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A LITTLE BOOK OF CANADIAN ESSAYS

BY

LAWRENCE J. BURPEE

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Transcriber's Note:

The entry in the table of contents for Chapter IV, page 43, is GEORGE THOMAS LANIGAN (1845–1886); however, the heading on page 43 is CANADIAN HUMORISTS.

On page 46 the title of a poem by John Hunter-Duvar was incorrectly given as "The Immigration of the Fairies." It has been changed to "The Emigration of the Fairies."

PREFATORY NOTE

THESE little essays are for the most part the substance of more elaborate articles which have appeared in various Canadian and American periodicals. They are obviously not in any sense exhaustive, nor do they profess to include all Canadian writers worthy of remembrance. They are brought together here merely in the hope that they may remind Canadians of the work of a few of their forgotten or half-forgotten worthies.

OTTAWA, 1909.

L. J. B.

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A Little Book
of
Canadian Essays

ISABELLA VALANCY CRAWFORD

JUST a quarter of a century ago a little book of verse appeared in Toronto, bearing the appalling title, "Old Spookses' Pass, Malcolm's Katie, and other Poems." The few who had the hardihood to dig beneath such a title found to their surprise that the volume contained a collection of verse of exceptional quality, sincere, musical, rising at times to the level of genius, and ranging from Western dialect-verse to delicate lyrics.

Isabella Valancy Crawford, the author of these poems, was a daughter of the late Dr. Stephen Crawford, of Peterborough, Ontario. From early childhood she had amused herself by writing short stories and verses, and after the death of her father she found it necessary to turn her gifts to practical account. She won a certain amount of popularity with her stories, but these were more or less pot-boilers. In verse alone she could adequately express herself. She put her heart and soul into this book of poems, and its failure was a bitter disappointment. With the irony of fate, a few copies strayed to England, after her death, and won warmly appreciative notices from the Athenæum, Spectator, and others of the great English reviews.

Of the poems included in her book, the most sustained and ambitious is "Malcolm's Katie," a love-story in blank verse, divided into seven parts, with lyrical interludes—in the manner of "The Princess." Katie and her lover Max have pledged their troth secretly, and Max goes off into the wilderness to carve a home for little Katie. The poem follows him into the forest, which affords the poet opportunity for some admirable descriptive passages:

The South Wind laid his moccasins aside,
Broke his gay calumet of flowers, and cast
His useless wampum, beaded with cool dews,
Far from him northward; his long, ruddy spear
Flung sunward whence it came, and his soft locks
Of warm, fine haze grew silver as the birch.
His wigwam of green leaves began to shake;
The crackling ice-beds scolded harsh like squaws;
The small ponds pouted up their silver lips;
The great lakes eyed the mountains, whisper'd "Ugh!
Are ye so tall, O Chiefs? Not taller than
Our plumes can reach." And rose a little way,
As panthers stretch to try their velvet limbs,
And then retreat to purr and bide their time.

.
Brown rivers of deep waters sunless stole;
Small creeks sprang from its mosses, and amaz'd
Slipp'd on soft feet, swift stealing through the gloom,
Eager for light and for the frolic winds.

.
The scouts of Winter ran
From the ice-belted north, and whistling shafts
Struck maple and struck sumach—and a blaze
Ran swift from leaf to leaf, from bough to bough,
Till round the forest flashed a belt of flame
And inward licked its tongues of red and gold
To the deep-crannied inmost heart of all.

The poem reveals everywhere an amazing insight into the workings of nature and human nature,

clothed in language that becomes at times a perfect riot of imagery, yet never beyond control. Here is introduced a love-song which, in sweetness and the delicacy of its form and thought, can only be compared to Ben Jonson's immortal lyric.

O, Love builds on the azure sea,
And Love builds on the golden sand,
And Love builds on the rose-wing'd cloud,
And sometimes Love builds on the land.

O, if Love build on sparkling sea,
And if Love build on golden strand,
And if Love build on rosy cloud,
To Love these are the solid land.

O, Love will build his lily walls,
And Love his pearly roof will rear,—
On cloud or sand, or mist or sea,
Love's solid land is everywhere.

Max, in the forest solitudes, wields his sturdy axe and dreams of the future.

"Bite deep and wide, O axe, the tree;
What doth thy bold voice promise me?"
"I promise thee all joyous things
That furnish forth the lives of kings.
For every silver ringing blow,
Cities and palaces shall grow!"
"Bite deep and wide, O axe, the tree,
Tell wider prophecies to me."
"When rust hath gnaw'd me deep and red,
A nation strong shall lift his head!
His crown the very Heavens shall smite,
Æons shall build him in his might!"
"Bite deep and wide, O axe, the tree;
Bright Seer, help on thy prophecy!"

A second lover appears on the scene, follows Max into the depths of the forest, and tries unsuccessfully to sow the seeds of distrust in his heart—distrust of that Katie whom, in another charming little song, he typifies as a spotless lily—"Mild soul of the unsalted wave." Max's rival, failing to move him to jealousy, returns to Katie with false tales, so plausible and circumstantial that, for a moment, she is torn with cruel doubts and fears; but in the end her own pure heart leads her, through sorrow, to a more perfect faith:

Who curseth Sorrow knows her not at all,
Dark matrix she, from which the human soul
Has its last birth; whence, with its misty thews,
Close-knitted in her blackness, issues out,
Strong for immortal toil up such great heights
As crown o'er crown rise through Eternity;
Without the loud, deep clamour of her wail,
The iron of her hands, the biting brine
Of her black tears, the Soul but lightly built
Of indeterminate spirit, like a mist

Would lapse to Chaos in soft, gilded dreams,
As mists fade in the gazing of the sun.

In the end Max and Katie are brought happily together again, and the poem ends as all love-stories should end.

Isabella Crawford's remarkable versatility is illustrated by the contrast between the narrative poem "Malcolm's Katie," with its dainty lyrical interludes, and the dialect-ballad of "Old Spookses' Pass." The central incident here is the night stampede of a drove of cattle in the foothills of the Rockies, and one is immediately struck by the spirit and vigour of the lines.

"Ever see'd a herd ring'd in at night?
Wal, it's sort o' cur'us,—the watchin' sky,
The howl of coyotes, a great black mass
With here and thar the gleam of an eye
An' the white of a horn,—an', now an' then,
An old bull lifting his shaggy head,
With a beller like a broke-up thunder growl—
An' the summer lightnin', wuick and red,
Twistin' and turnin' amid the stars,
Silent as snakes at play in the grass,
An' plungin' their fangs in the bare old skulls
Of the mountains, frownin' above the Pass."

Then comes the stampede.

"The herd wus up!—Not one at a time,
That ain't the style in a midnight run,—
They wus up and off like as all their minds
Wus roll'd in the hide of only one!
I've fit in a battle, an' heerd the guns
Blaspheming God with their devils' yell;
Heerd the stuns of a fort like thunder crash
In front of the scream of a red-hot shell;
But thet thar poundin' of iron hoofs,
The clatter of horns, the peltin' sweep
Of three thousand head of a runnin' herd,
Made all of them noises kind o' cheap."

