

The conditions which make possible this comprehensive study of literature as an art, and as an expression of human life, have not existed until within comparatively recent times. There are glimpses here and there in the works of the greatest minds of the unity of knowledge, glimpses of the range and significance of literature as the vital outcome of all human experience; but the clear perception of these truths has been possible only to modern men.

The perception of the truth that literature is, in large measure, conditioned on the development, the surroundings and the character of the men who create it; that the vast and varied movement of humanity recorded in history is a development, a progressive unfolding, a coherent expression of man's nature; and that literature, as a part of this vast movement, represents a growth, a vital process, and is, therefore, a part of the discovery of himself which man is making as his supreme achievement in life—these are the informing ideas of the modern critical movement. The epoch of purely textual criticism has long passed away; that work has been transferred mainly, if not entirely, to the scholars. Aesthetic criticism, on the other hand, has been immensely enriched and stimulated by the application to literature of the ideas which have been set forth; never in the history of letters has there been so much criticism of the highest order as during the present century. The permanent element in literature is not form but spirit; not a particular manner, but perfection of manner; not uniformity of execution, but endless variety, stamped always with supreme excellence. There are flawless models, but they are for inspiration, not for imitation; they fix the standard of quality, but they liberate the hand which they inspire. This was, perhaps, the first great change effected by the modern way of looking at literature, and the extent and significance of that change can be seen by comparing the criticism of Voltaire with that of Sainte-Beuve; the criticism of Dr. Johnson with that of Matthew Arnold.

Without consideration of the contents of modern criticism, the fact that so many minds of the highest class have made it their chief means of self-expression ought to put us on guard against any conclusion involving its rank as an original contribution to literature. That men of the order of Coleridge, Carlyle, Sainte-Beuve, and Arnold have chosen criticism as the method of expression best fitted to convey their convictions and conclusions is a sufficient answer to those who regard it as a secondary form, and refuse to recognize it as original and first-hand work. Not exhaustion of creative impulse, but change of direction, is indicated by the attractiveness of criticism to modern minds; not a decline of force, but the application of force through a new instrument.

The fact and the law of life and art—these are the realities for which criticism, consciously or unconsciously, is always searching. These form what Fichte called "the divine idea of the world," which "lies at the bottom of all appearance." Herder, Goethe, Hildebrand, and Grimm, Sainte-Beuve and Scherer; Coleridge, Carlyle, Arnold, Dowden, and Hutton; Emerson and Lowell—the great company of those who have pursued criticism for the highest ends—have each and all disclosed the power of these ideas upon their work. They have fashioned a new form of literature, and one perfectly adapted to the intellectual methods and tendencies of the age—a form through which the creative impulse, following the scientific method, but in the truest literary spirit, works with a freedom and power which attest the adaptation of the instrument to the task. Modern criticism has given us a new conception of literature. Studying comprehensively the vast material which has come to its hand, discerning clearly the law of growth behind all art, and the interdependence and unity of all human development, it has given us an interpretation of literature which is nothing less than another chapter in the revelation of life. This is its real contribution to civilization; this is the achievement which stamps it as creative work. The epic described adequately and nobly the stir and movement of an objective age; the drama represented the relations of men to the powers above them, and to the organized social and moral forces about them; criticism, in the hands of the great writers, discloses the law and the fact of art and life as these final realities are revealed through literature.—*Hamilton Wright Mabie, in the Andover Review.*

THE "SPECTATOR" ON AMERICAN AND CANADIAN POETS.

THE question why has American poetry so little vitality, is of no little interest. If literature, as a whole, did not flourish in America, we might say that the soil was not ready; but this is notoriously not the case. The prose of the present generation is quite as good in America as in England. Indeed, we are inclined to believe that it is better. In our experience, the prose now being written on the other side of the Atlantic is often more scholarly, and has a greater sense of distinction and of force and clearness, than on this. The chances are that an ordinary American work of fiction or criticism, or a book dealing with politics, law, science, or history, will be less open to objection on the score of style, than one dealing with similar subjects published in England. A certain slovenliness and inelegance, often noticeable in the work of English writers, is seldom to be found among our kinsmen. Their serious prose, without being stilted or pompous, has the careful, restrained air we note in the literature of the

