

III.—*The Poets of Canada.*

By JOHN LESPERANCE.

(Read May 23, 1884.)

Although it must be admitted as a fundamental principle that a colony cannot have a literature of its own properly so called, inasmuch as literature, to be distinctive, requires the germ of individuality, and individuality, in its collective meaning, is only another term for the outcome of a national sentiment; yet I apprehend that, as I have had occasion to show in other places, a partial exception should be made in favour of Canada. Our country differs from any other colony of the British Empire in its origin, geographical position, social and political nature, and its tendencies. Paradoxical as it may appear, the very heterogeneousness of our population—divided on the broadest lines of race, creed and tongue—has been the mainspring of a certain national unity clearly observable among Canadians, and much of our mental and moral spontaneity can be traced to a generous, stimulating spirit of competition. The result is that, coming directly to the particular subject which I have in view in this paper, we may justly lay some claim, at least, to a literature of our own in the sense that it is Canadian, as strictly distinct from English, French, or American. And in the various branches of this literature, the most distinctive of all is the department of verse. The ground being thus cleared, I have thought that I could choose nothing more interesting, nor more in accordance with the nature and duties of the English Section of the Royal Society than a brief study of the Poets of Canada. The material naturally divides itself into two parts, the French poets and the English poets, and by right of priority the former must come first under notice.

I.

FRENCH POETS.

In the summary review of the Literature of French Canada, which I had the honour of submitting to you at the general meeting of last year, I sketched the prominent position held by the French poets among their colleagues who cultivated the other fields of oratory, history, romance, polemics, essays and journalism. I might have added that their position was also the most ancient, in accordance with the general principle that all literatures have their beginnings in song. The first regular and consecutive poem that we find dates back as far as 1732, when Jean Taché published his *Tableau de la mer*, written in well-sounding Alexandrines. Taché was a versatile man,—notary, tradesman and shipper,—and his descendants, inheritors of an honoured name, have been faithful to his traditions.

At about the same time there appeared a serio-comic poem, modelled somewhat on Boileau's *Lutrin*, and treating of certain ecclesiastical controversies and troubles that occurred in 1728. The author was Abbé Etienne Marchand, curé of Boucherville from 1732 to 1774, and, as we shall see later on, he too can boast of a namesake who has successfully cultivated the comic muse. After the publication of this work, there is an interval of silence covering exactly one hundred years. This was the momentous epoch of Indian wars, of the conquest, of the American invasion, and of the bitter struggle for constitutional rights that raged betwixt the victors and the vanquished. Epigrams, satires and political dithyrambs abound, chiefly after the establishment of the journal, *Le Canadien*, in 1806; but nothing has come down to us of that serene character which peace and prosperity alone can produce. It was only in 1830 that a volume of epistles and miscellaneous poems was put forth by Michel Bibaud, who may be termed the father of French Canadian verse, as he was the first of French Canadian historians. The work is very unequal, as are all the other productions of this eccentric writer, but it is not at all devoid of interest.

Singularly enough, it was another historian who followed in his footsteps, and Garneau's superior talents at once gave a form and inspiration to the national poetry. All the compositions of this gifted man, the first of which appeared in 1835, are of a high order of merit, but I shall mention only his *Dernier Huron*, because it contains an image of the most original and pathetic beauty. The poet represents the Last of the Hurons standing on a hillock and marshalling the phantoms of his lost warriors. Suddenly, he fancies that a shadow passes before him, and the bones of the buried braves seem to rattle under his feet, and the Indian blood bubbles in his veins. But, alas! it was all a mockery; at the foot of the hill he saw only the scythe of the mower:

" Perfide illusion! Au pied de la colline
C'est l'acier du faucheur! "

It is an exquisite contrast. Garneau derived the idea of his poem from a painting by a native artist, Plamondon of Tariolin, the last of the pure-blood of the Hurons of Lorette. To this picture was awarded the first prize in a competition established by the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, in 1838, and it was purchased by Lord Durham, at that time governor-general.

The biographer of Garneau may be regarded as his poetical successor. M. Chauveau, the distinguished President of the Royal Society, has not produced much verse, although I learn with pleasure that he is at present bestowing his leisure upon an elaborate poem of a religious character; but the little that we have is worthy of himself, and I can assign no higher praise. His ode (1861) to Donnacona, the chief of a Quebec tribe, treacherously captured and conveyed to France by Jacques Cartier, is full of spirit, and the first stanza presents a noble picture:

" Stadaconé dormait sur son fier promontoire;
Ormes et pins, forêt silencieuse et noire,
Protégeaient son sommeil.
Le roi Donnacona, dans son palais d'écorce,
Attendait, méditant sur sa gloire et sa force,
Le retour du soleil."

