

## RECOLLECTIONS.

BEING PART OF A PAPER READ BEFORE L'INSTITUT CANADIEN, QUEBEC, 1877, BY THE LATE HON. P. J. O. CHAUVEAU.

[Translated by Mrs. S. A. CURZON.]

Then there were no police to hunt up the quarrellers, but at night we had for protection the men of the watch—"Watchmen"—who sang out in a mournful, yet reassuring, tone: "HALF-PAST TEN O'CLOCK. FINE WEATHER!" or any of the hours indeed, together with its weather-sign. If Felicien David had heard them he would have substituted their chant for that of the Muezin of the Desert.

What has become of the poor old fellows—at once so offensive and so obliging, ready at any moment politely to conduct to his home any good citizen who, having taken a drop too much, had mistaken a stone staircase for a sofa, or the dark intervals between them for a flight of steps to the Lower Town. I never could comprehend how they managed to carry all the luggage with which they were encumbered. The species is lost. Perhaps they had three hands. They carried a rattle, a dark lantern, and a club, and sometimes a long gaff with which to take thieves—that is, if the thieves did not take them. But thieves were by no means the worst enemies the watchmen had to fear. It was the roughs of the time, who did not fail to belabour them all the ways of scapegraces who played so many pranks, more or less deserving of the gallows, upon our good citizens? Who at night wrenched knockers off doors—there changed with intentional roguery the signs on a street? Some folks now want to make out that there are similar goings-on at present on Champlain street, and several of our papers have taken our young men severely to task too sober, too studious, too much taken up with politics. If anything of the kind occurs now it must be those scamps of by-gone times who return occasionally to their old haunts—and, between ourselves, that is no doubt the reason why the police never catch any of them.

These harem-scarems had also a mania for disguising themselves as demons and intruding upon balls held at country inns, where, in spite of themselves, they became the auxiliaries of the *curé* by the terror they inspired. One night four or five of these gentlemen so disguised made the tour of the city in a sleigh drawn by two black horses. They came upon a fellow who was sleeping off his rum in a snowbank. They seized him and put him to bed yet asleep in the midst of them. Soon roused by the jolting and ready to die with fear, the man made a great Sign of the Cross. Instantly four strong arms lifted him up and he was pitched into another snowbank, very sensible of the claws at the ends of the demons' fingers.

The story is vouched for by one perfectly convinced of its correctness. O! the good old times and the admirable folks! Nevertheless, there are those who deserve our sympathy much more than these. They are the relations of the merry youths—the honest shopkeepers who had amassed, pistole by pistole, the fortunes that these gentlemen scattered to the winds in so intellectual a fashion. And where are those excellent citizens who held by so much that remains dear to us to-day? Men who filled gratuitously a crowd of civic holidays, who lent their money without interest, at least that which was not invested, or, as they used to say, out at annuity; who were church wardens, members of the board of education, of the society of agriculture, of the fire company—that is to say, of the company against fires—justices of the peace, and likewise inspectors of public works; who gave, vice, and over and above everything else, subscribed large contributions for every purpose—religious, charitable or otherwise, while their sons or their rogues of nephews, quite unknown to them, were off upon some prank or other. They never thought of going out of their houses after the sunset gun was fired, or if they did, it was only to go down to the House to hear Papineau or Bourdage thunder against the governor and the bureaucrats.

Every week they anxiously awaited the appearance of the *Official Gazette* in order to see if by chance they had been cashiered as justices of the peace or officers of militia in punishment for their latest political freak, that is to say, for having, at some public meeting, proposed or seconded some resolution or other approving of the House and censuring the Government. It is worthy of remark that at this epoch French-Canadians formed but a single party. We had not yet responsible government, and all the public offices were filled by Englishmen, with an exception here and there in favour of a small class who made common cause with them.

Where also are the bureaucrats of whom I spoke just now?—so hated, and somewhat more arrogant, perhaps, than need be, but in their social life polished, sociable, hospitable, who merrily threw out at the window the money they earned, or did not earn—so merrily, indeed, that little or none remained for those who knocked at the door—the tailor, the butcher, the baker, for instance.

There are still a few of them among us, but instead of the rule they are the exception. And where are the "Garrison belles," so disdainful of the civilian youth and so attracted by a red coat and epaulettes; always ready to go, no matter how heavy the snow storm, for a picnic to Korska Hamel's or the Cape Rouge, to Loretto, or to the Falls of Montmorency? Where are the great ladies—so

formal, so richly attired, so devout and so worldly, who observed Lent so severely,—and what a Lent it used to be then!—but who, when carnival week came, arrived at church in the middle of the sermon—trippingly, almost dancing indeed, to hear the mass of the *Credo*, a Mass now relinquished, among many other customary usages. But where—as an old French poet writes—"Are the snows of others years?" Upon our hair, doubtless.

