

1892 :

ITS THREEFOLD SIGNIFICANCE.

It is now nearly seven years since attention was called in the press to the anniversary character of the year 1892, and to the necessity of elaborate preparation if the great event which so materially transformed the course and character of civilization were to be worthily commemorated. For, whatever later research may have revealed as to an earlier knowledge of this continent, to the people of Europe, after Columbus had sighted "the dashing, silver-flashing surges of St Salvador," it was a new world. That some vague tradition of the existence of an expanse of land in the great ocean west of the Pillars of Hercules may have taken various shapes among the nations of antiquity is quite possible. The story of Atlantis may be such a tradition. Navigation is not of yesterday. There is hardly an island in the Pacific that was not peopled when first visited by Europeans. The record of Hanno's voyage, from which our savants of to-day took their name for the gorilla, gives a fair notion of the cautious and yet enterprising manner in which the Phœnicians, metropolitan or colonial, undertook the work of exploration. Whether Africa was circumnavigated or not by the ancients, there is no reason to doubt their qualifications for such a task. As to their having crossed the Atlantic at any time it is needless to inquire. We know that, at a later date, but still centuries prior to the advent of Columbus, it was found practicable to reach the shores of this western continent, and what took place then may have taken place long before. As to the theory that America was peopled, wholly or chiefly, from Asia, and that Behring strait, or the crescent Aleutian archipelago, furnished an easy passage from mainland to mainland, it is more than possible. But, though libraries have been written on the subject, we are still in the dark as to the origin and affinity of our aborigines,—under what circumstances their ancestors came to these shores, what arts of life they brought with them, and whether the culture of Mexico, Central America and Peru was of native development or introduced from abroad.

There is hardly a country that had made the least advance in civilization that has not been credited with America's prehistoric triumphs. Nations as distinct as the Israelites and the Chinese, the Japanese and the Welsh have been gravely awarded the task of bringing the light to the tribes of the West. No theory has been more tenaciously clung to by a succession of enthusiasts than that the Americans are the ten lost tribes of Israel. Lord Kingsborough devoted a fortune and a lifetime to it. The Chinese theory has been defended with equal persistency. The Welsh and the Irish claims have also their valiant advocates, and Lord Monboddo was disposed to believe the original American Indian a Scottish Celt. The Mormons also have their theory, which is a new version of the Jewish argument. After the general dispersion, America was settled by the Jaredites, but, becoming wicked, they were "removed," and a colony of Israelites marched overland and took their place. The Egyptians and the Hindoos have also been adjudged the honour of the discovery. But the Northmen, of all pre-Columbian pretenders, have best stood the challenge and the test of critical inquiry. The Sagas in which the early voyages of the Norsemen to Iceland, Green-

land and the north-east coast of this continent are described, have been carefully examined by scholars on both sides of the Atlantic. Even those who hold that a good deal of the evidence is vague, if not actually fabulous, and that the text is not always free from the suspicion of tampering, concede that historical proof of those early visits to our shores is not wanting. Mr. B. F. Da Costa, who has devoted years of investigation to the subject, concludes that the testimony is quite as clear and trustworthy as the bulk of received and unquestioned history. He dwells especially on the absence in the Sagas of any trace of special pleading. Sir Daniel Wilson also admits that "with all reasonable doubts as to the accuracy of details, there is the strongest probability of the authenticity of the American Vinland of the Northmen." Mr. Charles G. Leland, who has made a special study of the legends of some of our native Indians, has found among the Micmac and other tribes what he regards as unmistakable traces of former intercourse with the Northmen. A French writer, M. Gabriel Gravier, approaching the subject from a patriotic standpoint, maintains that the Normans, after their settlement in France, still kept up friendly relations with their motherland, and that some of them may, therefore, not improbably have shared in those westward voyages to the New World. Now, as Canada is recognized as the stage (in part, at least,) of the earlier and temporary, as well of the later and permanent settlement of the Northmen; as, moreover, men who speak the tongue of the Sagas—a Canadian newspaper in which tongue is on the table before us—form a noteworthy portion of our present population, it is evident that this question is one of peculiar interest to the population of Canada.

