

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

ALEXANDER McLACHLAN.

By Stewart Hughes.

England has had many poets, while Canada, comparatively speaking, has had very few. Of these I may mention as the greatest, probably, Charles G. D. Roberts and Alexander McLachlan, who is styled the "Canadian Burns."

Mr. McLachlan was born in the year 1818 in the Town of Johnstone, Renfrewshire, Scotland. This town is situated in the valley of the Clyde. Looking across the garden of the McLachlans to the north, one could see that famous and historic mountain Ben Lomond.

During the early youth of Alexander his father died, leaving a young wife and a family of four, there being only one son. Alexander, for a short time supported the family by working in a cotton factory, but, this not suiting him, he emigrated to Canada in the year 1840. Soon after this the poet married his cousin, Clamina McLachlan. For the next few years Mr. McLachlan settled in various parts of the country, namely Downie Township, of Perth County, then North Easthope, of the same county, and Erin Township of Wellington County, where he lived until the year 1877.

In 1862 he was sent to Scotland by the Government under Sir John A. Macdonald to lecture on immigration. This appointment was chiefly made through the influence of one of his friends, the late Hon. D'Arcy McGee, at that time a member of the Canadian Cabinet.

Mr. McLachlan was a splendid lecturer, and his favorite subjects were poets, poetry, famous men, and temperance. I have already written of his trip to Scotland in 1862, but he returned on his own account in 1874. A short while ago I had the pleasure of seeing an old billhead which was a notification to the effect that Mr. McLachlan was to lecture at Kilmalcolm, Scotland, on the subject of Shakespeare. The lecture was to take place on the 27th of November, 1874, and the admission charged was 1s. 6d.

During the first occasion of his trip to Scotland he was presented with a silver-mounted cane by the citizens of his native town, Johnstone. This cane also had the McLachlan coat-of-arms engraved on it, which consists of a group of hounds at rest under some mountain ash, or, as we would commonly call them, rowan trees.

For a very beautiful poem on Burns which was written by Mr. McLachlan in 1886 he received a beautiful medal from the Toronto Caledonian Society. This medal is of several sorts of gold and has a hand-carved laurel wreath around it.

Mr. McLachlan was a man to whom Longfellow could have referred when he wrote about his ideal poet:

Whose songs gushed from his heart,
As showers from the clouds of Summer,
Or tears from the eyelids start;

Who, through long days of labor,
And nights devoid of ease,
Still heard in his soul the music
Of wonderful melodies.

Mr. McLachlan was an ardent lover of nature, but he had not the least knowledge of how to plant flowers or to prepare flower beds. At one time during my youth (of course the earlier part) we had the pleasure of spending a Sunday with the McLachlans. It happened that Mr. McLachlan had a dahlia growing under his study window, which, without deliberation I proceeded to pull up. Mr. McLachlan planted the flower again and, strange to say, it grew.

At another time he was given some pansies. One can imagine, I suppose,

an old gentlemen taking a spade and after digging a hole in the sod, planting the pansies in it. Such was the way in which the poet planted his. He expected them to flourish and naturally was very much surprised when they did not.

If at any time he happened to see anything green sprouting through the ground, he always, as a first consideration, called his wife to see what species of plant it was. If it happened to be a flower the poet promptly gathered all the twigs and branches available to protect it from the chickens, which seem to have a partiality for such things.

In 1877 Mr. McLachlan had moved to a farm in Amaranth, seven miles west of Orangeville. This farm was managed for several years by his son Malcolm, and later by another son, Alexander, who had control of it until his death in 1895. The poet, unable to work the farm himself, moved to Orangeville after the death of Alexander, where he died very unexpectedly in March, 1896. He was buried in Greenwood Cemetery, but his body was removed to the Forest Lawn Cemetery by the St. Andrew's Society of that town in later years.

A very great peculiarity of the poet's was that if at any time he was going to Amaranth station for his mail he always donned his best clothes, but if he was coming to Orangeville it did not matter what old suit he had on. Mr. McLachlan had an old grey Scotch flannel nightcap which he was very fond of wearing all the time. He also had a very heavy head of hair, and he was always afraid of catching cold if his nightcap were not on. Nevertheless, if at any time a visitor were coming his daughters hid his nightcap, but he usually succeeded in regaining it.