Let us get back to our Legends, from which we have not wandered so far as we might think. Many things among those we have so rapidly sketched which appear to us as but of yesterday, are quite strange to numbers of my hearers—soon they will have become legendary. Some may re-appear, perhaps, for it is frequently of the old that we make the new.

Thus it has happened with the Midnight Mass at Christmas, which had ceased to be celebrated, in the towns at least, for forty years. At Montreal they have begun again to sing the *Guignolle* on New Year's Eve, an old usage that had long fallen into desuetude. These are two good points to the credit of our times.

THE END.

## From the Valley of the St. Francis.

First of all, a feeling pulsed into the air, just enough for us to know it was there, the promise of spring! And then the birds came, and the branches began to appear bushier against the bright blue sky, and the brooks burst from their bondage of ice and snow and tumbled merrily down the hills, as though this were their first taste of freedom, and all Nature took up her glad, exultant cry—"The spring has come; the summer will soon be here!"

Just so has she sung the same sweet song since, and before, that strange man Columbus left the comfortable security of civilization to find a prettier home for humanity. We have many monuments, are true in our tribute to the memory of many hearts of heroism—even Nelson stands, with martial air, overlooking the lovely St. Lawrence, whose waters whispered such wonderful melodies of "The Old, Old Story" to the little French maiden who found favour in the heart which had before loved "not wisely, but too well"—but to Isabella of Castile, who parted with her jewels for this, our country's good, no such evidence of lasting gratitude has been given.

If ye could read the mysteries  
Which jealous nature holds so fast,  
We then could hear the hundred cries  
She hourly utters for the past.

But these eyes and ears we have not, and so it seems only humanity suffers for "the days that are no more."

But, still, living is a lovely thing. We feel this fully when the first May flowers lift their many-coloured faces from amongst the grasses on the highest hills. Such weeny, winsome things—pink! violet! and white! While below, in the valley, slender-stalked lilies and yellow bells begin to blossom.

The river, too, runs clearer, merrier, for its months of restraint, and its banks are made beautiful by the trees just turning to glory. Maples, red with the glow of their unfolding leaves; pale poplars, too tender still to tremble, as they will by-and-by, when they have left, like children, the unconscious fearlessness of youth behind them? Slim the unconscious fearlessness of youth behind them? Slim birches, with their smooth white bark, bearing a striking contrast to the brown, rough trunk of each tall elm. Here and there, along the edges of the picturesque St. Francis river, grow bunches of bright crimson branches, leafless, flowerless; yet, adding much to the charm of the scene—a splash of vivid colour from the lavish hand of Nature.

And then, how many robins there are, dearest to us for the legend which still clings to them and causes their safety. Seldom will a hand, even of a careless child, be raised against one of these sacred birds, whose breast, it is said, received its bright blood hue from the bleeding side of "Him who was wounded for our transgressions" so many hundred years ago on that grey morning at Golgotha.

Days follow without a shower; days which are saved from monotony by the ever varying beauties of the sky. Perhaps its blue is unbroken in the morning, but then suddenly, from somewhere, creeps a cloud, a soft, white, fleecy thing, which calls another, and yet another, until they appear like a flock of white sheep at play in a blue pasture. Then, suddenly, the rain comes, and we watch through the windows of our warm homes and say:

"This is just what we wanted to take the frost out of the ground—everything will be greener, fresher, fairer for this long shower; just as a heart is happier after tears."

But, ah! these showers come in the autumn, too, and dull the shades of fields and forests, leaving them brown and bare. But hush! this is May!—there is a promise in every blade of grass, a hope in every human heart—"The spring has come; the summer will soon be here!"

Sherbrooke.

MAY AUSTIN.

