

WILLIAM KIRBY.

Brief mention has already been made of the paper on William Kirby, the author of "The Chien d'Or," "The U. E.," "Pontiac," and other works in prose and verse, read by Mr. W. D. Light-hall, before the Society of Canadian Literature. We are happy to be able, in this issue, to present our readers with the substance of it.

William Kirby is one of that generation of our *littérateurs* which may be called the earliest. That generation, including Heavysege, Sangster, McLachlan, Mrs. Moodie, Haliburton, and some whose names are too near our Society for convenient mention, stood mainly in the peculiar position of having brought their culture and talents into the country from the mother-islands, but of having also—almost all—through long residence, developed an attachment of great strength to Canada. How complete their adoption of the new nationality was is one of the interesting features of their works.

The author of "The Chien d'Or," our finest novel, is no longer a young man. His family emigrated to America while he was a boy, in 1832, leaving his English birthplace, Kingston-upon-Hull. He had the advantage of studying in Cincinnati under a celebrated schoolmaster, who taught literature and philosophy and who is said to have kept a remarkable and somewhat famous institute. William Kirby then came to Montreal for a short time and, in 1829, established himself in Upper Canada, where he was editor, for twenty years, of the *Niagara Mail*. In that beautiful and historic place, in the neighbourhood of the great Falls and of the battlefields of Queenstown Heights and Lundy's Lane, he was wonderfully drawn to the traditions of the Loyalists. This was partly due to his own descent, partly to the fact that he had married into a family which had greatly distinguished itself on the Loyalist side during the Revolutionary struggle. The first fruits of his reflections on the theme which had such an attraction for him was a poem entitled "The U. E.," a long epic in twelve cantos and in Spenserian stanzas. Though defective in fire and literary finish, it is valuable as a series of pictures of Loyalist personages and times. Interspersed here and there are graphic descriptions—a *genre* which is one of our author's *fortes*.

Mr. Kirby's chief work is, undoubtedly, the novel so well known as "The Chien d'Or, or 'The Golden Dog.'" In the course of his writings and travels the author had become acquainted with some of the best literary men in Canada, and among these with Messrs. B. Sulte and J. M. LeMoine. The latter relates the origin of "The Chien d'Or," in the words of the author himself, contained in a personal letter of the date 1879.

"I happened to be in Quebec in 1865," says the letter, "my business being to attend to a bill there pending in Parliament. I bought one of your 'Maple Leaves,' and the account you gave of the Chien d'Or took my fancy very much. Sulte and I were sitting in the window of the St. Louis Hotel one day, and I spoke to him about the story and wanted him to write it out, and jestingly said that if he would not write a novel on it, I would. Sulte did not take the fancy, and I thought no more about it until my return home, when I found the Chien d'Or sticking like a burr to my imagination. * * * and I wrote the story as I got time. W. K."

The MS. had a curious history. Sent to a great London publishing house to be printed, it became mislaid for several years, and was then discovered—in the Grand Trunk Railway station at Toronto! Kirby, on getting it back again, worked it up, improved and remodelled it, and finally that old stand-by of Canadian authors, John Lovell, of Montreal, published it for him. In the cloth-bound form, and at that relatively early date, it turned out a losing transaction for Mr. Lovell, but has since succeeded far better in paper. "It is widely read in the United States," says LeMoine, "and brings us every year a certain number of tourists, curious to examine old Quebec in detail."

This important work, the most widely read, except, possibly, Haliburton's "Sam Slick," of the small class of Canadian fiction, vividly pictures the showy but excessively corrupt closing years of the Old Regime, when Bigot and his associates were imitating the gay and wicked court of Versailles. The Bourgeois Philibert, a merchant of gentle origin and honest nature, offends these gilded scoun-

drels by his opposition to their aggressions. The straightforward man, in reply to their insults, had the boldness to build into the wall, over the door of his mansion, a gilt sculptured tablet, representing a dog gnawing a bone, with this inscription:

Je suis un chien qui ronge l'os,
En le rongant, je prends mon repos,
Un jour viendra qui n'est pas venu
Que je mordrai qui m'aura mordu.

(The stone is at present built into the Quebec Post Office, which replaces the house of the Bourgeois.) The corrupt crew finally succeed in degrading a fine young fellow, around whom they have thrown their net of dissipation, to the point of running the Bourgeois through with his sword while maddened with drink, and the good man dies a martyr to the cause of the people. The main current of the story, however, is occupied with the progress of a daringly wicked beauty, Angelique des Meloises, who contributes to the murder of Philibert, but whose other crimes are even darker. Her ambition is to dazzle and marry the Intendant Francois Bigot, and through his position and riches to get to Versailles and conquer the King himself with her charms. For this she discards her real lover, the young fellow referred to—Le Gardeur de Repentigny—and instigates a murderess, La Corriveau, to the assassination by poison, at midnight, of her gentle-hearted rival, Caroline de St. Castin, Bigot's real good-star. In working out the career of Angelique, Kirby gradually advances into his most powerful and natural vein and produces fine situations of tragedy. Though not without grave faults—among which may be mentioned its great length, its sometimes stilted style, the artificial character of the dialogue, and the excessive and extravagant laudation of everything Canadian—"Le Chien d'Or" presents pictures of that picturesque epoch which are rich in their fulness of historic detail. There are passages in it of the highest order of literary workmanship—powerful expressions of passion, admirable pieces of description and considerable dramatic skill in the contrast of character and motive. Mr. Kirby has, indeed, tried his hand at the drama, having written three plays, "Beaumanoir," "Joseph in Egypt," and "The Queen's Own." Of more pertinence to us are his "Canadian Idylls," which, next to "Chien d'Or," are, I think, worthy of attention. Of the series, I consider "Spina Christi" the finest, as it is, from the measure chosen, the most musical. The legend with which it deals is one attached to an aged thicket of thorns at Niagara called currently "the French thorns," on account of their having been originally planted by the garrison of the fort there in the times of the French. These old thorns are of the species known as *spina christi*; whence the title of this idyll. Kirby's archaic language and versification in the poem are masterly. "Pontiac," also "Bushy Run" and "The Lord's Supper in the Wilderness," may be particularly recommended, of these idylls, and it is a pity the parts of the series have not been put together.

