

But there is no use in complaining. The growth of national life and feeling is not the work of a day; and Canada is no worse in that respect than other nations at a similar period of their history. It is not a great many years since Dr. Channing made a like complaint of the people of the United States,* and, to this day, they are looking abroad rather than at home for books of merit and men of mark, and are apparently more ready to welcome them than their own. But what is the remedy for these things? The only thing that will be likely to overcome such a tendency in a country, is the production within itself of works of sterling merit, and the calling attention to such, in speech and writing, by those who know of their existence. And believing, as I do, that we have in Alexander McLachlan a man whose genius has not yet been recognized for what it is worth, and that the knowledge and due appreciation of his poetry might tend in no small measure to the awakening of a more healthy and vigorous national life and pride of country among Canadians, I would now give some account of the drift and spirit of his 'Poems and Songs,' in the hope that it may not be without its effect in stimulating others who may know them to a more careful perusal of his works, and a desire in some, perhaps, who may not have been fortunate enough to have read them already, to procure them for themselves and make a study of them. We say a study; for there are some of his pieces whose beauty and force cannot be perceived on a mere superficial and hasty reading. Power of thought and beauty of language need power and sensibility, with care, for their recognition.

A man's chosen companions and friends and favourite authors are a pretty sure indication of what he is himself in his moral and intellectual tendencies; they are his *alter ego* in large proportions, and the drift of their teaching is likely to show the bent of his inclinations. We see that in the case of the man whose volume is before us. Knowing something of the men and authors who have had a share of his moral and intellectual sympathies, we have a knowledge of what may be expected in his

works. 'My Old Schoolmaster,'* Burns, and Wordsworth, and Byron, Carlyle, De Quincey, and Emerson mean manly independence of spirit, and freedom of thought and expression; fulness and intensity of genuine human sympathies, and revellings in Nature's beauty and sublimity; hatred of all that is mean, and scorn of pompous airs and pretensions of birth, and so on. And these are some of Mr. Lachlan's characteristics, read on almost every page. We feel that we have to do with a man who has escaped in a large measure from conventionalities and cant; who lives somewhat at the heart of Nature with her eternal verities; and who, in the expression of his thoughts and feelings, 'pipes but as the linnets sing'—as naturally nearly, and as sweetly. Except a stray, conventional 'ah me!' and 'oh dear!' there is nothing that sounds unreal or hollow in his song; it comes as from the heart, and is, for the most part, strong and healthful in its tendencies. But there is sometimes the expression in his verses of a fatalism which is as a fly in the ointment, and which suggests perhaps a weakness somewhere in his moral character. For when a man is morally strong he is not likely to feel and say with 'The Backwoods Philosopher,' that we are like trees, and the grass of the field, which grow without any will in their own formation—that we are right or wrong 'despite our wishes or our will,' or, as it is elsewhere expressed in the volume, just as 'God and circumstances make us.' That is apt to be the opinion of those who have yielded to some evil passion till it has become their master and tyrant, and who are seeking an excuse for their failing. But take away our wishes and will, and where would be the right or wrong of our conduct to speak of? Philosophically we may be free or not free according to the ideas of freedom with which we start; but, on any reasonable theory, our wishes and our wills have surely something to do with the formation of our character, and the right and wrong of conduct.

* See the poem so named in the CANADIAN MONTHLY for April last. 'My old Schoolmaster, John Fraser,' says the poet, 'had a very powerful influence in the direction of my mind, and gave it a liberal cast both in politics and religion. He was the very god of my boyish idolatry, and I was perhaps more indebted to him than to any author.'

* See his paper on 'The Importance and Means of a National Literature.'