Garneau and Chauveau bring us down to 1850, when the greatest of French-Canadian poets steps upon the scene and opens the galaxy that has gone on multiplying and brightening until our day. Octave Crémazie, born at Quebec in 1830, followed the calling of a bookseller. His poems appeared between 1852 and 1862, in which year he was involved in financial ruin and took refuge in France, where he died of a broken heart in 1878. In this place, last year, I expressed the hope, that a national monument would be set up to the memory of Crémazie in the shape of a complete edition of his works. I am pleased to say that my hope has been fulfilled by the publication at Montreal of a splendid volume, which every Canadian lover of letters should have on his book-shelves. The character of Crémazie's inspiration is sublimity. His thought soars on broad and sweeping pinions; his images are grand and salient; and, when he strikes the minor key of national regret and disappointment, the effect is deeply pathetic. I am convinced that, if his life had not been blasted, and he had continued to write in freedom of mind and amid the associations of his childhood and native land, he would have created poems not unworthy to rank with those of the best writers of contemporary France. The "Chaunt of the Old Soldier," composed on the arrival, in 1855, of the French corvette, *La Capricieuse*, sent out by Napoleon III to open commercial relations between France and Canada, is simply a masterpiece. The blind and tottering veteran, hearing the sound of cannon on the river, and fondly imagining that it heralded the return of the French fleet, is led to the ramparts by his son, and breaks out in a thrilling lamentation on being told that it is the Red Cross of England streaming from the mizzen. But his confidence remains unshaken, and day after day he repairs to the same spot, in the hope that his old companions in arms will yet come back from over the sea. The time arrives at last when he is no longer seen on the heights, and we are told that he has died in the arms of his son, murmuring: "They will return, but I shall not be there." Then we have the poet's outburst:—

"Tu l'as dit, ô vieillard! La France est revenue!
 Au sommet de nos murs, voyez-vous dans la nue,
 Son noble pavillon dérouler sa splendeur?
 Ah! ce jour glorieux, où les Français, nos frères,
 Sont venus pour nous voir, du pays de nos pères,
 Sera le plus aimé de nos jours de bonheur."

And a shadow is seen on the wall, wavering in the breeze. It is the old soldier standing at his post to assist at the glorious scene. Nor he alone.

"Tous les vieux Canadiens moissonnés par la guerre,
 Abandonnent aussi leur couche funéraire,
 Pour voir réaliser leurs rêves les plus beaux.
 Et puis on entendit, le soir, sur chaque rive,
 Se mêler, au doux bruit de l'onde fugitive,
 Un long chant de bonheur qui sortait des tombeaux."

Equally powerful and majestic is *Le Drapeau de Carillon*, an ode addressed to the lily-flag of Royal France which floated on the main bastion of Fort Carillon, or Ticonderoga, on the day when Montcalm achieved a brilliant victory over Abercrombie and his gallant High-

landers. That flag is religiously preserved at Quebec by M. Baillaigé, who is expected to display it in the procession of St. Jean Baptiste Day, which will take place in Montreal on the 24th of June. Superior even to the two pieces just mentioned is the *Promenade des Trois Mois*, a weird fantasy, wherein the dialogue between the worm and the corpse is replete with terrible thoughts of death and the dread Hereafter.

Next in merit to Crémazie, and *haud longo intervallo*, is M. Fréchette, President for the year of the French Section of the Royal Society. Of all Canadian poets he is the best known to English readers, because of his adequate knowledge of our language, his social relations with our people, and the circumstance of his having received the Monthyon award of the French Academy, an honour somewhat akin to the Newdegate Prize. M. Fréchette is a very careful writer, chiselling his verses according to the most approved Horatian rule. The flowers of his youthful genius were gathered in a small volume, entitled *Mes Loisirs*, which at once established his reputation. This was followed by *Pel Mel*, a work of richer promise and riper fruit. The equipment with which he presented himself before the French Academy was two little collections appropriately called *Fleurs Boréales* and *Oiseaux de Neige*. He has written constantly ever since, and I happen to know that he has ready two important volumes, containing a series of narrative poems designed to celebrate the principal events of the history of Canada from the beginning of the Colony. The poet excels in this species of composition and from the few examples lately published, such as "1870," *Notre Histoire*, *Le Drapeau Fantôme*, and others, we may expect the most valuable contributions yet made to the literature of French Canada. M. Fréchette plays with success on many notes. His verse, always perfect in form, breathes strength and tenderness, while the thought is always thoroughly limpid. He is a master of the sonnet, in which frame some of his prettiest conceits are enshrined. Among his lyrical efforts, *La Découverte du Mississippi* is, perhaps, the best, and I think that he is himself of that opinion. His vision of the romantic figures that passed along the mighty river in the heroic days of discovery and exploration is very poetical, and the contrast between the ancient wilderness and the progress of to-day is set forth with power. Victor Hugo could not have written more splendid strophes than these:—

