

Pioneer Literary Endeavor in Western Canada.

DURING the Toronto Industrial Exhibition, there has been displayed, now, for several years in succession, within the building known as the Pioneers' lodge, a collection of printed matter of a rather unique character, calculated to throw light on what we may term the incipient literatureism of Western Canada. In addition to the early views, maps, plans, portraits and so forth adorning the interior of the lodge, a group of books has been set out in a separate compartment and distinguished by the homely title of the *Log Shanty Book Shelf*. In each successive year the group has been a different one, but on each occasion the books have consisted of promiscuous gatherings likely only to be considered of importance during a primitive era in the history of a new country. In each group, however, additions, similar in character, have been made from time to time subsequently. A pamphlet catalogue of each shelf was prepared, and at the head of each list was a brief explanatory preface containing many particulars of local biography and history which will be likely to interest future enquirers. The subjects of the catalogues, in general terms, were the following, respectively :

Number 1, for 1887. Pioneer School Books. Aids to Self Culture and General Knowledge.

Number 2, for 1888. The Collection of a not Forgetful Pioneer Emigrant from Devonshire. Tracts, Pamphlets, Guide Books, Legends, Dialects, Local Histories and Maps relating to the West of England were eagerly secured and carefully garnered by the collector.

Number 3, for 1889. Some Pioneer Bibles.

Number 4, for 1890. Specimens of Pioneer Typography.

Number 5, for 1891. Relics of a Pioneer Anti-Obscurantist. (Erasmus of Rotterdam.)

This department of the Book-Shelf originated in the use of the Colloquies of Erasmus as a class book at school. The young scholar thus became an admirer of Erasmian ideas and a collector of Erasmian books. Rejoicing in the check given by Erasmus to the prevalence of Dark Age doctrine in the 16th century, he aimed to be, within his little sphere, an anti-obscurantist himself.

Number 6, for 18-2. Pioneer Shakespeare Culture in Canada. (An early collection.)

Number 7, for 1893. Books of a Sententious Character, Proverbs, etc. (A pioneer gathering.)

The preliminary observations explanatory of the last mentioned catalogue are the following, and these may serve to exemplify the kind of information prefixed to each of the seven groups just described.

"In the great dearth of general literature in these parts in the old pioneer days, any books or pamphlets which furnished forth a supply, however scanty, of proverbs, pithy sayings, aphorisms and similitudes, were very acceptable to any one having the least inclination for reading and study. Such expressions seemed always to contain so much in so small a compass. The local almanac generally supplied a few proverbs, adopting occasionally the style and even the language of Franklin's 'Poor Richard'; sometimes the local newspaper furnished a few, even when its columns in other respects were very scantily supplied. These were all conned over with gratitude, in the absence of other matter for consideration. With homely primitive folk, a small stock of proverbs is found to be very useful in many emergencies of the head, heart and hands. In short, the compact set of sayings thus stored up might be compared to the old-fashioned pocket-knife which young lads aforetime were so proud to possess, containing in its handle, besides several blades, a great variety of little implements—a corkscrew, button-hook, gimlet, turnserew; tweezers, pincers, fleam or lancet, etc. Don Quixote, when a copy



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was secured, of course became a favorite, especially for the sake of the utterances of his garrulous companion. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and even *Robinson Crusoe* came to be especially valued for the sake of the many aphorisms contained therein. Solomon's Book of Proverbs was easily accessible and became more and more appreciated, as also were the many sententious conclusions to be observed in *Ecclesiastes*, the *Psalms* and other books of the Bible. Even the apocryphal books began to be examined for the sake of the sayings of the wise son of Sirach. In point of fact, the whole Bible had assumed more or less of a sententious appearance since the days of the famous French printer, Robert Stephens, to whom is due, since 1556, the modern familiar divisions of chapter and verse. From every line of Scripture, whether embracing an aphorism or not, the commentator, Matthew Henry, could draw pious conclusions. To him, happily, the familiar words of the psalm were a reality:

"The judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether."

"More to be desired are they than gold, yea than much fine gold, sweeter also than honey and the honey comb."

"Moreover, by them is thy servant taught, and in keeping of them there is great reward."

"But it was from the Proverbs of Solomon that Matthew Henry's deductions always seemed especially inviting and instructive, rendering the contemplation of the whole character of Solomon and his comprehensive grasp of all things most interesting. It was not only in the area of Palestine but through-



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out all the regions of the east that Solomon's fame as an author of sententious wisdom prevailed in the olden time as well as in the present day. Solomon's wisdom, we are told (I. Kings iv. 30), excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt.

"For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol, and his fame was in all nations round about.

"And he spake three thousand proverbs, and his songs were a thousand and five.

"And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall; he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes."

"No wonder, then, that the written relics still extant of the wise king took a strong hold on the youthful imagination, and numerous books allied thereto in style and spirit began soon to be collected.

"Sometimes an antiquated English dictionary in use in the house, a bit of salvage from the home in the old country, was found to contain proverbs as well as mere words, and was prized accordingly. This was the case with Nathan Bailey's Dictionary, and at a little later period with Maunder's, each page of which was garnished on its four sides with proverbs. Ordinary school books also furnished a few pithy precepts, and, as time went on, in the old district grammar school, first under Dr. Strachan, then under Mr. Armour, and then under Dr. Phillips (its curriculum embracing Latin and elementary Greek), the grammar and other class books abounded in aphoristic matter, furnishing to some young minds much

food for thought. The Greek Delectus and the Latin Delectus, in fact, consisted of brief excerpts from writers of note, and appended to the ever-to-be-remembered Lexicon of Schrevelius were copious collections of Greek moral sentences, including the sayings of the seven sages of Greece. The mottoes subjoined to coats of arms in heraldic books likewise attracted attention, as also did the curt Latin sentences attached to printers' devices in title pages, emblems, impresas, etc.

"In the case of the gatherer of these specimens, even before the migration from the old land, his childish ear was captivated by the shrewd sayings, maxims and tales of one, known as a wise man or wizard, over the whole country-side in the neighborhood of the very rustic villages of Dunkeswell and Luppit, in Devonshire, Jan Baker, as he was called, whose intellectually-formed head might, under other conditions, have been that of a divinity professor; while subsequently, after the transfer across the Atlantic, it was his lot to come within earshot of the talk of another primitive character who was ever formulating phrases and rules of conduct, such as would at a later period have been not unworthy of Artemus Ward, Mr. Joshua Billings, or Abraham Lincoln himself, and giving those in contact with him the benefit of the same,—and this was a curious hermit of a man dwelling in a sort of cave, on the banks of the Don, in a portion of what is now Riverside Park. Early settlers will remember Joseph Tyler, a mysterious stray squatter here from the Southern States, who acted as ferryman on his own account, at this point of the river, by means of a large canoe constructed by himself, formed of two long logs, hollowed out and dovetailed together. To the very successful cultivation of melon and maize, it may be remarked in passing, Tyler added that of the tobacco plant. Under varied stimulants of the kinds described, the taste for sententious literature was evoked and sustained, and the foible thus early indulged continued latently to subsist, and was humored from time to time, and to this day a book of sage summaries and aphoristic conclusions is enjoyed. Thus commenced, the collection was catalogued, and thus it grew to its present dimensions.

"Looking at the vast heritage of packed and preserved practical wisdom which we have in such form derived from our forefathers, it is to be hoped that whatever developments in this direction may hereafter take place within the bounds of our young Dominion, and whatever institutions and policies amongst us may be based there upon, they will be such as shall be worthy of the great and understanding nations from whom we have sprung."

HENRY SCADDING.