The dramatic vigour of Isabella Crawford's style is further revealed in such poems as "The Helot," combined here with passion, intensity, and brilliant colour.

Low the sun beat on the land,
Red on vine and plain and wood;
With the wine-cup in his hand,
Vast the Helot herdsman stood.

.

Day was at her high unrest;
Fever'd with the wine of light,
Loosing all her golden vest,

Reel'd she towards the coming night.

Fierce and full her pulses beat;
Bacchic throbs the dry earth shook;
Stirred the hot air wild and sweet;
Madden'd every vine-dark brook.

Flow'd the vat and roar'd the beam,
Laughed the must; while far and shrill,
Sweet as notes in Pan-born dreams,
Loud pipes sang by vale and hill.

The Spartan, restrained, cold-blooded and unsympathetic, teaches his child a lesson in self-control—the supreme virtue of his race—by forcing the slave to drink himself into a state of brutality. He plies the Helot with fiery wine, until, maddened with its fumes, enraged by the contemptuous scorn of the Spartan, and smarting under the consciousness of the wrongs of his people, the slave rises in his mere physical might and strikes the cold Spartan in his one vulnerable spot—the life of his only child.

Says the Spartan:

Helot clay! Gods! what's its worth,
Balanced with proud Sparta's rock?
Ours—its force to till the earth!
Ours—its soul to gyve and mock!

But the Spartan has goaded his slave once too often.

Who may quench the God-born fire,
Pulsing at the soul's deep root?
Tyrants grind it in the mire,
Lo, it vivifies the brute!

The Helot seizes the Spartan's child and, lifting him high aloft, hurls him to the earth.

Thunders inarticulate:

Wordless curses, deep and wild;
Reached the long-pois'd sword of fate,
To the Spartan through his child.

One is tempted to quote many passages from these verses, illustrating their varied qualities. Here, for instance, is a vivid picture of Time:

Her vast hand reared her towers, her shrines, her thrones;
The ceaseless sweep of her tremendous wings
Still beat them down and swept their dust abroad;
Her iron finger wrote on mountain sides
Her deeds and prowess—and her own soft plume
Wore down the hills.

The perfect union of matter and manner is nowhere better illustrated, however, than in the poem "The City Tree." One need only say that if Isabella Crawford had written nothing else, she would deserve to be remembered for this alone.

I stand within the stony, arid town,

I gaze forever on the narrow street;
I hear forever passing up and down,
The ceaseless tramp of feet.

I know no brotherhood with far-lock'd woods,
Where branches burgeon from a kindred sap;
Where o'er mossed roots, in cool, green solitudes,
Small silver brooklets lap.

No emerald vines creep wistfully to me,
And lay their tender fingers on my bark;
High may I toss my boughs, yet never see
Dawn's first most glorious spark.

When to and fro my branches wave and sway,
Answering the feeble wind that faintly calls,
They kiss no kindred boughs, but touch alway
The stones of climbing walls.

My heart is never pierced with song of bird;
My leaves know nothing of that glad unrest,
Which makes a flutter in the still woods heard,
When wild birds build a nest.

There never glance the eyes of violets up,
Blue into the deep splendour of my green;
Nor falls the sunlight to the primrose cup,
My quivering leaves between.

Not mine, not mine to turn from soft delight
Of wood-bine breathings, honey-sweet and warm;
With kin embattl'd rear my glorious height
To greet the coming storm!

Not mine to watch across the free, broad plains
The whirl of stormy cohorts sweeping fast;
The level, silver lances of great rains,
Blown onward by the blast.

Not mine the clamouring tempest to defy,
Tossing the proud crest of my dusky leaves;
Defender of small flowers that trembling lie
Against my barky greaves.

Not mine to watch the wild swan drift above,
Balanced on wings that could not choose between
The wooing sky, blue as the eye of love,
And my own tender green.

And yet my branches spread, a kingly sight,
In the close prison of the drooping air:
When sun-vex'd noons are at their fiery height,
My shade is broad, and there

Come city toilers, who their hour of ease
Weave out to precious seconds as they lie
Pillowed on horny hands, to hear the breeze
Through my great branches die.

I see no flowers, but as the children race
With noise and clamour through the dusty street,
I see the bud of many an angel face—
I hear their merry feet.

No violets look up, but, shy and grave,
The children pause and lift their crystal eyes
To where my emerald branches call and wave—
As to the mystic skies.

CHARLES HEAVYSEGE

FIFTY odd years ago a certain man laboured over a carpenter's bench in the city of Montreal; and as he wrought rude shapes out of the unresponsive wood, his soul was far away in other days and other climes, and his brain was slowly reconstructing, in language of unmistakable beauty and power, the wonderfully dramatic story of King Saul.

This man was Charles Heavysege, whom Longfellow described as the greatest dramatist since Shakespeare, and Coventry Patmore praised scarcely less unreservedly. The drama *Saul*, by which Heavysege is, or should be, chiefly remembered, is an elaborate piece of work, divided into three parts, each of five acts, and altogether about ten thousand lines long. The first act opens on the Hill of God, with the Philistine garrison encamped beneath. A number of demons are dancing. Zaph, their chief, stands apart, with Zepho, his messenger. Zepho announces the approach of the newly anointed Saul, with a company of prophets and followers. They enter, the prophets chanting, the demons remaining as invisible spectators, and commenting with cynical mockery upon the lamentations of the prophets. Saul returns to his home at Gibeah, and resumes his calling of herdsman. In the third and fourth scenes he appears among his people as king, and summons them to oppose the Ammonites, who are besieging Jabesh-Gilead.

The second act opens at Michmash. A messenger announces that Jonathan has overthrown the Philistine garrison at Geba. Saul hastens to the Hebrew camp at Gilgal, where his ill-equipped and half-hearted followers are confronted by the veteran hosts of Philistia. The latter triumph, and Saul and Jonathan retire from the field, Saul bitterly complaining, Jonathan bravely resigned to the inevitable.

In the next act, Saul having been sufficiently humbled for his disobedience in offering a burnt sacrifice, the angel Gloriel is sent to interpose on behalf of the Hebrews. He compels Zaph, the evil spirit, to confuse the Philistines, so that each man shall take his fellow for the enemy. The Philistines come tumbling like a torrent on the field, and the Hebrews fly upon them and drive them tumultuously forth with great slaughter.

In the fifth act is introduced the most strikingly original character in the drama—Malzah, Saul's evil spirit. "Malzah," says Patmore, "is a living character, as true to supernature as Hamlet or Falstaff are to

And peep into each crystal glass
Of fountain, as I by it pass,
To see if from my visage go
The traces of my recent woe:
Then blithely let me journey on
To meet great Zaph ere sets the sun,—
Before the sun sets 'neath the sea,
Again to Zaph re-render me.