"Oui, deux siècles ont fui. La solitude vierge
N'est plus là! Du progrès le flot montant submerge
Les vestiges derniers d'un passé qui finit.
Où le désert dormait grandit la métropole;
Et le fleuve asservi courbe sa large épaule
Sous l'arche aux piliers de granit.

Plus de forêts sans fin; la vapeur les sillonne!
L'astre des jours nouveaux sur tous les points rayonne;
L'enfant de la nature est évangélisé;
Le soc du laboureur fertilise la plaine,
Et le surplus doré de sa gerbe trop pleine
Nourrit le vieux monde épuisé."

M. Pamphile Lemay now deserves our attention. In 1865 he published his *Essais Poétiques*, which included his remarkable translation of Longfellow's *Evangeline*, revised and re-edited by him in 1870. This work is sufficient of itself to establish any writer's reputation. In 1867 appeared *La Découverte du Canada*, a poem which was crowned by

Laval University and further honoured by a gold medal. In 1869, his *Hymne National* deserved another gold medal. In 1875, *Les Vengeances* saw the light. These poems are all more or less lengthy, but in 1879 M. Lemay collected his shorter and more fugitive pieces in a book, entitled *Une Gerbe*. He has since given forth a volume of *Fables*, replete with a quiet philosophy. The qualities of this poet's talent are grace and tenderness. His versification is always correct, his diction chastened, and his imagery well balanced and refined. He has an eye for Nature, and is particularly happy in the treatment of domestic and religious subjects.

M. Benjamin Sulte has, of late, neglected the Muse in favour of historical research, but his single volume, *Les Laurentiennes*, is quite sufficient to ensure him a prominent place among the French poets. He excels in song writing, and his work has a distinctly national stamp from the circumstance that he gives expression to the thoughts and aspirations of the people. Among his best efforts I may mention *La Patineuse*, *Les Fondateurs* and *La Cloche*.

It is a curious instance of the blending of races in the Province of Quebec, that one of the rising young French poets should bear the thoroughly English name of William Chapman. His contribution is denominated *Les Quebecquoises*, which, although rather juvenile here and there, even in the author's own estimation, is a production full of possibilities and promise. M. Chapman is a conscientious, painstaking writer, as severe to himself as any critic could be, and these qualities, supporting undoubtedly original talents, must secure the young poet a brilliant future. I would particularly call attention to his odes on matters of historical and national interest, such as those to *Dollard des Ormeaux*, *La Bataille de Ste. Foye*, *Chateauguay* and *Cadioux*.

Another poet with a foreign name, a good round Irish name, is James Donnelly. From a line in his impassioned address to Ireland, I should fancy he was born in the Emerald Isle. If so, his mastery of the French language, and his skilful handling of the intricacies of French versification, are remarkable. M. Donnelly has the poetic instinct, and it is a pity that he does not produce more.

Several clergymen figure among the poets of French Canada, but I have room for the mention of only one, Abbé Gingras, *curé* of St. Edouard de Lotbinière, in the district of Quebec. The very title of his little volume is poetic—*Au Foyer de mon Presbytère*. The Abbé writes rapidly and is not sufficiently addicted to the use of the file, but he has a fresh, unhackneyed turn of mind and his sentiments are truly elevated. As might be expected of a celibate priest, he treats of subjects that are out of the common, and is debarred from touching on that tender passion which is the most poetical outcome of the human heart. His work has, therefore, the enforced advantage of novelty of which he makes abundant use. His thoughts on the churchyard and on a child dying without baptism are original and awe-inspiring.

M. Félix Marchand, fellow of the Royal Society and member of the Provincial Parliament for the county of St. Johns, has devoted himself almost exclusively to comedy, both in prose and verse. Of the first I need not speak, except to say that his work evinces a knowledge of human nature, a gift of gentle satire, and a sense of sly humour, which readily raise it out of the groove of the commonplace. These qualities are heightened when presented in metrical form. *Les Faux Brillants* is a comedy in five acts, and *Un Bonheur en attire un Autre* is another in one act. Both of them are very happy conceptions, and the

ravelling and unravelling of the amusing plot in both cases display an amount of technical skill rarely to be met with in this very difficult kind of composition.