eighteenth century. It is certainly, then, not any want of the literary sense which injures American verse. Nor, again, is it any lack of appreciation of poetry. Take it all in all, the American public is more appreciative in regard to good poetry than the English. It is a commonplace that Mr. Matthew Arnold and Mr. Browning, and even Lord Tennyson, have had ten admirers in the United States for one in England. What, then, is the reason? We confess to being utterly unable even to suggest an answer. What makes the matter even more incomprehensible, is the fact that the "Younger Canadian Poets" are very much more interesting as poets than the men of the same race and language who live a little to the south of them. Some of the poems in the "Appendix" of Mr. Sladen's volume contain descriptions of natural objects which are full of beauty. For example, the following verse, taken from a poem called "Between the Rapids," by Mr. Archibald Lampman, strikes us as an excellent piece of landscape painting:—

The woods grow wild, and from the rising shore
The cool wind creeps, the faint wood odours steal;
Like ghosts adown the river's blackening floor
The misty fumes begin to creep and reel.
Once more I leave you, wandering toward the night,
Sweet home, sweet heart, that would have held me in;
Whither I go I know not, and the light
Is faint before, and rest is hard to win.
Ah, sweet ye were, and near to heaven's gate;
But youth is blind, and wisdom comes too late.

We had marked among the Canadian poems several other stanzas for quotation, but must content ourselves with one more example. The following lines are taken from a poem called "The Building of the Bridge," by Mr. Barry Straton:—

I know the secrets of thy streams,
The dusky entrances which lead
To quiet haunts, where herons feed,
Where daylight pauses, sleeps and dreams.
Within this circling woodland mere
The swollen spring-tide swamps the grass
Save where the scattered hummocks rise,
And over fields in harvest bare
The waters eddy everywhere,
And little mist-puffs pause or pass
Like cloudlets in thy mirrored skies.
Here where the sunken weed-mesh parts,
Wax-white lilies and golden hearts
Sleep on the stream,—fair spirits, they,
Of wooing beams that, on a day,
Sighed through the maple boughs above,
And died upon thy breast for love!

The felicity of phrase and sympathy with Nature to be found in these lines are to be met with in many other of the Canadian poems.

We cannot leave Mr. Sladen's volume without a word of explanation. We have judged the younger American poets as if Mr. Sladen's selections were certainly representative of them at their best. It is, however, possible that this is not so, and that a more competent selection might have produced a volume which would have won a different verdict. That Mr. Sladen has not selected wisely, we have, indeed, a certain amount of evidence. He has certainly not done justice to Lanier, whose powers as a poet we have been glad to recognize. In case, then, it is the selection which ought to be blamed, and not the poets, we offer by anticipation an apology to the writers whom we have judged, not by their strongest, but possibly by their weakest, work.

THE RAMBLER.

AMONG the many poetic effusions which, throughout the Dominion, have found appreciative readers, I notice the following—written at the advanced age of 91—by the late Law Clerk of the House of Commons, Mr. G. W. Wicksteed. To be able to write verse and to take an active interest in public matters when one has passed by twenty years the natural limit, is an unusual affair, and one that needs no comment save congratulation.

SIR JOHN MACDONALD.

Quis desiderio sit pudor aut modus
Tam cari capitis.—*Hor., Lib. Ode 24.*
In death's cold arms our country's father lies—
When shall his equal glad her longing eyes?

By distance parted, when her people were
Estranged and separate, scattered here and there,
He by a compact firm, and wisely planned
Gave them for country all Canadian land,
And stretched o'er mountain steep and prairie broad,
For friendly intercourse an iron road.

Long with consummate statesmanship he swayed
The councils of the nation he had made,
Contented for the right with tongue and pen
And won by kindly deeds the hearts of men—
And old-time friends and old opponents vied
In patriot sorrow when MACDONALD died.

Ottawa, June 9, 1891.

[The above beautiful tribute to the memory of the late lamented Premier was received in this office soon after his death, but through inadvertence was mislaid and unpublished until now.—*Ed. Citizen.*]
Citizen, June 15, 1891.

It is very dreadful indeed to have to descend to clippings—especially when one may not plead in extenuation that the weather has been hot—but I hope the strength and humour of the cutting will excuse me. It is so good, I think, that THE WEEK must ventilate it, in order that the Church choirs of the future may lay its lessons to heart. It is entitled—"A Little Further On":—

"A LITTLE FURTHER ON—A FRAGMENT.

