

Well, we have the number before us, and it has not entirely fulfilled our expectations. While the issue contains many articles of real excellence, yet there are a number quite mediocre in character, and some of them look very like twaddle. We propose to notice briefly merely the more important contributions. Canada may be proud of such a graceful and pleasing writer as Mr. Charles G. D. Roberts, who contributes a sketch entitled "Echoes from Old Acadia." Mr. Roberts is perhaps better known as a poet than as a prose writer. Yet he excels no less in the latter respect, having in the former capacity gained the distinction of being called "the American Keats." As an illustration of the force and elegance of Mr. Roberts' prose style, we quote the following extract from the article just mentioned. He is speaking of the first settlement of the island at the mouth of the St. Croix river by De Monts in the year 1605:

"On the mainland near they built a mill, and sowed their rye and barley; and they laid out garden plots in loving likeness to the thymy closes and beds of marjoram which sweetened the air about their Norman homes. . . . With digging and with building the summer passed merrily along. But by-and-bye the summer went out in a sudden blaze of scarlet and gold, and a dispiriting grayness stole across the landscape. . . . When late October winds began to pipe over the shelterless island, bending the sere long grasses all one way, and ridden by such a legion of crisped leaves that every brook was choked, and all the still pools hidden from sight, their hearts turned homeward very longingly." In simple and striking picturesqueness we doubt whether this passage can be excelled. Among English writers it reminds us of R. D. Blackmore, but even the author of "Lorna Doone" is not often so happy in expression.

Mr. W. Philip Robinson, the editor of the *Week*, contributes an able article on "The Promise in Canadian Literature." We question, however, his ability to maintain the assertion which has been made rather too often of late, that "Canadian poets and novelists have hitherto been almost invariably French." The distinction which the French Academy conferred recently on M. Frechette, appears to have dazzled the eyes of our English-Canadian critics so much that they can see merit only in French-Canadian literature.

"An Unappreciated Work" is the title of a well-written critical article by James M. Oxley, on Dickens' "Tale of Two Cities." In the line of what might be called light writing, Mr. W. E. Maclellan contributes "The Decadence of the Red River Cart,"—a clever sketch with delicate humor and felicitous turns of expression.

Among the poetical contributions by Canadian writers the palm must clearly be awarded to "Prometheus," by Mr. A. Werner. We take the liberty of reproducing this poem, being, as it is, in spite of occasional roughness of expression, a poem of high merit, and altogether the best in this alleged microcosm of Canadian literature. Indeed, in terse and graphic vigor Mr. Werner's poem is not often equalled.

#### PROMETHEUS.

Bare and grim and ghastly frowns the great Caucasian mountain,—  
Great cliffs soaring up, snow-capped and steep, into the sky,—  
No sweet song of summer bird or murmur low of fountain,  
Clear and pitiless shine the heavens on his agony.  
Stretched out on the rock-face, rough and hard and bare,—  
Aching brow unshielded from the southern noon-day glare  
Or the burning breath down-beating of the stifling furnace-air.  
Oh! the awful stillness of the steeps!  
Sunlight glaring on the stony sweeps—  
Not a moving leaf, or chirp of bird in tree—  
Not a sea-gull fluttering o'er the distant sea,  
Not a snake, or mouse, or wild thing—or the glance  
Of a midge's wing upon its airy dance,—  
Not a passing cloud to come in pity and in love  
Twixt him and the cruel brightness of the great blue sky above:—  
Feeling nothing save the strain of racking nerve and dizzy brain,—  
Yet with high heart still unbroken, constant in his pain.

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Starlight on the Caucasus! \* \* Steep for man,—but none for him!  
Far away across the Euxine, cottage fires are burning dim—  
Men are resting from their labours, knowing not that he lies there,  
Stretched, and chained, and racked in anguish, on the rock-face bleak and bare.

All for them!—and none to thank him—none to pity or to bless,  
Seeing no end, through the Ages, to his pain and loneliness,—  
Yet defying, in the mighty strength of his despair,—  
In the courage of his truth and death-denying love—  
All the bolts of Zeus, Avenger, thundering above! —A. WERNER.