The number of minor poets, whose works are more or less ephemeral and cast in varying degrees of excellence, is very large, and the bare enumeration would fill a lengthy paragraph. M. Sulte has counted no less than 175 names. These writings were originally consigned to the columns of newspapers or the pages of magazines, and have never been collected except on one or two occasions. Among the writers of this class, I may cite Eustache Prudhomme, formerly a notary of Montreal, who published many elegant pieces some twenty years ago, but has since gone out of sight. Judge Routhier, one of the best prose writers in this province, has also published a number of poems, the Ode on Canada in the nineteenth century being specially worthy of note. J. Lenoir, of Montreal, was cut off in his prime, just as his talent was maturing. His apostrophe to the Church of Notre Dame of Montreal is set in broad lines. Then we have Fiset of Quebec, Poisson of Arthabaska, Alfred Garneau of Ottawa, son of the poet and historian, Achille Fréchette of Ottawa, and Evanturel of Quebec.

The time and space at my command do not allow of any further extension of this study. My paper has been essentially revisional and not critical, and hence I have been spared the labour of finding fault. But even if I had gone into analysis, I should still hold that the names which I have cited are those of genuine poets, who have published works of real merit, many of them destined to live as long as the French language survives in America, and as long as the French Canadians preserve their patriotism and their intellectual autonomy. All the elements have been touched upon in their poetry,—their history, enlivened by romance and consecrated by affliction; their nationality, maintained in spite of all the disintegrating influences of conquest; their religion, homely and primitive as in the Brittany and Normandy of the Middle Ages; their social life, adorned by courtesy, inspired by cheerfulness and stamped with a simple, old-fashioned sense of honour.

II.

ENGLISH POETS.

In treating of the English poets of Canada, you will perhaps be surprised to learn that the field is a very wide one, and that I must at once draw the line between the writers who have published only casual verses, however excellent many of them may be, and those who have produced works of a more ambitious and enduring description. I shall touch upon the first without any strict regard to chronological order, and without further insistence than the limits of my paper will allow. *Place aux dames!*

The most distinguished names of our female poets are those of Annie L. Walker, Pamela S. Vining, Augusta Baldwin, and Mrs. P. L. Haney. The principal work of Harriet A. Wilkins, of Hamilton, is her *Acadia*, which has reached a second edition. Jennie E. Haight, formerly a teacher at Montreal, rises considerably above the ordinary standard, while the verses of Mrs. Moodie have sustained the reputation which this gifted lady has achieved in the department of romance. Helen M. Johnson published a volume of poems in 1856, which has since become very rare. She was cut off prematurely in

1863, in her thirtieth year. Miss Murray's poems, especially on Scottish subjects, are full of interest, but she will be chiefly remembered as a successful writer of fiction. Mrs. Faulkner published, in 1850, a volume of poems under her maiden name, Rhoda Ann Page, and the title, *Wild Notes from the Backwoods*, sufficiently indicates its character. A distinguished Irish Canadian name is that of Rosanna Eleanor Mullins, better known as Mrs. Leprohon, whose numerous poems, sacred, narrative, descriptive, lyrical, elegiac, and society verses, were gathered into one volume in 1881. Mrs. Leprohon was endowed with many attributes of the poetic faculty, and several of her pieces will always find a place in any selections from Canadian poets.

