

ARCTURUS:

A CANADIAN JOURNAL OF LITERATURE AND LIFE.

SATURDAY, MARCH 26TH, 1887.

JOHN CHARLES DENT,

EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR.

Room U, Arcade (Victoria St. entrance), Toronto.

Terms, in advance, \$2.00 a year, or \$1.00 for six months. Subscribers not paying in advance will be charged 50c. extra. Clubs of three, \$5.00; clubs of five or more, to one address, \$1.60 each. Subscriptions may begin any time. *Advertisements*.—\$1.00 per line per annum; six months, \$2.50; single insertion, 20c. per line. No advertisement charged less than five lines. *Business communications* should be addressed, Business Manager, ARCTURUS, Room U, Arcade (Victoria Street entrance), Toronto. *To Contributors*.—The Editor cannot undertake to return MSS. by post, even when they are accompanied by stamps to pay return postage.

ON GREEN POETS.

THERE is something as natural in the coming of green poets as in the advent of green peas. When Dame Nature, in her continuous endeavour to make life palatable, puts forth in her quiet way, unostentatiously and without regard to price or praise, her vernal dainties—be they for eye, ear, stomach or other senses (for I hold to the decided belief, opinions of *savants* notwithstanding, that the stomach is the chief sense of humanity)—when, I say, the Universal Housewife spreads out her annual spring feast, we look for the young and tender poet with as much complacent expectancy as we look for the lamb and chicken on the dinner-table, the pickerel and bass in the river, the redbreast in the garden, and the swallow by the eaves. The juvenile singer is as necessary an adjunct to the success of Spring's triumphal entry as is the mint sauce that must ever accompany the last appearance in public of the untimely-ended lambkin. If he did not drop in upon us as usual with his drastic dactyls and sporadic spondee, his refractory refrains and overloaded odes, we should note his absence unconsciously at first by feeling a deficiency. Soup without salt would be as unsavoury as spring without the poet. It would be like striking the yellow, time-stained finger board of an old harpsichord, after the wires had long been extracted to clean pipes with, and a shadow of sadness would surely steal upon us at the disappointing surprise we had so silently experienced. Such another cloud would chill our very heart-strings, if the vernal equinox were passed without the canticles of the green or spring poet.

Gentle reader, have you ever noticed when the songsters return to their favourite haunts, after having escaped the cares and colds of winter, that they do not at once burst forth into the unceasing volume of beautiful melody, which afterwards makes them such dear and familiar friends? Their first efforts are always short and hesitating, indistinct and jerky, as if they were tuning up, like an orchestra before the opera, or clearing their throats, like a children's chorus. They seem not to be sure of their scales, just as is experienced in the bashful attempt of the obedient Euphemia Ann, who, in the vacation following her first course of singing lessons, is introduced with ample pride and apology by her maternal parent to display her vocal accomplishments. How the dear girl's voice trembles and quavers, starting out with sudden shrillness, and then sinking timidly, as though ashamed of its recent boldness. How she swallows some notes and expectorates others, until she comes to a sudden and unexpected full-stop, after making everyone around her as blushing uncomfortable as herself. It is so with the harbingers of aerial harmony. They are not used to singing without an accompaniment, and the music of nature is not yet played by the orchestra

of leaves and insects. Not so, gentle reader, with the spring poet. There is nothing of the hesitancy of even an early robin about him. He does not look around anxiously to make sure that no one is near or likely to intrude upon his privacy, whilst he tries his first artistic aria. He does not desire to tune up, nor does he turn his face away from the audience, as did the timorous Euphemia Ann. Rather is he possessed of a full assurance that he is expected, and will be thoroughly enjoyed by a full house. He bursts at once and without preliminaries of any kind into his annual "Ode to Spring"; "The First Flower"; "The Robin's Return"; "The Last Snow-flake"; "The Advent of Ice-Cream"; etc. He is certain of filling the auditorium and callous to any accompaniment. He delivers his sermon in song from the pulpit of poetry, and is surprised and annoyed to find those whom he would call his hearers go one by one to sleep. We may safely assume him to be quite young; if his years have numbered a score, you may reckon with arithmetical certainty that the cranio-logical part of him is not equal to his time of life, but has assumed a cancerous method of marching backwards. As he merely describes what he sees in common with the squirrel, the sparrow and the grasshopper, you may conclude without risk of libel that the poet has read nothing, and desires none but his own experience. He is of the class of poets who take a great deal of licence without paying for it, thereby defrauding the mental revenue of a vast amount of common sense. He is like the girl who paints an Alpine scene in a hot schoolroom. Her glaciers are all ice-cream, and her clouds wet muslin; the rocks are masses of dough, overlaid with pinnacles of blanc-mange, and over it all is thrown the crimson glamour of a dying sun. The sun dies a natural death after lighting up such a scene, and blushes as it dies. Similar is the work of the green-poet when he attempts the delineation of nature. It has no inspiration, unless insanity can inspire. There is no emotional outburst of spontaneous reflection as in Wordsworth; no swift imagery of sensuous joy as in Shelley. Spring poetry of the green order is the meaningless vapour of dissolving imbecility. I select an instance, composed by a young man of the order mentioned. It is called, "Lines to the First Swallow." A prize poem, possibly, offered to the winner of the annual migratory race. What anguish must have torn the breast of the second swallow, that was only beaten by two flaps of the wing!

"Happy harbinger of joys to come,
But are not yet—while others
Thy vari-plumaged singing brothers
Are yet unsinging in their watches dumb,
Thou, with earliest twitter, skim'st
On and on and on as if in skimming
Thou find'st the joys they find in hymning
Tributes to the gates of Heaven. Deem'st
Thou thy twitter not unmusical,
To me it is a matchless anthem,
A song supernal, a melodious gem,
A merry, mad and moving madrigal."

A mad wriggle, indeed! Does the first swallow really care for this? Does the reader even swallow it? Why such trash and balderdash! Yet it is a sample of all green poetry. *Poeta nascitur non fit*. The spring poet is born unfit.

E. BURROUGH.

A LEADING Baptist minister in Richmond, Va., has received a letter from Boston, signed H. F. Steadman, asking the ministers of Richmond and the South to pray especially for Boston, which is represented as being in an unprecedented condition of wickedness.