The sonnet by J. Almon Ritchie, entitled "Love's Wane," is also deserving of praise. It is quite equal, if not superior, to the ordinary American magazine poetry. This poem appears in another column of THE VARSITY. Of lesser merit, but still commendable, are "Some-time" and "Alone," the former by John W. Dafoe, the latter by T. B. P. Stewart, who will be remembered by our readers as the writer of the prize poem in our own university last year. "Twilight Fields" and

"Lines to Death" are decidedly common-place, and "A Young Lover's Love" is at least bucolic in style and versification if it is not so in matter. We should judge the person referred to was a very young lover indeed.

Why these last three poems and the greater number of the remaining prose articles are assigned a place in a "microcosm of Canadian literature," we shall probably never be able to learn. We might venture the supposition that these articles were introduced into the collection on the famous *lucus a non lucendo* principle. At all events, they are lacking in this somewhat important qualification for a place in such a collection: they are not literary in any degree to speak of.

In fine, while there is so much to admire in this number of the *Current*, and while we thank the editors for bringing out several writers of merit who were hitherto unknown, we yet object most emphatically to the statement that this is to be considered a fair representation of what Canadian writers are able to do in the field of magazine and review literature. We should have thought that in such a "microcosm" as the *Current* professes to lay before us we might have met at least some of the names of our old acquaintances in the various departments of Canadian literature, as Mr. G. Mercer Adam, Mr. Kirby, Miss Machar, M. Frechette, Mr. Hunter Duvar, Dr. Mulvany, Mr. John A. Fraser, jr., and Mrs. Kate Seymour Maclean. But the *Current* knows them not, and while some of her contributors are quite equal to these and entirely worthy of the place assigned them, yet she has brought in various other strange divinities, declaring that these be thy gods, O Canada! Let those who wish accept the dictum of the *Current*; we decline to do so.

#### OLD CABOOSE'S BALL.

Old Caboose sat with his feet on the stove in his bar-room among a motley crowd of bull-whackers, cow-boys, miners and roustabouts, lamenting the good old days "before the police came into the country," when whiskey and rum were as plentiful as water, when the buffalo roamed the prairie in countless myriads, when the smallest coin known was a fifty cent piece, when justice was administered by himself and his Spitzee cavalry, and execution carried out by means of a lariat hung from the nearest tree, and other grand advantages of western life, all of which have gradually disappeared since the always-to-be-regretted advent of the police, and the establishment of Canadian control in the country. These were the good old days when any fellow with sand enough could get an outfit from one of the big trading posts at Fort Benton on the Missouri, consisting of a dozen bulls and a couple of large waggons laden with whiskey and alcohol. No cash down. All he had to do was to freight it up to Whoop-up or to Old Man River, build a log cabin and a stout corral, and trade it off to the Indians for furs and robes. In the fall—always provided he had not been shot or hanged in the summer—he returned to Benton, handed over his robes, and cleared enough to buy a complete outfit to repeat the experiment next year on his own behalf.

Old Caboose was a great favorite among the rounders and roustabouts who collected every evening round his bar-room stove, and used to delight in getting the old man to repeat his experiences, or to start him on his favourite subject: The unfair treatment that he, old Caboose, in particular, had received from the Dominion Government, and especially from Sir John Macdonald, who undoubtedly is to this day in complete ignorance of his criminal harshness, or indeed of the existence of such a personage as old Caboose. The old man's life, like that of most "old-timers" in the west, has been an eventful one. An Englishman by birth, he had received a good education, and was for a time a preacher in the Society of Friends. Finding this life a monotonous one, he emigrated to California in the stirring times of '49. Here he made a big "pile," but lost it all gambling. Then he wandered about to different mining camps, now in Nevada, now in British Columbia, now in Montana. Finally he joined some loose companions and adopted the dangerous, but lucrative, profession of a whiskey trader in the Canadian North-West. On the banks of the Spitzee (now High River) one of the most beautiful spots in the North-West, about fifty miles from the Rocky Mountains, they established a "Republic," of which old Caboose was President. He was also Generalissimo of the Forces—the celebrated "Spitzee Cavalry." This, however, like many other republics, has long since passed away—republics, as well as kingdoms, in the words of the hymn, "wax and wane," and the flag of the Spitzee Cavalry has long ceased to strike terror into the heart of the rival trader, who dared to infringe their monopoly of trading whiskey, fire-arms and ammunition to the Blackfeet and Crees. Old Caboose for the last ten years has been the sole proprietor of that celebrated house in Fort B—, whose sign is a full-cocked revolver with the motto: "No jaw-bone here!"

Well, we didn't seem to be getting any nearer the "Ball." Six-eyed Johnston was the first to moot the question, and he introduced the sub-