In the roll of the male writers, which I shall abbreviate as much as possible, I may mention James McCarroll, Frederick Wright, R. J. McGeorge, W. F. Hawley, E. H. Dewart, E. J. Chapman, Thomas McQueen, H. F. Darnell, John May, J. R. Ramsay, John Massie, J. G. Hodgins, Robert Stuart Patterson, J. A. Allen, Samuel Payne Ford, Robert Sweeney, D. J. Wallace, J. H. King, W. H. Hawley, Donald McIntosh, William P. Lett, T. Cleworth, John Scoble, James McIntosh. Alexander McLachlan has sometimes been called "the Canadian Burns," and he certainly deserves special commendation for all his efforts in favour of our country and its literature. His publications are numerous, among which are three small volumes of poems, the last of which, entitled *The Emigrant*, is much the best. Isidore G. Ascher, formerly a lawyer of Montreal, but now resident in London, published *Voices from the Hearth* in 1863, which at once secured for him a leading position among our minor poets. He still publishes occasional pieces under the familiar name of "Isidore." *Alazon and other Poems*, was put forth in 1850 by William Wye Smith, formerly of Toronto, and he has been a prolific writer, in prose and verse, ever since that date. The reputation of John Breckenridge goes back to 1846, when he published at Kingston *The Crusades and other Poems*, including lengthy pieces, such as *Napoleon Bonaparte* and *The French Revolution* and *Laiza*. This volume is now out of print and very scarce. If Mr. William Kirby had not achieved so high a reputation in the domain of fiction, especially by his valuable historical novel *Le Chien D'Or*, we should be disposed to linger more over his verse. His *U. E., a Tale of Upper Canada*, appeared in Niagara in 1859, and we have had the pleasure of reading several contributions of equal merit since that time. Mr. Kirby is a thorough Canadian both in verse and prose. John F. McDonnell, a young Irishman of Quebec, has written a number of very spirited lyrics, and, if he had not died prematurely, would certainly have established a reputation. W. O. Farmer, a youthful lawyer of Montreal, is destined to fill the void made by McDonnell. He has pathos, imagination, enthusiasm, and a delicate ear for cadence. It is to be hoped that Mr. Farmer will continue to cultivate the Muses with devotion. There is matter for regret that Mr. George Martin does not write more frequently and that, after assisting Charles Heavysege in the publication of *Saul*, he has not thought fit to print a collection of his own poems. It is a further pity that Martin Gerald Griffin has become so absorbed in politics and the cares of militant journalism as to neglect his uncommon literary ability. Mr. Griffin has that facility of verse and instinct of good taste which are inherent in the poetic temperament, and of all the productions which I have read from his pen, there is not one that is not decidedly superior. It is sufficient to say of Mr. Cleveland, of the Eastern Townships, that he has succeeded in breaking the charmed circle of the *Atlantic Monthly*, and that several

of his compositions have been laid before a wide public in the pages of that fastidious and exclusive periodical. It is, once more, unfortunately due to the narrowness of my space that I can only barely allude to two men who, by their transcendent talents and the prominence of their positions, would almost merit the honours of a separate page. The two greatest orators of Canada were also very considerable poets. There is a swing in Howe's verse, a breeziness in his fancies, a rush and roar in his transports, well in keeping with the wild music of those waves within whose sight his infancy was cradled. I would suggest that a careful selection be made of Howe's poems, and that they be published in cheap form for distribution as prizes or otherwise in our schools. They breathe the true native spirit. Somewhat the same may be said of McGee's *Canadian Ballads*, which might very properly be detached from the bulky volume containing his other poems and published separately. Thus would the country have another link of sympathy with the memory of the martyred orator and poet. I have now to speak of one who needs no introduction to lovers of Canadian literature, and certainly none to his Fellows of the Royal Society—Evan McColl. His first published volume dates back to 1836, under the title of the *Mountain Minstrel*, containing poems in Gaelic and attempts in English song. In 1838, and simultaneously with a second edition of the *Mountain Minstrel*—the best proof of that work's success—appeared *Clarsach Nam Beann*, a contribution to Gaelic letters which at once placed him in the front rank of Celtic bards. Hugh Miller called him "the Moore of the Highlands." During his long residence in Canada, Mr. McColl has frequently published poems on subjects of varied public interest, and it was hoped that the time would come when he would commemorate the second half of his martial life by putting forward his Canadian poems. He has done so. A handsome volume, published simultaneously at Toronto, Edinburgh, and Inverness, appeared in 1883, and is announced as containing the English poems of the author. These are considerably over two hundred in number, presenting an almost infinite variety. We have the *Mountain Minstrel* complete, which is a desirable acquisition; and we have, in the second half, the songs that were mostly written in Canada. Our poet has maintained his popularity for so many years, and the characteristics of his genius are so well known and appreciated, that we need scarce do more than thank Mr. McColl for bequeathing to his countrymen this beautiful memorial of a long life devoted to poetry. Nor will the father live alone: he will survive in his offspring. I have detached the name of Mary J. McColl from among the female poets, purposely to set it beside that of her venerable parent. Her *Bide a Wee*, a handsome little volume, was published at Buffalo in 1880. When an authoress is introduced into the world of letters with such sponsors as Longfellow, Whittier, Wendell Holmes and Joaquin Miller, she requires no poor words of recommendation such as I might utter to-day. I shall only repeat in one line what I wrote more at length, in a review of the work at the time of its publication, that Mary McColl gives promise of such poetic qualities as must place her by the side of the principal poets of America, if she continues to give due attention to her natural gifts.