We now approach the climax of Saul's tragic career. Forsaken of God as it seems, he visits the Witch of Endor, and seeks by enchantment to obtain from the ghost of Samuel help in his trouble, for the Philistines are pressing him closely, and he knows not where to turn for succour. Samuel tells him that the Philistines will be victorious, and that he and his sons will be counted among the slain. Saul raves in his anguish, as the shades of those whose death is laid to his charge pass before his eyes:

Who comes before me yonder, clothed in blood?
Away, old man, so sad and terrible;—
Away, Ahimelech, I slew thee not!—
Nor these—nor these thy sons, a ghastly train.
Nay, fix not here your dull, accusing eyes.
Your stiff tongues move not, your white lips are dumb;
You give no word unto the ambient air;
You see no figure of surrounding things;
But are as stony, carven effigies. . . .
Out, vipers, scorpions, and ye writhing dragons!
Hydras, wag not your heads at me, nor roll
At me your fiery eyes. . . .

It is the morning of the battle with the Philistines. Saul is camped with his army in the valley of Jezreel. He knows that all is lost before the conflict begins. The final scene is upon the battlefield of Gilboa. Saul's three sons lie slain, and the king enters mortally wounded. The enemy's horse are heard approaching. Saul lifts himself with a last effort and falls upon his sword.

Heavysesge was pre-eminently an interpreter of moral impulses. He was never so successful as when dealing with a subtle moral situation, or tracing the development of character. These qualities, so strikingly revealed in Saul, are equally apparent in his second Biblical tragedy, Jephthah's Daughter. The intensely tragic situation created by the inevitable fulfilment of Jephthah's vow is handled with rare dignity and power.

The poem opens in these words:

'Twas in the olden days of Israel,
When, from her people, rose up mighty men
To judge and to defend her; ere she knew
Or clamoured for, her coming line of kings;
A father, rashly vowing, sacrificed
His daughter on the altar of the Lord;—
'Twas in those ancient days, coeval deemed
With the song-famous and heroic ones
When Agamemnon, taught divinely, doomed
His daughter to expire at Dian's shrine
Two songs with but one burden, twin-like tales,

Sad tales, but this the sadder of the twain. . . .

Jephthah's daughter comes dancing to meet him with her maidens, welcoming him home from his victorious campaign, but instead of the joy she expected to see on her father's face, she reads there horror and despair. Jephthah thrusts her from him in his agony, and she returns in bewilderment to her mother's tent.

He pleads with the God of his fathers to release him from his rash vow, but no answer is vouchsafed unto him. He turns to his tent, and meets the fierce denunciations of his wife; but a more terrible ordeal awaits him. His daughter comes and pleads for her life—she, his only beloved child:

Spare me, father, spare me!
Cut me not down or ere my harvest comes;
Oh, gather not the handful of my days
In a thin sheaf of all unripened blades!

.

It is a bitter thing to die when young:
To leave all things we loved, admired, most cherished,
Forgot, perhaps forgetting.

But as Jephthah weakens, and would break his sacred vow to Heaven to save his child, she casts aside all thought of self and embraces the sacrifice:

Were it not great to die for Israel,—
To free a father from a flood of woe?

She turns to her maidens and takes leave of them:

Now is the burden of it all "No more."
No more shall, wandering, we go gather flowers,
Nor tune our voices by the river's brink,
Nor in the grotto-fountain cool our limbs.

Then, as she prepares to depart with the priests for the sacrifice, the future is unlocked, and she sees herself shrined in the hearts of youth and maiden,—

Recording how, inviolable, stood
The bounds of Israel, by my blood secured.
Nor more shall they thus celebrate myself
Than laud my sire; who, in his day of might,
Swore, not in vain, unto the Lord, who gave
Him victory, although He took his child;—
Took her, but gave him, in her stead, his country,
With a renowned, imperishable name.



ARCHIBALD LAMPMAN

"I CAN remember," wrote William Dean Howells, "no poem of Archibald Lampman's in which I was not sensible of an atmosphere of exquisite refinement, breathing a scent as rare as if it drifted from beds of arbutus or thickets of eglantine, where he led the way. His pure spirit was electrical in every line; he made no picture of the nature he loved in which he did not supply the spectator with the human interest of his own genial presence, and light up the scene with the lamp of his keen and beautiful intelligence. He listened for its breath, its pulse; he peered into its face, and held his ear to its heart, with a devotion none the less impassioned because his report of what he saw and heard was so far from vehemence or straining. Sometimes in his transport with its loveliness he could not help crowding his verse with the facts that were all so dear to him; but one knew from its affluence that not a scent, or sound, or sight of the Canadian summer was lost upon his quick sense, and one saw how he could not bear to forbid any in a world finding its way through his music into art for the first time. The stir of leaf, of wings, of foot; the drifting odours of wood and field; the colours of flowers, of skies, of dusty roads and shadowy streams and solitary lakes all so preciously new, gave his reader the thrill of the intense life of the northern solstice."

To those who had the privilege of Archibald Lampman's friendship, and knew him as man and poet, this appreciation of Mr. Howells' cannot seem exaggerated. His verse reveals everywhere the qualities that belonged to the man—absolute sincerity, seriousness lightened by glimpses of delicate humour, and a sympathy so broad that it might not be confined to mankind, but must embrace all Nature, animate and inanimate. He was ever true to his ideals in his poetry as in his life. His verse reflected his own pure, high-minded nature. He was in very truth an ideal poet, clean-hearted, broad-minded, clear-sighted, free from all affectation and conventionality, strong in support of what he held to be the right, but otherwise most modest, unassuming, and self-forgetful. His point of view is so admirably summed up in that one of his sonnets called "Outlook," that one cannot forbear quoting it —although it is probably one of the best known of his poems.

Not to be conquered by these headlong days,
But to stand free: to keep the mind at brood
On life's deep meaning, nature's altitude
Of loveliness, and time's mysterious ways;
At every thought and deed to clear the haze
Out of our eyes, considering only this,
What man, what life, what love, what beauty is,
This is to live, and win the final praise.

Though strife, ill fortune, and harsh human need
Beat down the soul, at moments blind and dumb
With agony; yet, patience—there shall come
Many great voices from life's outer sea,
Hours of strange triumph, and, when few men heed,
Murmurs and glimpses of eternity.

In reading Lampman's poems, from the very first the sympathetic ear catches cadences of that harmonious music of the wild woods to which he held the key:

Ah, I have wandered with unwearied feet,
All the long sweetness of an April day,
Lulled with cool murmurs and the drowsy beat
Of partridge wings in secret thickets gray,
The marriage hymns of all the birds at play,

The faces of sweet flowers, and easeful dreams
Beside slow reaches of frog-haunted streams.

