

## TO AN "OLD MASTER."

O FRIENDLY alchemist,  
There in thy ancient frame !  
Cracked thy vermilion robe, I wist,  
But thine eyes shine out the same,  
Beaming forth from thy furrowed face  
Blessing untold for this thankless race.

No Elixir from thee,  
Dropping Eternal Youth,  
Crave I impotently,  
Lacking faith—for in sooth,  
Well do I know that thy beard is gray,  
And first a man serveth himself away.

Nought of thy crucible !  
Secrets of golden pelf,  
Malleable or fusible,  
Keep thou unto thyself !  
Yet one small cunning I pray to know,  
Of all the magic thou might'st bestow.

My joyous days are fleet  
Speeding away to Dis,  
I cannot stay their feet,  
I would distil my bliss.  
Would husband the sweets of the morning dew,  
Would draw from the sunlight a prism or two.

Then without craven fears  
I'll watch the dial,  
All the months may follow the years,  
I shall have my phial !  
And when my nectar changes to gall  
With a magical drop I will sweeten it all.

"Have they not taught thee—the modern powers,"  
Saith he, and frowneth, alack !  
"That the gold of the sunlight is brought by the hours  
And straight they carry it back !  
That when the flower-dew appeareth again  
It droppeth always in beads of rain !"

Montreal.

GARTH GRAFTON.

## PROMINENT CANADIANS.—V.

LOUIS HONORE FRECHETTE, LL.D., POET AND JOURNALIST.

AMONG living French-Canadian poets, Louis Honoré Frechette easily ranks first. Cremazie is still regarded as the national singer of French Canada, and his place cannot be taken away from him. But he never possessed the lyrical faculty of Frechette, though he excelled him always in passion and intensity of phrase. Had Cremazie lived he might have become famous as a dramatic author. His work is full of action, episode, and strong colour, and one might readily have expected from him a drama of some consequence. But he never quite revealed what was in him, though he has left enough in the way of patriotic and descriptive verse to keep his memory green in the hearts of his countrymen. Frechette is a true lyrist. In him the musical art is highly developed, and his songs are rich in melody and tone. Other forms of verse he has of course attempted, but it is in the lyric that he appears at his best. He began writing at an early age, and he was not more than ten years old when some of his verses were found good enough to attract the attention of his elders. Literature was always to him a delight, and those about him took pleasure in encouraging him in his favourite pursuit. He was born at Levis, on the southern shore of the St. Lawrence, on the 16th of November, 1839, and was educated at the seminary of Quebec, Ste. Anne's College, and the College of Nicolet. While attending the classes at the seminary he assisted his fellow pupil and friend, Henri Taschereau (now judge), in the editorship of a little manuscript college paper called *L'Echo*. The poems he contributed were clever in their way, and the young poet soon found himself in demand as a writer of occasional verse acrostics and album sonnets. He wrote with considerable freedom, and his vocabulary, considering his age, seemed ample for his purpose. He began the study of law, and entered the office of Mr. Taschereau, where he was soon joined by M. Faucher de Saint Maurice. But literature proved too strong a tempter. Faucher abandoned law altogether, and though Frechette succeeded in getting admitted to the Bar of Lower Canada in 1864, he gave the profession very little attention in after life. Indeed, from a mere boy he had made up his mind to be a poet, or an author of some sort. Bohemian instinct was growing within him, and when he and Lusignan—a fellow scribe—occupied the attic of an old house in Palace Street, Quebec, night was often turned into day by the mad revelries of the group of kindred spirits who gathered round the table of the hosts. The room was heated by a stove pipe which came up from the basement of the house. One day Frechette printed in the *Canadien* a poem, descriptive of his home, in which occurred the line :

"Shivering in my attic poor."

The next day, a dumb stove replaced the stove-pipe, and the poet's surprise had not been dissipated when his landlady entered the attic, and