It is one of our standing regrets, and a source of discouragement, that we have not been able to maintain a literary periodical of our own. The loss is the greater because there is a vast store of talent in the country, which only requires a proper channel of publication to produce most substantial results. The *Canadian Monthly* is a case in point.

That magazine never really rose beyond the tentative stage, but, even so, it served a most useful purpose by giving a voice to several of our young singers. We all remember the writings of *Fidelis*, and all of us have been delighted at the felicitous conceptions of Mr. Dixon of Ottawa and of the Rev. P. Mulvany.

With all due respect, I cannot overlook the name of our distinguished colleague, Mr. George Murray. He is known throughout the length and breadth of the Dominion as a ripe and refined scholar, and what may be strictly denominated the type of a purely literary man. Throwing a well-known lapidary compliment into the present tense, we may truthfully say of him: *Nihil quod tangit non ornat*. Without dwelling on those other services to Canadian literature with which his name has been associated for years, it were empty praise to repeat that his verse is set in so perfect a mould that it becomes a fit subject of study and imitation. Unfortunately, his poems have not yet been collected in book-form. But I hope I shall be guilty of no indiscretion in saying, and I am sure the Royal Society will be delighted to learn, that an eminent colleague has the material of a volume ready, and has been persuaded by his friends and admirers to publish it within the not distant future. When Charles Mair, the young poet from Perth, Ontario, put forth his *Dreamland and Other Poems* in Montreal and London, I fancied I discovered in them the germs of the Canadian Swinburne. There was a freedom and dash in the metre, an effervescence in sentiment, and a bloom of imagination which gave promise of a golden harvest, but unfortunately Charles Mair has abandoned his province and his Muse, and has since devoted his entire mental energies to trade in the Northwest.

Our dramatic compositions are unaccountably rare, with the exception of those of Heavyside, which I cannot here notice. Chief among the others is *Prince Pedro* of Dr. J. H. Garnier, of Lucknow in the county of Bruce, which I have had previous occasion to pronounce a performance of exceptional worth. The plot revolves on the terrible story of Inez de Castro, which is one of the darkest pages of Portuguese history. The author has the true dramatic instinct; his intrigue is developed with ingenuity, the dialogue is in perfect situation, the characters are sharply drawn, and the *dénouement* (can we not find an English equivalent for that eccentric stage word) is a striking culmination. I venture to pronounce *Prince Pedro* one of the best contributions to Canadian dramatic poetry, and to recommend its more general perusal. I am given to understand that Dr. Garnier has other important poems in preparation.

The first work of the well-known author, J. J. Procter, was published in Montreal in 1861. It was entitled *Voices of the Night*. Although it appeared at a period of literary depression, the vogue of the work was such as to inspire the author with the confidence that he had struck the popular chord of feeling, and ever since his name has stood honourably before the public. I am happy to inform the Society that, only a day or two ago, I had the honour and pleasure of receiving an advance copy of a second volume from the same pen, entitled *Black Hawk and other Poems*. The numerous pieces composing this work are not of uniform excellence, but their general character is such as to enhance the reputation of the author. Mr. Procter is one of the recognized poets of Canada and his claims cannot be overlooked.

Few of our poets have the sweep and vigour of Samuel James Watson, now, alas! gathered to his fathers, whose single volume, containing the mellifluous *Legend of the Roses*, and a drama of great power and force entitled *Raolan*, was published in 1876. It at

once took a high rank among cultivated readers, Longfellow and Emerson showing in a marked manner their appreciation of its merit and value. The long poem is exceedingly rich in apt allusion, graceful comparison, and delicacy of expression. There is hardly a halting line in the whole legend, which is full of pretty fancies and tenderly-turned conceits. The drama is quite in keeping with Watson's other work. It is of a graver mould, and the incident, dialogue and grouping of characters are managed with consummate art and taste. The pity of it is that Watson was so soon taken away from us. He was one of the few, that were not born to die.

On my third visit to Canada, in 1865, I read one evening in the portico of the St. Lawrence Hall, in the Montreal *Telegraph*, now defunct, the following poem :—

I.

Good night! God bless thee, love, wherever thou art,
 And keep thee, like an infant, in His arms!
 And all good messengers that move unseen
 By eye sin-darkened, and on noiseless wings
 Carry glad tidings to the doors of sleep,
 Touch all thy tears to pearls of heavenly joy.

Oh! I am very lonely missing thee;
 Yet, morning, noon, and night, sweet memories
 Are nestling round thy name within my heart,
 Like summer birds in frozen winter woods.

Good night! *Good night!* Oh, for the mutual word!
 Oh, for the loving pressure of thy hand!
 Oh, for the tender parting of thine eyes!
 God keep thee, love, wherever thou art! Good night!

