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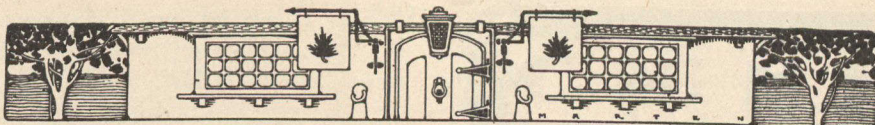
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AT THE SIGN OF THE MAPLE

SEPTEMBER ON THE ST. LAWRENCE.

THOSE who have taken holidays in July and August look on with rueful eyes when the late-goers depart in the first month of Autumn for river or lake. In the case of the September traveller, it is the late bird which gets the worm. The boats and trains in July and August are overcrowded with noisy families bound for Muskoka or Montreal, but the clamour has died with the summer when the September trips begin. Then you congratulate yourself that you were so sensible as to wait during the heated term for the days when, as one of our own poets tells us, "the river blue is deepest."

There are gloomy souls who can sit on deck and talk of departed June and coming December, while the river is turquoise under the blue sky and jade under the clouds of gray; but, like dear old Omar, most of us reckon little of "past regrets and future fears." Who cares for the headache of yesterday or the heartache of to-morrow when the boat sways above the whirling rapids and the cedars on the island send their fragrant healing across the waves? Then a boy with magic fingers is playing such music as only those born under a melodious star can evoke for milder mortals—Hungarian dances that mock the wild water, Chopin waltzes that ripple with the outer current and dreamy ballades which echo across to the dim blue shore where from a sleepy French-Canadian village, there is lifted a silver cross, shimmering in the light of the perfect autumn afternoon. Yes, this, too is Canada—the East of quaint villages and stately spires, with stories of past struggles in the names which make the St. Lawrence a river of music.

Beautiful, too, lie the river and the city, as one looks from the mountain front on another September day of dreams and sees the mighty stream, the smiling green islands and the distant heights of border hills veiled in the violet haze which is September's fairy cloak. Is it any wonder that our poets have let English bards sing of the May, while they have opened their hearts to the soft loveliness of the days "when the other world is near"? The air, as yet, has no unkind chill of frost but the yellow gleam of goldenrod, the scarlet touch in the woodland are a deeper glow than any summer pageant gives us. Ottawa has a picturesque charm; Kingston a grave dignity of fort and stream; the cities of the Pacific a mountain majesty; but Montreal from the mountain-side on a golden September afternoon is *grande dame* in the richest brocade with embroidery of ruby and sapphire. Talk not of her dirty streets, where the mud gladly adheres to the wayfarer, nor of her grasping aldermen and her practical politics. On a certain September day I found her a fairyland with ivory gates wide open, and who would revile the scene where Aladdin gave the lamp an extra rub?

But the gates of fairyland are closed at five o'clock, when one comes back to earth, or rather St. Catherine Street, to delectable tea-rooms where a merry matron from Melbourne entertains one in a soft Australian voice with witticisms at the expense of the Canadian accent. It is quite impossible to quarrel with the friend from Melbourne because she is of Irish "distraction" and altogether a "dear" who has made the mountain drive an hour to remember.

* * *

ON a Saturday morning the steamer *Beaupre* was crowded from bow to stern with sturdy French-Canadian citizens who were evidently bent on something more than a pleasure excursion.

"Where are those people going?" I asked of a young workman who had just rolled a heavy barrel towards the R. and O. steamer.

"To Sorel. The First Minister, he speak there to-day." The accent was unmistakably that of Quebec. He nodded towards the deck of the river steamer—"You can see him—First Minister."

At the bow, accompanied by members of his Cabinet and surrounded by an admiring group, was Sir Wilfrid Laurier, smiling with that easy, unaffected grace which has made it difficult for political opponents to be anything but personal friends. The workman on the shore looked steadily at the group of Canadian ministers with a light of hero-worship on his toil-stained face. To the Canadian whose forefathers came from the British Isles, Sir Wilfrid is a great political leader of charming personality; but to his own people he is, indeed, "First Minister" and their loyal, unfeigned adoration of this son of Quebec is a good thing to see in these days of vilification and political slander. The workman turned at last to go back to his barrels and bowing with that gentleness which seems to belong to his people, said softly: "He make great speech at Sorel."

* * *

AMONG those who have felt the river magic of our early Autumn is the Canadian poet, Helena Coleman, from whose song, "September Comes Again," these lines are taken:—

And now September! in whose languid veins
The wine of summer, slow-distilling, flows;
The light and glory fade—the laughter wanes,
But earth more lovely grows.

O rare September! has it all been said—
The wistful hours, the soft, reluctant days,
When Nature seems to pause with arms outspread
And heart that yearns both ways?

Upon the mellowed harp-strings of the vine
The fitful winds their soft forebodings urge,
And with the liquid murmurs of the pine
In plaintive sweetness merge.

The mountains, veiled in gold and amethyst,
Their once familiar outlines scarcely show;
Across the uplands, faint with purple mist,
The oaks and maples glow.

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