in an injured voice told her tenants that if they "so shivered in the room it would have been better to have said so privately, than to have complained of it in the newspapers." But Frechette did not write poetry alone. He was a social critic of much tact and skill, and the provincial press was frequently enriched by articles from his pen. Many of these were enlivened by a sharp humour which easily passed for satire. He assisted in the editorship of the *Journal de Quebec* for a short time, and in 1865 he began the publication on his own account of the *Journal de Levis*. Three years earlier he published his first book,—a thin volume,—entitled *Mes Loirirs*, which won praise from high quarters. But Frechette, anxious for a wider field in journalism, and not caring to practise his profession in Quebec, left Canada in 1866, for Chicago, where he became the foreign correspondent in the Land Department of the Illinois Central Railway Company. In that office he succeeded Thomas Dickens, the brother of the great novelist, and held the position two years. While in Chicago he connected himself with the press of that city, and wrote frequently, articles, sketches, and poems for the *Tribune*, *L'Amerique*, and other journals. These productions became a marked success, and served to bring their author into prominent notice. At the close of his fifth year in Chicago, the poet resolved to return to his native country. Next to poetry he loved politics, and he thought he saw an opening in public life in Canada. In 1871 he contested Levis County, in the Liberal interest, with the Hon. J. G. Blinchet, now Collector of Customs at Quebec, for a seat in the Quebec House of Assembly. He made a vigorous campaign, and spoke in nearly every parish of the constituency, but he was defeated. In the following year he was a candidate in the same county for the Dominion House of Commons, but again he was defeated, this time, however, by a small majority. The fall of the Macdonald Administration on the Pacific Railway charges, and the general elections of 1874, reopened the constituency, and M. Frechette, nothing daunted by past ill-success, once more entered the arena. He was elected by a good vote, and sat in the Federal Parliament until the dissolution of 1878, when on seeking re-election, he suffered defeat for the third time. The graving dock at Levis is described as Frechette's tomb; hundreds of the electors of the county, failing to get employment on the works then going on, vented their displeasure on the Government candidate, by voting against him. M. Frechette removed to Montreal, and devoted himself entirely to literature and journalism. He accepted a position on *La Patrie*, wrote a number of *Chroniques* over the signature of "Cyprien," which attracted much notice, and subsequently became editor of the chief French Liberal organ in Montreal. This position he relinquished after a few months' experience. As a political writer, M. Frechette is pungent and forcible. During his reign in the editorial chair, political discussion was peculiarly animated and personal. He boldly dashed in, and it was not long before he had everybody by the ears. The *Patrie* became one of the liveliest papers in Canada.

But it is as a poet that M. Frechette has won his spurs, and it is in that capacity that his friends admire him most. In 1869 he published *La Voix d'un Exilé*, a touching poem of great merit. *Pêlé Mêle*, a pleasant volume of verse, appeared in 1876. In 1880, *Les Oiseaux de Neige*, and *Les Fleurs Boreales*, which contain his most characteristic work, were crowned by the French Academy, and their author received the grand reward of the year, the Montyon Prize. The news that he had gained this recognition swept over the Dominion like lightning. It was the first time in the history of Canada that a Colonist had been so rewarded by an European country. Frechette's poems had been subjected to a severe ordeal. Among his competitors for the coveted honour were some of the first pens in France. When the news reached the Dominion, every literary man in the country felt genuine pride in the success of his fellow-countryman. The citizens of Montreal and Quebec gave the bard a dinner, at which speeches of a most complimentary character were made. The Universities of McGill and Queen's conferred on him the honorary degree of LL.D. Addresses from several literary societies were sent to him, and he became the lion of the hour. In 1881 a Paris edition of Frechette's poems appeared, and numerous translations of his sonnets and lyrics have been made by friendly and often skilful hands. He was himself greatly surprised to hear that he had won the prize, and when he went to France to see the Academicians, he was told by one of them never to lose the Canadian stamp. "It is the perfume of your originality," said one member of the French Academy to our poet. "That which strikes me most in your poems," he continued, "is the modern style, the Parisian style of your verses. That style is united to something strange, so peculiar and singular—it seems an exotic, disengaged from the whole." Frechette, at that time, was unaware that he possessed a peculiar gift. But he soon learned that the Canadian character of his work—"the certificate of origin,"—as he expresses it, gave his poems a freshness and versatility, and a novelty, which struck at once the eye and the ear of the Forty Immortals of Old France. The French was perfect, the music was exquisite, the story was sweet and tender. All this could have been accomplished in France, however, by the rising young poets on the spot. But Frechette's work was startling in its newness of incident, its *locale* and peculiar colouring. The Academicians found a fresh vein in the mine of poesy, and the prize had to be given to the poet whose ancestors, centuries ago, had pioneered their way to King Louis' arpents of snow in the New World. It was a victory for Canada, and Canadians did not hesitate to honour the man who had won the title of *laureate* of the Academy.

When the Royal Society of Canada was formed, M. Frechette was named by the Governor-General one of the original twenty members of the French Literature and History Sections. Subsequently, he became President of the section. Before that body he has read several poems and essays, which have been well received.

M. Frechette has written a powerful drama, entitled *Papineau*,