"He had been an energetic curate from 1870 to 1880, filled to the brim with all the schemes and methods of his

time. He was now, in 1900, an energetic rector, whose principal thought day and night was for his parish and the Church he served. By his side sat his curate, a young man with a puzzled and hunted expression of countenance, and on the opposite side of the room another young man, the organist, sat before a small harmonium, turning over a heap of music. The three appeared to be discussing a harvest thanksgiving for the following week.

"We begin at the Lord's Prayer, of course," said the rector, "then Venite, one psalm—I think it had better be Psalm cxviii., a lesson (and Smith, I shall only read two verses), the *Te Deum*, a hymn, the Creed harmonized, an anthem, one collect, and a hymn. Will you make a note of it, Brown?"

"You will not introduce a sermon?" asked the curate.
"Better not," said the rector. "Don't you remember what a fuss they made when you preached on Good Friday?"

"It was not more than five minutes," said the curate, humbly.

"But," said his rector, "they said it was the thin end of the wedge, and that it took all the brightness out of the service, and you know it is of the last importance to get the young men to church."

"There was a young man at church last Sunday," said the organist hopefully.

"It was Gubbens, and he yawned," said the curate.

"Yawned!" said the horror-stricken rector, "that must not occur again! We must leave out a collect or something. What can we do to amuse him? He must be amused! Brown, can you suggest anything?"

"I did stand on my head on the organ stool at the end of the lesson," said the organist, rather aggrieved, "but some of them didn't notice me, and some of them said they had seen it done better. I can't think of anything else at the moment."

"You are always kind," said the rector, warmly, "and you know how difficult it is to keep up the interest. When I was a curate, the banjo was one great means of obtaining influence in a parish, but now even the infant school refuses to listen to it."

"Still a few men used to come occasionally," said the organist, "Robinson, for instance."

"I'm afraid Robinson isn't as steady as he was," said the rector. "He is not as regular at billiards and the bi-weekly dances as he used to be." The three good men looked at one another, wearied and cast down.

"I spoke to him about it," said the curate, "and he explained that billiards and dancing were too stale, but he would join a balloon club if we started one."

"Yes," said the rector, "I wish we could; but balloons are so frightfully expensive, and the duchess won't help, because she says she had to give £100 to the choir excursion to the West Indies, and she was perfectly certain they were not satisfied, because they heard Parkinson took his choir to Khiva!"

"It was the society for sending everybody to Homburg for a fortnight that spoilt our choir treats," said the organist. "Before the G.E.H.F. they were quite contented with Boulogne for a day or two."

"And you must remember," said the curate, "that the duke was not encored when he sang a comic song in character at the Half-hourly Amusement Club."

"Well," interposed the organist, "he could hardly expect it, for since the Two-penny Ticket Society was set on foot not even a break-down has a chance in this country."

"I wish," said the rector, reflectively, "we could get up enough for a set of those automatic choristers; for since we introduced whist in the vestry before evensong on saints' days it is so difficult to get the men into the choir!"

"Everything is difficult nowadays," remarked the curate. "The committee for the Free Clothing Guild complains that the women will not wear a dress which is not imported from Paris. And," continued the rector, "there was a row at the Free Board to-day because you put clear turtle on the menu two days running."

"And the Guild of Amusements Committee told me," said the organist, gloomily, "that, unless on pain of death, the members wouldn't see another magic lantern; they were so sick of them!"

"Then," said the rector, despairingly, "I do not see how the Bible truths are to be brought home to them. If they will not be taught dramatically or operatically, or even by the oxy-hydrogen light, I don't see what is to become of the Church of England. And if this Free Recreation and Gratis Summer Tour Act passes, I don't know how we are to stand out against the Secularists!"

"The curate hesitated. 'Suppose,' said the curate diffidently, 'we were to try a little religion.'—*Spero, in the Monthly Packet.*

The adoption of the conventional black silk gown by the Judges on the New York Bench is a fact of some significance, intimating that step by step the customs of an older country are being copied. Certainly—this world cannot get on without Ritual, and there is nothing I like better to see than people who have a right to exercise authority, exercising it in the legitimate and satisfactory way. I would much rather, for instance, deal always with officials who do their work officially, who, by reason of their opportunities and position, show that they are accustomed to take the initiative, than with shy or absent-minded or underbred people who appear more than half ashamed of their duties. This has ever been a strong