is her gentle face, how wise her woman's
way;
For she has taken mother's place, who died the
other day:
She 'tends the baby that was left, and stills its
feeble wail,
Except when she must go abroad with father's dinner
pail.
She mends the children's dresses; her little brot h-
ers three
They lip their prayer at bed-time all clustered
round her knee:
Each morning she prepares a lunch for father, with-
out fail,
And dons her shawl and hood at noon to take the
dinner pail.
A blessing on your sweet young face, O true and
faithful heart,
No heroine was e'er so true or fearless as thou art;
And I will wait and watch each day, and I will
never fail,
To see thy pretty figure pass with father's dinner
pail.

The most cheerful sound of woman's
voice rings in the refrain of—
Supper's Ready!

The horses halt and slack their traces,
The weary workers lift their heads,
Light is on the hired man's face
As thro' the fields the anthem spreads;
The brown faced girl I love is standing
Tip-toed on the kitchen landing;
She cannot cry nor call in vain,
Her sounding voice rings down the lane—
"Supper's ready!"

When he touches sacred subjects we
have some of his truest notes, as in "The
Old Hymn," "The Children's Country,"
"John Wesley," "The Ass's Colt," "The
Semaphores of God," "The Gold of God,"
"Just Two Friends." For vigor and
brevity take the following:

Saul.

With blood upon my fingers and upon my brow a
frown,
I wiped my knife and took my way to old Damascus
town.
The Sals of God all terror struck beneath my feet
went down—
I trod on angels all the way to old Damascus town.
All Hell came forth applauding as I went marching
down
To stone to death and persecute in old Damascus
town.
I fell! and God stood o'er me: His hand had put
me down—
Tonight they'll wait in vain for me in old Damas-
cus town!

We have not been able to show by adequate examples, his patriotism, his martial songs, his homely humor and good fellowship, his vivid descriptions of farm life, and the love of nature, of kindred and of home, we find so passionately expressed. We like the songs in this book, moreover, because they are so full of hearty cheer, and of sympathetic encouragement for the poor and unfortunate, who need just such a voice as his to beguile the tame, monotonous way of their life, and relieve it of some of its tedium. Other and more finished songs might not reach them; but in these they find a consolation that the super-refined taste should take into the account and learn not to undervalue. Doubtless he knows, by his own experience, the truth of his own song:

When troubles are piled about your feet,
When shadows are falling across your way,
When your face is lashed by rain and sleet,
It's hard to look joyous and bright and gay;
It's hard to laugh when your soul is sad,
It's hard to just when your brain is aching;
When they're sick at home and the times are bad
It's hard to smile when your heart is breaking.
PASTOR FELIX.

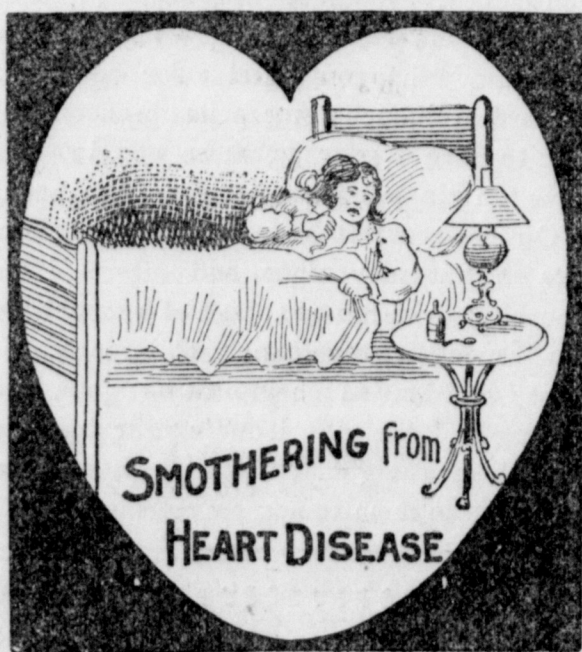
CALIFORNIA PEARLS.

The Great Majority Found Are of Little Value.

The beds of the gulf of California produced enormously for awhile, yielding many pearls of great size. For some time, 150 years back, the output was 300 to 500 pounds of the "gems of the ocean" annually. In 1790 a collection of big pearls was made there for a collar that became the property of the queen of Spain, and which is even now one of the most valuable possessions of the Iberian crown. As late as 1881 a black pearl, valued at \$10,000 and weighing 28 carats, was obtained from these waters. One of twice that weight, light brown and worth \$8,000, was secured in 1883, and in the same year a merchant of La Paz, Hamed Hidalgo, bought from an Indian for \$10 a pearl of beautiful luster, which he sold in Paris for \$5,300. All the black pearls got from the gulf of California are sent to Europe, because over there they fetch more than white ones, being a fad.

The pearl oyster banks of the gulf could not be worked profitably today but for the introduction of modern apparatus for diving. Such of the bivalves as are left are in water too deep for search by ordinary methods but the rubber clad diver, provided with a tube to furnish him with air, is able to search the bottom at leisure, his glass fronted helmet giving him a good view of his surroundings, thanks to the dim greenish light which illuminates the subaqueous regions. He carried with him a sheet iron reservoir filled with compressed air, which in case of emergency may be connected instantly with his helmet by the turning of a cock. In this business one interesting fact is that no such articles are employed in diving for pearls anywhere else in the world. The customary method is to dive naked. In the Zulu archipelago the divers paint themselves black, so as not to attract the notice of sharks.

The pearl fisheries of the gulf of California are farmed out by the Mexican government to a San Francisco company, which employs about 400 men. Work is carried on along the eastern shore of the peninsula and up the Pacific side as far as Margarita island. The oysters are found always edge upward and usually in groups, and the diver has no difficulty in separating them from the rocks on which they grow by cutting the "byssus" which serves the mollusk as an attachment to its resting place. The bivalves thus obtained are carried by schooners to La Paz and are opened under official inspection. One thousand of them may yield not a single pearl of any size, while from a dozen shells \$20,000 worth may be taken. The great majority of pearls found are of little value. The final process employed is to squeeze the meat of the oyster in the fist, lest a pearl should remain imbedded in the tissue of the bivalve.—Boston Transcript.



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