

“By all the blood for Britain shed  
 On many a glorious battlefield,  
 To the free winds her standard spread,  
 Nor to these base insurgents yield,  
 With loyal bosoms beating high,  
 In your good cause securely trust;  
 ‘God and Victoria’ be your cry,  
 And crush the traitors to the dust.”

Compared with standard martial songs, such as Burns’s “Scots Wha Hae wi’ Wallace Bled,” or “The March of the Men of Harlech,” or “Die Wacht am Rhein,” the first three lines of the foregoing stanza are really excellent. The vocables are mouth-filling, the rhythm moves rapidly and carries one with it, and though the third line might be improved by the use of the word “fling” for the word “spread” in the text, still “To the free winds her standard spread” increases respiration, and stimulates ideated sensations of free movement and expanding personality. Altogether, it is a vigorous—a “breezy” line. No Canadian need feel ashamed of it. And what magnificent energy is in the last two lines of the stanza! The reader no sooner reaches this line, “God and Victoria” than he shifts back the accent to the word “God,” emphasises it with a full burst of breath and with a change in pitch, and then impulsively spurts out the utterance of the remaining syllables in the same changed pitch until he attacks the word “cry,” which is both oxytoned and emphasised. Thus the line becomes a veritable battle-shout and inspiring slogan. After this ringing, rousing, energising oxytone line comes the barytone cadence, “And crush the traitors to the dust.” The reader braces himself for action—takes in a full breath, fronts his eyes, sets his jaws, and all his muscles, and lunges forward to the fray. Both are brave lines; both are energising, impelling; and the whole stanza is a magnificent sample of inspiring martial verse. No Canadian need feel ashamed to recite it before the admirers of Robert Burns, William Duthie, or Karl Wilhelm.

Though historically and æsthetically the third and fourth stanzas of Mrs. Moodie’s first martial lyric are justifiable, poetically viewed they are not. They are too much like the quality and inspiration of Alexander Muir’s “The Maple Leaf Forever.” The fifth stanza alone is worth a hundred martial songs of that ilk. And if the third and fourth stanzas were eliminated from Mrs. Moodie’s lyric, the remaining stanzas would form a genuine martial poem worthy to be preserved as an excellent sample of its *genre* in Canadian literature and quite worthy to stand beside the specimens in other literatures. I disagree, therefore, with Mrs. Moodie’s modest estimate of her martial lyrics. They are better than mere “loyal staves,” fitted solely to “amuse” casual readers. That they were widely circulated and sung throughout Canada at the time when they were needed, is proof that they possessed lyrical eloquence and the inspirational power which stirs the heart and impels the will to honourable action. They are good verse, but they are not genuine poetry. And this conclusion leads me, before passing, to consider some samples of martial verse, which happen to be also fine poetry, by Canadian poetesses, to remark the æsthetic standards by which we must judge martial verse as such.

When verse of this species is meant to be inspirational, and not commemorative, when it is designed to move the will, and not to delight the imagination, the matter must count for more than the formal structure, the direct appeal of conative ideas must take precedence over considerations of the diction and imagery in which they are expressed, and sensual rhythm—lilt—must be given greater sway than vowel-melody and verbal harmonies. Now, this is a practical exigency, not an intrinsic æsthetic necessity. For the inspirational martial lyric or song is a forthright, immediate meeting of a crisis in national life and affairs. As such