## W. D. Howells as a Word Artist.

In reading certain contemporary authors, we are very often struck by a skill and delicacy in handling language which is quite apart from the latter's use as a more or less unconscious medium of powerful thought, feeling or imagination. The writers we refer to may or may not possess these gifts, but what seems distinctively theirs is a power of making us feel in some fresh, new way the words they are using and combining. We are not suffered to slip over them on the thought or the imagination, but we are forced to stop, to admire, to recognize in them that beauty and fitness which have made language what it is—the great

staying and transmitting place of the human mind. Whether or no this power is an outcome of modern realism I will not pretend to say, but it is certainly found in a good many writers of the school, and amongst others in W. D. Howells. We may not always care for the subjects he chooses, or admire his method of treating them, but it is impossible to deny that he uses his words well, fitting them to his ideas and descriptions with an aptness and clearness rising to the highest felicitousness at times and making us linger over them as we would over a glimpse of pretty scenery or an exquisite tone of colour. And yet we would hesitate a little to call him a writer of genius. Compare him for a moment with some of the older novelists, with the humorous and dramatic abundance of Dickens, with Thackeray, keen and sarcastic, yet capable of so much simplicity and tenderness; with Scott's wealth of romantic incident, glittering like the peaks and coasts of a delightful unforgettably country in our young memory; with Hugo, or George Eliot's deep thought music. For all his cleverness of shrewd observation, he will hardly bear the test. We are sometimes conscious of a certain meagreness in his writings, of a failure to grasp life and character deeply and sympathetically enough, of a disposition to make too much of their more trivial and superficial aspects; in fact, we recognize in him often rather the man of talent than of sensibility. Whence then comes this felicitousness of language of his, which is a living flexible thing, and never to be confounded with mere fluency? Is it a genius, a sensibility in itself, a new recognition of the beauty and uses of the individual words, that get so knocked about, so blurred and conventionalized in the battlefield (for them) of daily talk? Why may it not be, since genius after all, wherever it shows itself, is simply a making us see things over again, a putting aside of the veil of dullness woven about us by habit and conventionality, that we may feel newly the accustomed and familiar. And we owe the word artist a debt of gratitude for doing us this kindly office with respect to language, for there are few things that conventionalism so enters into and spoils the force of, both in its grosser forms and those subtler ones that escape our notice. Words contract easy relations to one another, and get into the habit of slipping out in each other's company, whether they exactly fit our meaning or not. We all know how much easier it is to talk round a thing than into it, part of which difficulty certainly springs from our loose grasp of the meanings and relations of words. But the word artist will have none of this. His words, above all things, must fit exactly, and he has an abnormally keen scent for conventionality of every kind. There is an insect, probably known to most persons, endowed with exceedingly long feelers, which it waves about in front of itself as it advances, warding off danger at long range as it were. The word artist resembles such an insect as he moves delicately about language, avoiding conventional combinations or pulling them apart and combining anew until his words start up freshly before us, making us feel inclined sometimes to rub our eyes over them, as if the difference lay rather in our altered sight than in them.

J. E. SMITH.

## On the Grand Pré.

Evening, late June, all day the unsated sun  
Has drawn fresh sweets from the full-flowered earth,  
And drooping, faint, the lily bells, abashed,  
Bend low their heads 'neath fringe of tender green  
And blooming uplands glow to rosier flush.  
Now, sweeping o'er the sea, a sudden breeze  
Flings landward its salt breath invigorating.  
Lingering, I watch the incoming, restless, tide  
Dashing to shore in foaming spume and spray,  
And narrowing in its swell the swarded flats  
To threads of emerald. Broad acres green,  
In billowy waves, for miles encompass me,  
Flanked east by scarped and ruddy cliffs, pine-crowned—  
And yonder hills and velvet-verdured dale  
Stretch to th' horizon, until wearied eyes  
Turn restfully to seek the distant blue  
Of Parsboro's shore, now dim and misty grown  
With veil of sunset haze. Old Blomidon,  
Stern sentinel of Fundy's tide-lashed bay  
Throughout the centuries, holds ceaseless watch,  
Firm, 'neath the hurrying clouds of coming eve—  
Shadows lie everywhere, but depth of shade  
Hangs o'er the unquiet sea, and memory's tide  
Brings from my soul a little spray of tears  
In answering shadow, as the sea chants on  
Its deep unwritten music to the night,  
And each spent wave echoes the sad refrain.

O! Voice of God! mysterious evermore—  
O! heart of man, insistent as the tide  
To break its lawful bounds, powerless alike—  
No fret nor questioning can overleap  
The bar that Mighty Will has set for thee.

Still chants the sea in shadow as in sun,  
Drifting to shore some treasure with its sand.  
May not these soul-tides cast upon the land,  
From out their restless depths, some grains of gold  
Through life's rude storms before that morrow dawns  
When all is still, and the tide's ebb'd for aye?

Gone the sweet day, and scattered, too, my dreams;  
Idly, still seaward turned, I linger on  
To catch the fading gleam, one more salt breath.  
St. Eulalie, Grand Pré.

M. J. WEATHERBE.