II.

Good night, my love! Another day has brought
 Its load of grief and stowed it in my heart,
 So full already, Joy is crushed to death,
 And Hope stands mute and shivering at the door.
 Still Memory, kind angel, stays within,
 And will not leave me with my grief alone,
 But whispers of the happy days that were
 Made glorious by the light of thy pure eyes.

Oh! shall I ever see thee, love, again,
 My own, my darling, my soul's best beloved,
 Far more than I had ever hoped to find
 Of true and good and beautiful on earth?
 Oh! shall I *never* see thee, love, again?
 My treasure found and loved and lost, good night.

III.

Good night, my love! Without, the wintry winds
 Make the night sadly vocal; and within,
 The hours that danced along so full of joy,
 Like skeletons have come from out their graves,

And sit beside me at my lonely fire,—
 Guests grim but welcome, which my fancy decks
 In all the beauty that was theirs when thou
 Didst look and breathe and whisper softly on them.
 So do they come and sit, night after night,
 Talking of me to thee till I forget
 That they are mere illusions and the past
 Is gone forever. They have vanished now,
 And I am all alone, and thou art—where?
 My love, good angels bear thee my good night!

When I had read once, I paused in admiration and astonishment. I read again, and still the wonder grew. Here was a kind of triple sonnet, written in blank verse, and signed with fictitious initials: but I felt there was a soul in them. The reflection I made was: "The man who wrote these lines is a poet, and I will hear of him again." Five or six years elapsed, when in 1870 appeared the *Prophecy of Merlin*, by John Reade. I procured one of the first copies, and, after attentive reading, my judgment was confirmed. King Arthur has been borne away in a barge to the vale of Avalon, and Sir Bedivere, the last of the Knights of the Round Table, lifts up his voice upon the beach and weeps. Merlin comes forth, and, after stanching his wound, consoles him with a prophecy of the happy days that are to replace the golden era of Camelot. Three queens shall reign in the favoured land, a triple sisterhood beneath one crown,—Britain, and Albion, and green Innisfail. The description of the arts and sciences in this new time is of surpassing beauty. Merlin then gives a glowing description of Prince Albert, the consort of this Queen; adds a brilliant picture of the Crystal Palace and the first London Exhibition; makes a touching allusion to Canada, "the far land beneath the setting sun;" and concludes with a tribute to Prince Arthur, who had, at that time, passed a year among us. After this, Merlin disappears and leaves Sir Bedivere alone upon the strand among the dead. Merlin goes and Bedivere is solitary, but we are happy, because we are in possession of the most perfect poem ever written in Canada, a fit pendant to Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. The same volume contains a number of other beautiful compositions. Those bearing on Scriptural subjects, such as Vashti, Balaam, Rizpah, Jubal and Jephthah, being specially remarkable. In a magazine article, published a few years ago, I made bold to say that, with the exception of Longfellow, Mr. Reade is the best sonneteer in America, and I am proud to say that my judgment has been ratified in high quarters. I should be embarrassed to choose from his sonnets; and must content myself with one example of his softer and more mythical mood, in ballad metre:—

I.

In my heart are many chambers, through which I wander free;
 Some are furnished, some are empty, some are sombre, some are light;
 Some are open to all comers, and of some I keep the key,
 And I enter in the stillness of the night.

II.

But there's one I never enter,—it is closed to even me !
 Only once its door was opened, and it shut for evermore ;
 And though sounds of many voices gather round it, like the sea,
 It is silent, ever silent, as the shore.

III.

In that chamber, long ago, my love's casket was concealed,
 And the jewel that it sheltered I knew only one could win ;
 And my soul foreboded sorrow, should that jewel be revealed,
 And I almost hoped that none might enter in.

IV.

Yet day and night I lingered by that fatal chamber door,
 Till—she came at last, my darling one, of all the earth my own ;
 And she entered—and she vanished with my jewel, which she wore ;
 And the door was closed—and I was left alone.

V.

She gave me back no jewel, but the spirit of her eyes
 Shone with tenderness a moment, as she closed that chamber door,
 And the memory of that moment is all I have to prize,—
 But *that, at least*, is mine for evermore.

VI.

Was she conscious, when she took it, that the jewel was my love ?
 Did she think it but a bauble, she might wear or toss aside ?
 I know not, I accuse not, but I hope that it may prove
 A blessing, though she spurn it in her pride.