Mr. Kirby, though a man of seventy, is, in appearance, as in literary power, much younger, and might pass for fifty-five. He is of full figure and stature and somewhat stout. He has been a member of the Royal Society of Canada since its formation, and takes much interest in its proceedings. In politics he is a Conservative; in faith, an Anglican. His dealings and views are gentle, broad and courteous. He has for over twenty years been Collector of Customs at Niagara, and is a Justice of the Peace of Lincoln County. He has two sons. There is no Canadian man of letters who enjoys more unreservedly or more justly than Wm. Kirby the esteem of those who know him.

THE PLANETS IN MAY.

INCREASING LENGTH OF THE DAYS—MORNING AND EVENING STARS.

During May the speed of the sun visibly slackens as it moves from the vernal equinox toward the summer solstice, its increase in northerly declination being only a little over half of that during the month of March. It rises on the 1st at 4.59 a.m., and on the 31st at 4.33 a.m., the length of the days increasing 54 minutes.

The May moon falls on the 15th at 1.34 a.m. It is in perigee, or nearest the earth, on the 16th. It begins its series of many conjunctions promptly on the 1st, with Neptune, and marks the relative position of the other planets as it passes them in successive conjunctions. Saturn, Uranus, Jupiter, Venus, Neptune, Mars and Mercury being the order in which these events occur. Mercury is an evening star throughout the month. On the 1st, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, it is nearest the sun and on the same day reaches its greatest brilliancy. On the 6th it is in conjunction with Mars, being about 1° north of that planet. Neither of these planets can be found without artificial aid excepting for a few evenings before and after the 24th, at which date Mercury is at its greatest eastern elongation, and can be found near the western horizon.

Venus, having had a most brilliant career as evening star, is now the queen of the morning heavens. Her companion, for a while, will be Jupiter, but he will leave her in her glory in June and join the evening planets. Her delicate pearly lustre grows dim as her crescent wanes, the period of her stay above the horizon getting gradually shorter as she approaches the sun. This brightest of the starry gems when viewed through a telescope is a sphere in gibbous phase, shining with an intense brightness and surrounded by a dense atmosphere that hides her real face so completely as to leave but small hope that the impenetrable veil will ever be pierced by human eye. Venus has a retrograde motion until the 19th, from which date until the end of the month she has a direct motion.

Mars, an unpretending ruddy planet in comparison with the gorgeous coloring of Venus, is evening star and is slowly approaching the sun, and is to be found south of the Pleiades and west of Aldebaran, and it will require unusually keen vision to discover the position of our near neighbour, who next year will be the admiration of all observers.

Jupiter is a morning star and has a retrograde motion of 2° 16', rising on April 30 at 11.22 p.m. The early hours therefore are honored by his presence, and as he pursues his course until the early dawn causes him to be lost, he is fair to behold, getting brighter and brighter as the month advances, his diameter increasing from 40".6 to 43".8. Jupiter is in opposition with the moon on the 17th, passing within 15' of each other.

Saturn is the evening star, having a direct motion of 1° 42', or, in other words, has an easterly course which continues until the end of the year. The bright star Regulus, in the constellation of Leo, and Saturn are slowly approaching each other, and, as the star is fixed, the movement of the planet is very apparent as the distance is slowly lessened. The soft mellow light of this planet dims as he approaches the sun and gets further and further from the earth.

Uranus, another of the evening stars, rises at 4 p.m. and sets about an hour before sunrise on the 1st of the month. Its great distance may be somewhat better understood when we consider that its diameter is less than four seconds of arc. This planet, invisible to the naked eye, may be quite accurately defined in position by the star Spica in the constellation of Virgo.

Neptune, the most distant of the planets, also evening star, is twice in conjunction with the moon, on the 1st and 28th, and with the sun on the 22nd, on which day Neptune, Sun and Earth are in line in the order named.

MURIEL.

Five fairy years of sunshine and of flowers,
Sweet Muriel, have bloomed beneath thy feet,
Which lightly tread where slow the moments meet
In silence stealing through thy childhood's bowers.
Some day, dear little heart, Life's precious hours
From thee will pass away on pinions fleet;
Some day, O darling one, the flowers sweet
May fade, and Life's soft sunshine fill with showers.
Hast thou not heard the dead leaf flitting by,
On autumn wings uplifted to the sky;
Hast thou not seen upon the summer lake
The sullen cloud in golden showers break?
O holy angels thronging the blue air,
Lead ye the little feet o'er pathways fair!

Pictou.

HELEN M. MERRILL.