In the very last poem he wrote—the sonnet, “Winter Uplands”—when the hand of death was pressing urgently upon his soul, the same sympathetic insight is found, the same keen perception of the jealously guarded secrets of nature, the same absence of strain, egotism, and passion. It is not, perhaps, altogether without significance that while the above verses, some of his earliest, are devoted to Nature’s spring-time, his last word was given to midwinter. It was a part of his broad sympathies that he could find beauty and helpfulness in the storm and stress of our northern winter, as well as in the haunting charm of a Canadian midsummer’s day.

In the poem “Heat” is developed one of the most distinctive qualities of Lampman’s verse—its almost marvellous picturesqueness and imagery:

From plains that reel to southward, dim,
The road runs by me white and bare;
Up the steep hill it seems to swim
Beyond, and melt into the glare.

Upward, half-way, or it may be
Nearer the summit, slowly steals
A hay-cart, moving dustily
With idly clacking wheels.

By his cart’s side the wagoner
Is slouching slowly at his ease,
Half hidden in the windless blur
Of white dust puffing to his knees.

And in the very next poem, “Among the Timothy,” still another characteristic is revealed—his gift for striking phrases, phrases that sparkle like gems, sentences that appeal irresistibly to one’s sense of the beautiful, and live in the memory after the rest of the poem has dropped out of sight:

Hither and thither o’er the rocking grass
The little breezes, blithe as they are blind,
Teasing the slender blossoms pass and pass,
Soft-footed children of the gipsy wind,
To taste of every purple-fringed head
Before the bloom is dead;
And scarcely heed the daisies that, endowed
With stems so short they cannot see, upbear
Their innocent sweet eyes distressed, and stare
Like children in a crowd.

Two other qualities that mark Lampman’s verse, and give it distinction are the jealous care with which it was polished and repolished before allowed to depart from the workshop of the poet’s mind, and his unerring instinct in the choice of words. It follows that one may search in vain throughout his poems for a crude expression, an awkward line, or even a false rhyme or metre. His verse is also instinct with colour and music, and possesses in its highest development that true “lyrical cry” which is one of the attributes of true poetry, and of true poetry alone.

Of the more definitely human studies, perhaps nothing that Lampman wrote is much finer than “Easter Eve.” It possesses, in its degree, something of the sombre grandeur of Dante, and reminds one, in its spiritual significance and dramatic power, of Stephen Phillips’ “Christ in Hades.”

In "The Monk" we have another graphic and sombre picture, though of a different kind. The forlorn hermit is seen in his cell, his lonely cell, trying to read, and brooding over what "might have been":

With every word some torturing dream is born;
And every thought is like a step that scares
Old memories up to make him weep and mourn.
He cannot turn, but from their latchless lairs
The weary shadows of his lost delight
Rise up like dusk-birds through the lonely night.

In the "Child's Music Lesson" is revealed still another phase of the poet's broad personality—his tender love for children; and in such verses as "An Athenian Reverie" he shows his knowledge of the history and literature, and the very atmosphere, of ancient Greece. Here, too, one gets another glimpse of the poet's personal outlook:

Happy is he,
Who, as a watcher, stands apart from life,
From all life and his own, and thus from all,
Each thought, each deed, and each hour's brief event,
Draws the full beauty, sucks its meaning dry.

Lampman's friend and biographer, Duncan Campbell Scott, has afforded us some interesting details of the poet's personality and his methods of work:

"His poems were principally composed as he walked to and from his ordinary employment in the city, or upon excursions into the country, or as he paced about his writing-room. Lines invented under these conditions would be transferred to manuscript books, and finally, after they had been perfected, would be written out carefully in his clear, strong handwriting in volumes of a permanent kind.

"Although this was his favourite and natural method of composing, he frequently wrote his lines as they came to him; and in many of his note-books can be traced the development of poems through the constant working of his fine instinct for form and expression. . . .

"To write verses was the one great delight of his life. Everything in his world had reference to poetry. He was restless with a sense of burden when he was not composing, and deep with content when some stanza was taking form gradually in his mind.

"He was not a wide reader; books of history and travel were his favourites. During his last illness he read *The Ring and the Book*, the novels of Jane Austen, and continued a constant reading of Greek by a reperusal of Pindar, the 'Odyssey,' and the tragedies of Sophocles. Matthew Arnold was his favourite modern poet, and he read his works oftener than those of any other; but Keats was the only poet whose method he carefully studied."

Perhaps one of the most entirely satisfactory poems he wrote was the sonnet-sequence, "The Largest Life," written toward the close of his short life, and beginning:

I lie upon my bed and hear and see,
The moon is rising through the glistening trees;
And momentarily a great and sombre breeze,
With a vast voice returning fitfully,
Comes like a deep-toned grief. . . .

The last of the three sonnets embodies the sum-total of the poet's gospel—that gospel to which he was faithful to the end:

There is a beauty at the goal of life,

A beauty growing since the world began,
Through every age and race, through lapse and strife,
Till the great human soul completes her span.
Beneath the waves of storm that lash and burn,
The currents of blind passion that appal,
To listen and keep watch till we discern
The tide of sovereign truth that guides it all;
So to address our spirits to the height,
And so attune them to the valiant whole,
That the great light be clearer for our light,
And the great soul the stronger for our soul:
To have done this is to have lived, though fame
Remember us with no familiar name.

This was indeed the life that Archibald Lampman led, and, having done so, it matters little enough whether or no fate remembers him with a "familiar name."

CANADIAN HUMORISTS

DESPITE her preoccupation with such serious things as mark the path of a new country, Canada has not lacked genuine humorists at any stage of her history. In the days of the Old Régime, the brilliant and versatile Lescarbot delighted the little colony at Port Royal with his merry witticisms; and at Quebec, Lahontan sent the shafts of his pungent satire in all directions, reckless enough whose skin they might puncture. Indeed, had he done nothing more than perpetrate that gigantic hoax of "La Rivière Longue," in his *Voyages*, Lahontan might fairly be entitled to rank as one of the first humorists of his age.

In later days, when the Canada Company was opening up the wilds of what is now Ontario, William Dunlop—called by his friends "Tiger" Dunlop—brightened the stern pioneer life of the period by his unflinching fund of humour and high spirits. In Nova Scotia, Thomas Chandler Haliburton made for himself a name that became of much more than national significance, and that is still potent to all who possess the saving appreciation of humour. In the neighbouring province of New Brunswick, James de Mille, scholar, linguist, and author of some thirty or more novels and tales, began his literary career by writing charmingly amusing little sketches for Colonial papers and magazines. It may be worth mentioning that his "Dodge Club" appeared a few months before the publication of Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad*—a curious coincidence, as they embodied the same novel application of a new type of humour. It was, of course, a coincidence, and nothing more.