About four or five years ago, when I was editor of the *Canadian Illustrated News*, I received a small copy-book containing a number of short poems, written out in a school-boy's hand. A modest letter accompanied it: Would I kindly look at the pieces, and, if I found any that were suitable, would I kindly give them a corner in my paper. I at once plucked out this flower of a sonnet and published it:—

“ At Pozzuoli, on the Italian coast,
 A ruined temple stands. The thin waves flow
 Upon its marble pavements; and in row
 Three columns, last of a majestic host
 Which once had heard the haughty Roman's boast,
 Rise in the mellow air. Long years ago
 The unstable floor sank down, and from below
 The shining flood of sapphire—like the ghost
 Of youth's bright aspirations and high hopes,

More real than castles in the air, and laid
 On some foundation, though of sand that slopes
 Seaward to lift again—it comes arrayed
 In olive sea-weeds; but a raven mopes
 Upon its topmost stone, and casts a shade.”

I felt sure that we should soon hear from this New Brunswick boy again. And so we did. In 1880, there was published in Philadelphia a dainty little volume, entitled *Orion and Other Poems*, by Charles G. D. Roberts. You all remember with what pleasure and applause that publication was received. The poem from which the book takes its name is simply a gem of purest ray serene. While Ænopion, the King of Chios, immolates unto Apollo a tawny wolf, his hunter, Orion, makes his appearance upon the scene with

“The grandeur of the mountains for a robe,
 The torrent’s strength for girdle, and for crown,
 The sea’s calm, for dread fury capable,—”

and stands

“Without the laurel’s sacred shade
 Which his large presence deepened.”

In reward for his services, the hunter craves the hand of the snow-breasted nymph, Merope, but the king, while he feigns to consent, fills a wine-cup with a Colchian drug and presents it to the unsuspecting servitor, who falls asleep upon the beach. Two slaves are then despatched to pour poison upon his eyelids, by which these are deprived of light. A troop of maids beloved of Doris then rises out of the sea, and grouping around the prostrate giant they sing a chorus which, with strophe and antistrophe, is cast in the best Greek model, and not unworthy of Swinburne. Orion hears and arises groping, and after a grand apostrophe to Night, a voice, thrice repeated, bids him hie to the hills, where he shall behold the morning. On his way up he grasps a forgerman from a smithy behind a jagged cape, and, hoisting him upon his shoulders to guide his feet, he reaches the crest of the mountain

“Ere the fiery flower
 Of dawn bloomed fully.”

There his beloved appears to him, and he recovers his sight just as the rosy light of morning falls upon her beautiful face. The twain then retire to Delos, being escorted over the waves by bands of Nereids at Poseidon’s bidding, and in that island’s consecrated shelter they spend a blissful existence. There is a marked imitation of Tennyson in this poem, but its original character is equally marked and stamps it as the author’s very own.

Ariadne is the second of the classic poems in the volume. The picture of the heroine lying on the sea-beach forms a picture that lingers in the mind:—

“She lay, face downward, on the shining shore,
 Her head upon her bended arm; her hair
 Loose-spreading fell, a heart-entangling store;
 Her shoulder swelling through it glimmered more
 Divinely white than snows in morning air;
 One tress, more wide astray, the ripples bore
 Where her hand clenched the ooze in mute despair.”

The subject of the poem is Bacchus' wooing and winning of the maid, the account of which is aglow with the poetry of passion.

Launcelot and the Four Queens is another Tennysonian reminiscence, but so exquisite is the workmanship that a special charm pervades it all. See how Launcelot du Lac is depicted asleep:

"Neath the fruit-trees latticed shade
An errant knight at length is laid,
 In opiate noon's deep slumber sunk;
His helm, well proved in conflict's stern,
Lies in a tuft of tender fern
 Against the mossy trunk.

A robin on a branch above,
Nodding by his dreaming love,
 Where four blue eggs are hatched not yet,
Winks, and watches unconcerned
A spider o'er the helm upturned
 Weaving his careful net.

The sleeper's hair falls curling fair
From off his forehead broad, and bare,
 Entangling violets faint and pale;
Beside his cheek a primrose gleams,
And breathes her sweetness through his dreams,
 Till grown too sweet they fail."

Four queens of great estate come riding by, and very properly fall in love with the sleeping knight. They weave a spell of witchery above his eyes, and bear him homeward on his shield by the aid of their men-at-arms. He is locked up in a high chamber and plied with the wiles of the beautiful queens, but remains faithful to Guinevere, and is finally rescued by one of the damsels of the court. Let the Royal Society send a word of greeting to Mr. Roberts, and encourage him to go on cultivating a talent which must inevitably lead him to fame.