Mr. McLachlan had a great liking for wild flowers, although he preferred the pansy. He evidently had severe misgivings as to his place of burial, as this verse tends to show:

In a grave in the forest, when life's
journey's past,
Unknown and unhonor'd, they'll lay me
at last;
Abune me nae bluebell nor gowan shall
wave,
And nae robin come to sing over my
grave.

OUT-OF-THE-WAY INFORMATION.

The Irish prefix "O" is a contraction of *oigha*, "grandchild"; but the Scottish "O," to be found in a few names, is merely a contraction for "of," indicating the place in which the person was born or lives.

The icebergs of the two hemispheres are quite different in shape, the Arctic bergs being irregular in form, with lofty pinnacles and glittering domes, while the Antarctic bergs are flat-topped and solid-looking.

A piece of genuine Japanese lacquer takes the artist almost a lifetime to perfect, and is produced by hundreds of thin coats of lacquer laid on at considerable intervals of time, the value depending rather on the labor bestowed than on the quality of the material used. First-class lacquer work can scarcely be scratched by a needle.

People who live at high altitudes have weaker and more highly-pitched voices than those living in lower regions. In America, among the Indians living on the plateaux between the ranges of the Andes, at an elevation of from 10,000 feet to 14,000 feet, the men have voices like women, and the women like children, while their singing in a shrill monotone. The Australian native has a weak voice, but can make it carry a long distance.

THE SUGGESTION OF THE AMETHYST.

(By David James Burrell, D.D., L.L.D.)

In one of Canon Wilberforce's sermons on the Symbolism of the Precious Stones in the Foundation of the Heavenly city he calls attention to the significance of the amethyst in these words: "Put aside for a moment the unbroken chain of legend which has clustered round the amethyst and treat it from the matter-of-fact, scholarly point of view. Put imagination on one side and translate the work literally; it can bear but one interpretation; it is a combination of two familiar Greek words; 'a' meaning not and 'methustos' a user of strong drink. What a marvelous prophecy have we here! Uttered twelve hundred years before the perilous art of distillation was invented, it points distinctly to the peculiar and special peril of these latter days."

If the suggestion derived from this particular passage of Scripture be regarded as far-fetched and somewhat fantastic, it will in any case serve to emphasize the validity of other undeniable and irrefutable arguments in behalf of Total Abstinence.

First, the Economic Argument; namely, the use of intoxicating liquor as a beverage does no good.

Its needlessness is sufficient to condemn it. Does it strengthen the body? Does it sharpen the mind? Does it quicken or stimulate the spiritual faculties? Does it contribute to the welfare of society? Does it answer any patriotic end? Does it equip a man for religious work? Does it prepare him for death? Does it give him a better standing at the Judgment Bar of God?

Second, the Prudential Argument, to wit, the use of intoxicating liquor as a beverage is harmful. Now and then a moderate drinker puts up a diaphanous defense; but, as a rule, the case goes by default. Men drink because they want to; that's the rationale of it. Corner them and they will frankly admit it. The average man is too wise to set himself against the testimony of both observation and experience. Everybody knows the "horrors of rum." Ask the doctors; ask the scientists; ask the social reformer. They all tell the same story; the drink habit is an enemy to the physical, mental, spiritual man. It desolates the home, demoralizes society and corrupts the State. It fills our prisons, insane asylums, poor houses and potter's fields; it does evil and only evil, and there is nothing to be said for it.

Third, the Christian Argument; that is, self-denial for the benefit of others. Paul put it on this wise: "If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat while the world standeth." A moderate drinker is either addicted to the habit or he is not. In the former case he should quit for obvious reasons. What a small matter it is for a Christian to give up his glass of wine pro bono publico! Why should he hesitate, in view of the force of example, when he frankly avows that he really cares nothing for it?

A Christian is a separated man; separated from the world by "the mind that was in Christ Jesus," that is, by the spirit of self-denial in behalf of others. To deny one's self the use of the social glass, for the sake of example and in consideration of the frightful evils of intemperance, lays so small a demand upon the soul of a professing Christian that it would appear he should scarcely think twice of it.