Much of the best work of Canadian humorists lies buried in the numbers of forgotten Canadian periodicals. Probably the present generation remembers only one humorous paper published in Canada—the late lamented *Grip*, which, to the surprise of every one familiar with the brief careers of most Canadian periodicals, maintained a vigorous existence for twenty odd years. Yet *Grip* was but one of a group of a dozen or more such papers, the earliest of which was the *Canadian Punch*. Two of the best were Montreal publications—*Diogenes* and *The Free Lance*. Toronto might boast altogether of half a dozen. One belonged to Quebec; another to Winnipeg; and two hailed from the Pacific Coast. With the single exception of *Grip*, all these papers were very short-lived, but an examination of their faded pages convinces one that if their lives were brief they were at least merry. Many of them contain fragments of

native wit and humour that compare favourably with anything in Punch or Life. George Thomas Lanigan was the cleverest of the Montreal writers, and James McCarrol one of the best in Toronto. Each edited a humorous paper. Bengough needs no special mention to readers whose memories go back to Grip.

Nor were the energies of Canadian men of humour confined to their own country. Andrew Miller, the founder and first editor of Life, was a Canadian; as was also Alexander Edwin Sweet, who founded Texas Siftings. Mrs. Everard Cotes (Sara Jeannette Duncan) years ago disproved the ancient slander that women lack humour. Nothing more thoroughly amusing and entertaining than her Social Departure has appeared since Innocents Abroad. One is glad to remember that Palmer Cox, who created the inimitable "Brownies," was a Canadian; as was also John Hunter-Duvar, author of a dainty and delicate piece of humour, "The Emigration of the Fairies"; and that most genuine poet and humorist and kindest of men, Dr. William Henry Drummond. One must not forget, either, the late Grant Allen, in whose book of verse, The Lower Slopes, will be found a number of very amusing quasi-scientific poems, perhaps the best of which is "The First Idealist."

Probably, however, no better representative of Canadian humour could be chosen than George Thomas Lanigan, the odd and pungent flavour of whose writings is curiously suggestive of that of a recent American humorist. Lanigan was born at Three Rivers, in what was then the Province of Lower Canada, in the year 1845. Adopting journalism as his profession, he founded the Montreal Star, and became Canadian correspondent of several of the more important newspapers of the United States. The placid environment of the Montreal of those days was, however, too much for his restless and energetic temperament, and he wandered south. Finding a vacancy on a St. Louis newspaper, he applied, and was appointed a reporter. An exceptionally brilliant piece of work attracted the attention of the editor, and Lanigan, after serving one day as reporter, was made city editor. Here he immediately threw himself into the vortex of municipal and social problems, and raised a hornet's nest about his ears by his scathing though just criticisms of certain influential citizens. The incident proving somewhat embarrassing to his newspaper, he promptly resigned and moved to Chicago, where he was appointed editor of one of the leading journals. He afterwards removed to New York, where for nine years he was an editorial writer on the staff of the World, and gained some local fame through his ability as a literary critic.

It was at this time that he wrote his Fables, which appeared from time to time in the World, and in 1878 were published in a small volume of some fifty pages, with illustrations by F. S. Church. Seven of these Fables are included in Mark Twain's Library of Humour. The following, not included in that collection, may be quoted as characteristic examples:

THE PHILOSOPHER AND THE SIMPLETON

A Simpleton having had occasion to seat himself, sat down on a pin; whereon he made an Outcry unto Jupiter. A Philosopher, who happened to be holding up a Hitching-Post in the Vicinity, rebuked him, saying, "I can tell you how to avoid hurting yourself by sitting down on Pins, and will, if you will set them up." The Simpleton eagerly accepting the Offer, the Philosopher swallowed four fingers of the Rum which perisheth, and replied, "Never sit down." He subsequently acquired a vast Fortune by advertising for Agents, to whom he guaranteed \$77 a Week for light and easy employment at their Homes.

Moral.—The Wise Man saith, "There is a Nigger in the Fence," but the Fool sendeth Fifty Cents for Samples and is Taken in.

THE TWO TURKEYS

An Honest Farmer once led his two Turkeys into his Granary and told them to eat, drink, and be merry. One of these Turkeys was wise and one was foolish. The foolish bird at once indulged excessively in the Pleasures of the Table, unsuspecting of the Future, but the wiser Fowl, in order that he might not be fattened and slaughtered, fasted continually, mortified his Flesh, and devoted himself to gloomy Reflections upon the brevity of Life. When Thanksgiving approached, the Honest Farmer killed both

Turkeys, and by placing a Rock in the interior of the Prudent Turkey made him weigh more than his plumper Brother.

Moral.—As we travel through Life, let us Live by the Way.

THE SOCRATIC CHIMPANZEE AND THE SHALLOW BABOON

A Chimpanzee who had long viewed with Envy the Popularity of a Shallow but Pretentious Baboon, asked him to account for the Milk in the Cocoa-nut. The Baboon replied that his questioner Believed in the Darwinian Theory that Monkeys degenerated into Men: an Answer which so delighted the Spectators that they tore the Chimpanzee into Pieces, while the Baboon's work on the Conflict of Science and Orthodoxy attained a Hundredth Edition.

Moral.—A Hard Question turneth away Argument.

THE TURKEY AND THE BEAR

A Bear having observed a Turkey on the opposite side of the Barn-Yard Fence, growled angrily to the trembling Bird: "I have an Impression that it would require Evidence to remove that you are addicted to the use of Bear's-Grease to promote the Growth of your Hair, and that to gratify your Lusts you compassed the foul Murder of my maternal Grandfather thirty-five Years ago." "I cry you Mercy," replied the timid Fowl, "but I am wholly destitute of Hair; besides, at the time of your Lamented Relative's Death I was not hatched." "Well," roared the aggravated Bruin, "How dare you trespass upon my Estate, and entertain intentions of Territorial Aggrandizement?" "Alack, good Czar," replied the unhappy Bird, "how can that be, when the Barn-Yard Fence stands between you and me?" "That makes no Difference," cried the Plantigrade of all the Russias. "I am compelled to Interfere for the Protection of your Unhappy Christian subjects," and, crossing the Fence in force, he proceeded to Occupy the Turkey as a material guarantee.

Moral.—Where there's a Will there's a Way.

Lanigan is described by one of his friends as having been an observing student of men, events, and politics. Nothing in modern history escaped his notice. His versatility was remarkable. He contributed humorous sketches to the comic papers, and at the same time wrote thoughtful and well-informed articles on the important questions of the day. He was an ideal journalist, gifted with a splendid memory, well-read, broad-minded, quick with his pen, having command of a clear, crisp style, and apparently incapable of fatigue. He detested shams, and was bold and uncompromising in attacking and exposing them, keen and searching satire being his favourite weapon.

