

Mr. Tardivel judged by English and other writers.

CHAP. I.

A DANIEL COME TO JUDGMENT.

THE AUTHOR OF "BORROWED AND STOLEN FEATHERS."

(Written for the *Morning Chronicle*, 29th November, 1878.)

Criticism, as an art, may be practised either with great advantage or great detriment to a national literature. In comparatively young countries, like Canada, where literary material is not over abundant, nor remarkable for variety, great care should be taken to avoid the encouragement of a spirit hostile to literary enterprise in any of its legitimate departments. Few industrious and talented authors can be expected in any young, struggling community like ours, the vast majority of the members of which must devote all their time and abilities to the dry, practical work of winning a bare subsistence. With us the necessary, the indispensable occupations must needs absorb by far the greater portion of our energies; yet our moral and intellectual interests demand as much attention as we can spare to so refining and enlightening a pursuit as literature—a word of comprehensive meaning. Even of the small number who possess the taste, time and information qualifying them for authorship, but few can be expected to appear in the character of originality. In one sense, indeed, no historian—however fertile and brilliant—can lay claim to this quality, since he mainly deals with materials, in the shape of memoirs, antiquities and ancient or modern records of all sorts: the products of the most varied intellects, digesting, combining and arranging them in the manner thought most suitable for his purpose. Now the men who quarry and hew the different stones of an edifice are as indispensable as the workmen who place them in their designed positions, thus carrying out the architect's most skilful and symmetrical plans. Each set does useful work, being mutually complementary and helpful. Mr. LeMoine, the author of *The Chronicles of the St. Lawrence*, as an antiquarian, explorer and chronicler, has done a great deal to rescue many of our early legends and historical episodes from oblivion, and to make the life, manners and circumstances of Canadians of the olden, and even of later times, better known and appreciated than was otherwise possible. Tourists from all lands, and writers on Canadian and American history, biographers and *littérateurs* of every class have acknowledged the value of the materials so abundantly garnered in his sketch-books. Now, this gentleman, while not pluming himself upon wonderful originality, has undeniably rendered good service to Canadian letters. His compilations present the best points and beauties, practical and fanciful, of many works inaccessible to the general reader. It would, therefore, appear anything but generous to applaud bitter, spiteful attacks on this author. These remarks are suggested by the brochure "Borrowed and Stolen Feathers; or a Glance through Mr. J. M. LeMoine's latest work—*The Chronicles of the St. Lawrence*," by J. P. Tardivel. The critic displays characteristic, innate modesty and the spirit pervading his pamphlet, in a passage on page 7, as follows:—

"*The Gazette*, the *Mercury*, and the *Canadian Monthly* having more than exhausted all that is to be said in favor of the *Chronicles*, I deem it meet that the public should be shown the other side of the medal, as the French say. And as no one seems inclined to perform this rather delicate operation, I, who am accustomed to the frowns and sullen looks of irate authors, take upon myself the ungrateful task."

How arrogant and self-sufficient! "One accustomed to the frowns and sullen looks of irate authors!" Why, *Xolus*, from "the native land of storms" happily described by Virgil, could not have boasted a more trying and hardening experience than this! No wonder this critic is merciless; Peregrine Pickle being hitherto by comparison, and ancient Pistol, modesty itself! Surely, "the giant's strength" should be wielded with mercy, and "not as a giant's," particularly in the case of an opponent or victim deemed so insignificant. But severe critics have always suffered the consequences of their inhumanity and inordinate conceit. A masterly English critic has said:

"'Tis hard to say if greater want of skill
Appear in writing or in judging ill."

"Let such teach others who themselves excel,
And censure freely, who have written well."