Still it is the year 1492 which, as Sir Daniel Wilson writes, marks for the Old World the beginning of its modern history and for this western hemisphere the dawn of all definite annals. To allow the 400th anniversary of it to pass by without respectful and grateful commemoration would be an outrage to the memory of the great admiral. We do not wonder that the chief cities of North America were rivals for the honour of bearing the expense of the celebration. What is now feared is lest the award to the western metropolis should prove a Cadmean victory, not only to the humiliation of the successful aspirant, but to the disaster of an enterprise in which all America is concerned. Too much time was unhappily lost in vain discussion. Better far had a commission been appointed a couple of years earlier, comprising the various interests involved—local, industrial and commercial—to decide as to the site, the character and the *modus operandi* of so great a memorial event. In spite of dark forebodings, however, we do not share the fears of those who think that the choice of Chicago will be a barren victory to the people of that proud city. The World's Fair will, we may be sure, be provided for at whatever cost or effort, notwithstanding the unfortunate delay. Of course, at this late date—and in the face of the Chicago award—it would be folly for us in Canada to attempt anything so ambitious as a World's Fair. But it ought to be borne in mind that the year—this *annus mirabilis* to which we have so long looked forward—is for Canada a triple anniversary. The discovery of Columbus is as much to us as to our neighbours. But we must not forget that in 1892 this city of Montreal will have been a community of 250 year's standing. The quarter-

millennial anniversary of a city is a sort of silver wedding that America is not often called upon to commemorate. Forty years, says one of our own writers, to a New-World city is an æon. Now here is an American city that was founded when Milton and Corneille were in the prime of life, when Racine was in his nurses's arms and Dryden a boy at school, when Richelieu was near his end, and Cromwell was near his zenith of power. Surely it is not well that such an anniversary should pass unrecognized. It is not essential to its worthy commemoration that we should ask all the world to see how Father Vimont's prophecy of the grain of mustard seed has been fulfilled. But we may surely accept it as a fit occasion for doing honour to the founder of our city. To the memory of the brave explorer who gave the spot its earlier and its later name due respect has already been paid. DeMaisonneuve also deserves honour at our hands, and no more convenient occasion for paying the debt is likely to occur.

But 1892 will also mark the silver wedding of Confederation. If, therefore, some modest but not ignoble plan for commemorating the 250th anniversary of Montreal's nativity should be devised and carried out, all Canadians can join in it and associate with it the commemoration of the 25th birthday of our Dominion. We may confidently say that such a coincidence as the occurrence of these three great anniversaries—the Discovery of America, the Foundation of Montreal, and the institution of the federal system in Canada, will not often occur in our history, or the history of any country. Some scheme, therefore, by which our recognition of the importance of each of the events whose successive anniversaries in a single year make 1892 for us Canadians a veritable *Annus Mirabilis* is surely only consistent with our dignity as a people.

### IRISH FAIRIES.

The *Daíone maithe* ("good folk") are a little people, being only a few spans high in their proper persons, though they can assume whatever shape they please and often appear in the form of tall, dark, handsome men or young and beautiful women. Their chief dwelling is in the sífra, or fairy house, deep down in the hill-side—a palace, whose walls are of crystal and pillars of silver, with a pavement of gold, where Finvarra, the fairy king of Oonagh, his lovely bride, hold their court. They also frequent the interiors of the green *raths*, or forts, which abound in many parts of Ireland. Here they hold their revels, accompanied with the song and dance, and hence, on clear moonlight nights, they issue forth and dance in the moonbeams to the sound of fairy pipes. Sometimes they may be seen sweeping across the country on milk-white horses shod with silver and bridled with gold, the little men clad in green, with red caps, and the ladies in silver gossamer, with their hair sweeping the ground. They do not appear by day, but when the peasant sees little clouds of dust whirling along in an eddying wind, he takes off his hat and says, "God save ye kindly gentlemen," for he knows that the fairies are riding along on the wind; or else he crosses himself and mutters a prayer or a charm, for it is in these eddying clouds of dust that the fairies are wont to catch up mortals and whirl them away to fairyland.

King Finvarra is almost as boldly defined and graceful a personality as the Apollo of Greek myth, whom, in many respects, he greatly resembles; like him, he is a lover of mortal maids, delights in the song and dance, and confers many and great benefits upon those whom he favours, though he can be very vindictive toward all who offend him, and can inflict hardly less terrible maladies both bodily and mental by means of the "fairy stroke" than could the King of the Silver Bow himself. The fairies in general are an amorous race, and although their consorts are endowed with more than earthly beauty, they evince a decided preference for mortal loves, and it is dangerous for a pretty girl to approach a "gentle"—i. e., fairy-haunted—spot after dark. Many a tale is told of maidens spirited away by their elfin lovers, while the ladies, who fully share the tastes of their lords, delight in beguiling any handsome young man whom they can get into their power. Sometimes the mortals who excite this fatal passion are carried off entirely.—*The National Review*.