He was as versatile in verse as in prose. His amusing ballads were thrown off at a moment's notice. His "Akhoond of Swat" is well known, but the circumstances under which it was written may be less familiar. One evening, after running through the English mail just received, Lanigan announced that the Akhoond of Swat was dead, and he was writing a poem about him. The verses appeared in the next morning's paper, and were copied all over the continent. They are included in Rossiter Johnson's Play Day Poetry, and other similar anthologies. Rossiter Johnson also reprinted "The Amateur Orlando," perhaps the best of all Lanigan's humorous poems. "The Rosicrucian's Secret," "The Rime of the Curious Customer," founded on one of Charles Southern's practical jokes, and "The Plumber's Revenge" are good examples of his ballads. In the last mentioned, a plumber avenges his father's wrongs by practising his nefarious trade upon the water-pipes of that father's successful rival in a very ancient love affair:

"Would," he cried, as he drew the bill,
"My father were alive;
Ten pounds of solder at ten cents,
\$1.75!"

Lanigan was a thorough linguist. Even as a boy, before he had entered upon his journalistic career, he made a number of excellent translations of the inimitable folk-songs of French Canada, the evanescent charm of which it is so exceedingly hard to retain in a translation. One of the best of these was his fine rendering of "Un Canadien Errant," the beauty and pathos of which are as marked in the translation as in the original.

THE LAST OF THE STRICKLANDS

CATHARINE PARR TRAILL

CATHARINE PARR (STRICKLAND) TRAILL was one of a family of nine, six of whom, five sisters and a brother, left more or less important literary works, covering a wide field—history, biography, science, poetry, and fiction. Her father, Thomas Strickland, is described as a man of liberal tastes and education. His first wife was a grand-niece of Sir Isaac Newton. By her he had no children. After her death he married Elizabeth Homer, a gentle and accomplished lady, whose example and influence tended largely to mould and direct the minds of her naturally gifted family.

Mrs. Traill tells of the early days at Stowe House, in the Waveney Valley near Bungay, in her own characteristically simple and graphic way:

"We passed our days in the lonely old house in sewing, walking in the lanes, sometimes going to see the sick, and carry food or little comforts to the cottagers; but reading was our chief resource. We ransacked the library for books; we dipped into the old magazines of the last century, such as Christopher North styled 'bottled dullness in an ancient bin,' and dull enough much of their contents proved. We tried history, the drama, voyages and travels, of which latter there was a huge folio. We even tried Locke on the Human Understanding. We wanted to be very learned just then; but, as you may imagine, we made small progress in that direction, and less in the wonderfully embellished old tome, Descartes' Philosophy. We read Sir Francis Knolles' History of the Turks, with its curious wood-cuts and quaint old-style English. We dipped into old Anthony Horneck's Divine Morality, but it was really too dry. We read Ward's History of the Reformation in Rhyme—a book that had been condemned to be burned by the common hangman. How this copy had escaped I never learned. I remember how it began:

'I sing the deeds of good King Harry,
And Ned his son, and daughter Mary,
And of a short-lived interreign
Of one fair queen hight Lady Jane.'

To relieve the tedium of the dull winter days Susan and I formed the brilliant notion of writing a novel, and amusing ourselves by reading aloud at night what had been written during the day. . . . I chose the period of my hero, William Tell, intending to write an interesting love tale; but I soon got my hero and heroine into an inextricable muddle, so fell out of love adventures altogether, and, altering my plan, ended by writing a juvenile tale, which I brought to a more satisfactory conclusion."

Thus began a literary life, unique at least in this—that it was almost conterminous with the nineteenth century. Of the five sisters, Agnes and Elizabeth will be remembered as the joint authors of the Lives of the Queens of England, and other historical works. Jane wrote a History of Rome, and also a Life of her

sister Agnes, as well as a number of juvenile tales. The three remaining literary members of the family (Samuel, Susanna, and Catharine) are generally counted as Canadian rather than English writers, the greater part of their lives having been spent, and most of their books written, in Canada.

Colonel Samuel Strickland came to Canada in 1825. Something over a quarter of a century later he published an account of his experiences as a pioneer, under the title *Twenty-seven Years in Canada West*. Susanna (Mrs. Moodie) also published an account of pioneer life in Upper Canada, *Roughing it in the Bush*, which ran through many editions. It first appeared in 1852, and was followed the next year by a companion volume, *Life in the Clearings*. Mrs. Moodie was the author as well of a number of novels and tales, and two books of verse, one written with her sister Agnes.

Catharine, like her sister Susanna, took to herself a husband before emigrating to Canada. Thomas Traill was a classmate of Lockhart's at Balliol College, and a very well-read man. He and his wife came over in 1832, and settled in the neighbourhood of Rice Lake, Ontario. After the death of her husband, Mrs. Traill removed to Lakefield, where she remained practically up to the day of her death.

In one of her later books Mrs. Traill gives an interesting account of her first excursions in the realms of literature.

"It was at this time that I ventured to indulge the scribbling fever, which had been nipped in the bud by adverse criticism the previous year. . . . Scotland was the dream of my youth, and I called the first story I wrote at this time 'The Blind Highland Piper.' The next was inspired by a pretty little lad with an earnest face and bright, golden curls peeping from under a ragged cap. . . . He passed the window so often that I grew to watch for him, and give him a little nod and smile to cheer his labours day by day. I never knew his history, so I just made one for him myself, and called my story 'The Little Water Carrier.' Thus I amused myself until my collection comprised some half-dozen tales."

A friend of the family saw the manuscript and, being pleased with it, passed it on to a London publisher, who accepted it. Catharine received five guineas for it, her first literary earnings.

The life of the Traills was an eventful one after they came to Canada—very different from the tranquillity of their English homes. Mrs. Traill gives in one of her books an admirable picture of Lake Ontario, as she saw it for the first time on her journey to Cobourg. Elsewhere she describes enthusiastically the matchless Canadian sunsets, with their riot of colour defying pen or brush to adequately reproduce.

Pioneer conditions must have proved trying enough to a young girl accustomed to the conveniences and luxuries of an English gentleman's home. We find no note of complaint, however, in her narratives, though her description of the new home in the bush is vivid in its revelations of the hardships of the early settlers. Her *Backwoods of Canada* came out in 1836, and was followed some years later by *Afar in the Forest* and *The Canadian Crusoes*. In 1857 their home was burned down, and they lost absolutely everything, including books, manuscripts, and other valuables, the family barely escaping with their lives.

From her earliest youth Mrs. Traill had been a devoted student of nature, and she put some of her most valuable and lasting work into her studies of animal and plant life. In 1869 she wrote the letterpress for a book on *Canadian Wild Flowers*, the illustrations of which were done by her niece, Mrs. FitzGibbon (afterwards Mrs. Chamberlain); and in 1884 she published *Studies of Plant Life in Canada*, also illustrated by her niece. Some years later she wrote *Pearls and Pebbles, or the Notes of an Old Naturalist*, and *Cot and Cradle Stories*. There is nothing dry or uninteresting about these familiar studies of the teeming life of the Canadian field and forest. Mrs. Traill's observation of nature was as close and loving as that of White of Selborne.

Cot and Cradle Stories was Mrs. Traill's last book. It is a book for children, written in a charmingly simple and lucid style. Here are told the adventures of "The Great Green Dragon Fly and his Friends," "The Swiss Herdboy and his Alpine Mouse," "Mrs. Flytrap and Daddy Longlegs," and many others; all were her friends—pigeons, and squirrels, bees and ants, field-mice and bantams, and a host of others. An interesting point in connection with this book is that, although the stories it contains were published in

1895, when she was over ninety years of age, they were written at different times over a period of three quarters of a century, some as early as 1818, and others only a few months before the book was published. Thus it became a thread binding together her widely scattered writings; and it is characteristic and fitting that Mrs. Traill's last work should have been devoted to the animals she loved so well, and should have been addressed to the children, whose approval and pleasure were more to her than the commendation of the greatest critics.

JOHN HUNTER-DUVAR

JOHN HUNTER-DUVAR, of Prince Edward Island, will scarcely be remembered by many even in the Maritime Provinces. His work as a poet was far from mediocre, but neither the man nor the things he wrote sought notoriety or had it thrust upon them. He lived a quiet, studious life at his beautiful home "Hernewood," with occasional excursions into the world—such as a visit to Murray Bay in search of material on Roberval. It was on this occasion that he was picked up by Sir James Le Moine, on one of his yachting excursions about the St. Lawrence in search of antiquarian lore, and made to pay for his footing by contributing some interesting legends of his island home. Hunter-Duvar's literary tastes were distinctly mediæval. His verse has nothing in common with that of other Canadian poets. It is moulded upon the pattern of the early Spanish and French poets.

His first book, *The Enamorado*, is a light drama of the Spanish school. The main incidents "occurred in the reign of Henry III. of Castile, and during the incumbency of Henry de Vellena as Grand Master of the Order of St. James of Calatrava. The wife of the Grand Master had retired to a convent, to enable him to assume the dignity, but immediately afterwards left the conventual retreat and resumed her marital relations. The Grand Master was one of the most erudite men of his time, and consequently was arraigned before the Chapter General on a charge of sorcery. Sentence of deposition was passed against him in 1407, but was not carried into effect until 1414." On this historical foundation Hunter-Duvar managed to build up a romantic drama, in which the conflict between two strong personalities is well worked out. Here and there lyrical interludes are introduced, in which the quaintness and the sweetness of the mediæval songs are admirably reproduced:

Sound of heart and fancy free
Rode the gallant knight,
Forth to prince's joust rode he
In his armour bright,—
Of Yolante, the peerless,
Heedless was he quite.

Queen Yolante, the splendour-eyed,
Sate with many a dame,
When her beauty he descried
Flashed his heart aflame.—
To Yolante, the peerless,
Captive fell the knight.

Fair Yolante, the golden-tressed,

Met one burning glance,
And love's smart within her breast
Was like prick of lance,—
For love is found withouten quest,
And love is life's unrest.

In De Roberval Hunter-Duvar threw into dramatic form some of the romantic incidents of the very early days of New France. The drama opens at the Court of Francis I., where Roberval is preparing for his voyage to the New World. The action moves to La Rochelle, where the gentlemen adventurers are mustered, and the ships are taking in provisions and stores, while the worthy citizens of the town present Roberval with pledges of their friendship, useful and otherwise. The second act opens at Quebec, where Roberval and his officers, with their motley crew of settlers, are debarking from the ships. On the voyage, by Roberval's orders, his niece Margaret had been left with her lover on the Isle of Demons, to perish. She escapes, and returns to France.

The story of Marguerite de Roberval is told in the Heptameron. It has also been made the basis of a romance by a Canadian writer, T. G. Marquis.

The drama gives, in a series of stirring scenes, the history of the ill-starred colony, the feeble attempts at exploration and settlement, the conflicts with the natives, and the final arrival of Jacques Cartier with the king's orders to Roberval to embark all his people and return to France. The little fleet sails for home, but encounters a heavy gale in mid-ocean, and all are lost. The final scene is supposed to be off the coast of Newfoundland. Long seas are rolling in after a storm. Mermaids singing:

A gallant fleet sailed out to sea,
With 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 efts
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.

Hunter-Duvar put some of his most characteristic and most imaginative work into *The Emigration of the Fairies*, a long narrative poem, and *John a' Var*, his *Lays*. The latter contains a number of lyrics, "strung on the thread of a troubadour's adventures." It was issued many years ago, for private circulation, in a somewhat fragmentary form, and the author had completed it before his death, but his intention of publishing the book was never carried into effect.

He was a frequent contributor to English and Canadian periodicals, both in verse and prose, the latter covering quite a wide field, from short stories to archæology. He even wrote some light humorous stuff for *Grip*. Some very good things of his in verse are scattered through the magazines, such as "The Judgment of Osiris," "On the Tigris," "The Moira Encantada," and a translation of "Vaux des Vires." He also translated an Italian troubadour romance, *The Seven Lays of Lancelot*. The same delicacy of touch which marks his verse is found in much of his prose work, notably in the *Annals of the Court of Oberon*. All his imaginative work, whether in verse or prose, is distinguished by the antique tone which he made so essentially his own. It never rises to any very great heights, nor descends to the commonplace. A certain quiet humour pervades many passages, with an occasional touch of good-natured satire. It was perhaps addressed to a somewhat limited circle, but none the less finds a place among things of permanent value in Canadian literature.

GEORGE FREDERICK CAMERON

GEOURGE FREDERICK CAMERON, one of the most brilliant of Canadian poets, was born in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, on September 24, 1854. The meagre particulars of his life are given in an introductory note to his *Lyrics on Freedom, Love, and Death*, published at Kingston in 1887. He was educated at the High School of New Glasgow, studied law at the Boston University, and after graduation entered the law office of Dean, Butler & Abbot, of Boston. In 1882 he returned to his native country, and, after a year or two at Queen's University became editor of the *Kingston News*, a position which he held until a few weeks before his death. As a boy at New Glasgow he had read the greater part of *Virgil* and *Cicero* in the original, and was already employing most of his spare time in writing poetry. Throughout the remainder of his short life, law and journalism were mere avocations, literature was his vocation, and he found in verse a medium through which he could best express that passionate love of freedom and hatred of oppression that dominated his nature and inspired some of his most glowing lyrics. For the rest, one may read between the lines of his poems a story of physical and mental suffering and bitter disillusionment. To this we must attribute that tone of almost savage pessimism that mars so many of his verses.

Cameron's poems are contained in a volume of some three hundred pages, edited and published after his death by his brother, in accordance with the last wishes of the author. This volume represents only about one-fourth of his writings, but it is all that has ever been published, and is quite sufficient to place George Frederick Cameron among the few true poets that Canada has produced. The poems are grouped for the most part under four main heads: *Lyrics on Freedom*, *Lyrics on Love*, *Lyrics in Pleasant Places and Other Places*, and *Lyrics on Death*. The volume is dedicated to his mother:

Oh, can there be in any word or line
For mother-love a fitting recompense?—
For mother-love immortal, or intense,
As if it were immortal and divine,

And more perceptible to bodily sense?

.

Yet, if I may not pay my debt complete,
Still as a slight percentage from me, take
My love and this: a later wave may break
In richer ripples, mother, at thy feet:
But,—take these now, and keep them for my sake!

Some of Cameron's most passionate verses on Freedom were inspired by the unmentionable cruelties of the Spanish troops in Cuba, between the years 1868 and 1873.

She is not mine—this land of tears,
But her high cause is mine, and was,
And shall be, till my thought shall pause
Upon the measure of its years
To ponder over larger laws.

.

Without fair Liberty to make
The key-stone of the world's whole plan,
The arch we heap o'erhead will break,
And some fair morrow man will wake
To find beneath the ruins—man!

No Cuban patriot could have felt more keenly the defeat of Cuban hopes, the menace of Spanish victory:

'Tis done! The sword that flashed in air
At Freedom's bidding, shattered lies:
The wing that brushed so late the skies
Is palsied all, and in despair
The eagle falls and darkly dies.

.

'Tis done! The Spaniard stands at length,
The victor's laurel on his brow:
The heart which scorned so long to bow
Is bowed at length by tyrant strength,
Is bowed—and all is over now.

His sympathy with the oppressed knew no boundaries of race or colour, nor did he count himself a citizen of any land.

From corner-stone to curve and cope,
I am a cosmopolitan!

He felt so deeply the wrongs of the people of Russia, that even the assassination of the Czar Alexander seemed to him an act of retributive justice, and his contempt for some of his fellow-poets in the United States who attempted to express the sympathy of the American people, knew no bounds:

These men to loose or burst the galling chains

Of those who mourn in darkness oversea!
These men—who feel a fever in their veins
At every moon change—these to set men free!

These men of servile souls and servile songs
To name the day when despotism shall cease!
These men, forsooth, to right the people's wrongs,
And give the world her harvest-time of Peace!

What can he know of joys or miseries—
Yon vain, luxurious fool, who lolls at ease,
And sips the foam alone upon the cup?

Who'er would know or one or all of these,
Must take the ponderous chalice, hold it up—
And drink life's vintage to its very lees!

But even the short years of Cameron's life brought him to a sweeter and saner view. In the poem "In After Years" he admits that he was wrong to think that "right may spring from wrong." He had also come to the knowledge that tyrants were not confined to sultans, czars, or kings. He had grown to know "that Love is freedom's strength, and Peace her chief foundation stone."

One turns with a measure of relief to other pages, where the more human side of the poet's nature finds expression. In "Aperotos" he sings:

Ah, yes! it may be best to be
Without a taint of love or touch
In all your blood; but I am such
That loveless life were death to me:

And death—so it had love to fill
The pauses in the music—were
Not half so bad, nor half so bare,
Since, loving,—I am living still.

And in these verses, written a few days before his death:

True love can never alter,—
True love can never die:
False love alone can falter,—
False love alone can fly.

Love, darling, needs to borrow
No beauty of the morn;
Through day to the to-morrow
It smiles with scorn on scorn:

On hate—but devils only
Can hate—it ever glows:
True love leaves no heart lonely,
It glads where'er it goes.

Even through the dust and ashes

Of hope wet by sad tears,
It brings a flame which flashes
Athwart the coming years.

Aye, as the wild years, flying,
For swiftness lose their breath,
It goes with them, in dying
It takes the hand of death.

One cannot readily forget the rare sweetness of verses such as these—verses that sing themselves into the memory:

Ah, love is deathless! we do cheat
Ourselves who say that we forget
Old fancies: last love may be sweet,
First love is sweeter yet.

And day by day more sweet it grows
For evermore, like precious wine,
As time's thick cobwebs o'er it close,
Until it is divine

Grows dearer every day and year,
Let other loves come, go at will:
Although the last love may be dear,
First love is dearer still.

Patriotism, in the narrower sense, found no resting-place in the heart of this poet, but it is pleasant to find here and there in his verses proofs of his love for his native land, and nowhere else more happily expressed than in his "Sonnets on leaving Nova Scotia."

Farewell! And I must speak the word to-day;
And I must leave what I have known so long,—
And only known to love, and loved to know!
The breeze moves strongly outward from the bay,—
And here and there amid the busy throng
Affection wrings the hand of those who go,
And love as deep the hearts of those who stay.
The feast is o'er, and sad the parting song!
Why not? These hills our feet have trod in youth:
Why not? These vales our earliest vision knew:
Why not? These friends—we long have prov'n their truth:
And now to each and all we bid adieu!
The lines are cast: loud rings the warning bell:
Swift clasp of hands, brief kiss,—and long farewell!

.

When shall I see them all again? I say,
Now that the loved, lost land lies far a-lea,—
Now that we are upon the world's highway,
Now that we are alone upon the sea.
When shall I meet them all, when shall it be?

When shall I come to them, if ever? When
Shall I come back to these dear ones again?
Speak, ocean-winds! Is it beyond your ken,
 When shall I come to them, or they to me?
I hear no tone; no token gives the wind:
 The only voice is where, above the shrouds,
 The seamew screams defiance to the clouds:
Till Night comes down, about, before, behind,
And locks all lands from sight, but locks not mind from mind.

It is worth remembering that these sonnets, admirable alike in thought, form, and restrained music, were written when Cameron was a boy of fourteen.

Here, again, is something on a well-worn theme, but one that can never grow old:

Bring back, O Time! bring back to me
 The days I once did know,
The dear old days that used to be—
 The days of long ago!

Bring back the hopes that failed to last,
 The fears that failed not so:
Bring back, bring back, the golden past—
 The days of long ago!
Bring back once more with fruit and flower
 The early morning glow,
And give me, for a single hour,
 The days of long ago.

An interest that is pathetic, and something more, attaches to the following verses—found in his pocket after his death:

Away and beyond that point of pines,
 Away in a spot where the glad grapes be,
Purple and pendant on verdant vines,
 That Fate of mine is awaiting me.

And if no more the wind blows true
 To waft me afar to that island sweet,
Beyond that greater and other blue
 I feel that I and my fate shall meet.

For the hope that is can never fade,
 And the hope that is can never fall,
That Fate was law since the world was made,
 That it shall be law to the end of all.

And Time may be long or it may be brief
 Ere I stand on that dim and unknown shore,
And grief or joy be mine, but grief
 Can dwell not there—where we meet once more.

Whatever of bitterness or pessimism or uncharitableness there may have been in the life and poetry of

George Frederick Cameron, it was redeemed by this last message—a message of faith, hope, and charity.

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[End of A Little Book of Canadian Essays by Lawrence J. Burpee]