

"New Brunswick Has Poets, Too"

W. A. Edmiston

(A few weeks ago that famous radio series "Stage '49" presented a play based on a prize winning novel of last year about a Saskatchewan poetess. It has occurred to me that all this fanfare could have much better been directed towards New Brunswick, the poetical center of Canada. With this in mind I have written the following historical essay on one of New Brunswick's newest poets.)

Much commotion has been made in recent times, about a poetess from the province of Saskatchewan whose work was, until a short time ago, unknown in the provinces east of Quebec. *1. At present, however, the work of this great western artist is being acclaimed from one coast to the other. *2. But turn your eyes to the east, for New Brunswick need not look to Saskatchewan for leadership in the field of poetry. Here, in the province where Bliss Carman once gave his contribution to the world of letters, a new voice is being heard. It is the voice of a new poet, a young man whose name will soon be on the lips of people who can read from coast to coast. *3. His name is Harold Mink.

Unlike the "Sweet Songstress of Saskatchewan", Harold was born in the great eastern metropolis of Moncton. Moncton, situated like Rome on the Tiber, like London on the Thames, and like Stratford on the Avon, on the banks of a river noted for its beauty, the Petitcodiac, which is a river of many moods, its color a lovely chocolate brown, fitted only to flow through a city as fair as its river. Not far from the banks of this delightful river, the majestic buildings of the T. Eaton Co., Maritimes Ltd., rise above the other buildings and cast a spell of peace and contentment over a peaceful and contented city. Railroad tracks belonging to the Canadian National Railways run through the heart of the city to give visitors and citizens alike a chance to view the sleek grace of the engines which puff clouds of delicately tinted grey-black smoke into the clear air. What better birthplace for a man who was destined to become one of Moncton's leading sons. *4.

Harold lived not only in a city, but in the very centre of that city, in a cozy little apartment with a broad expanse of windows overlooking a vista of unusual charm—the city's Main street. It was from these windows that little Harold saw a scene which brought forth his first words of poetry, from which an older Harold saw and fell in love with the fair lady who was to cast her influence on several of his later poems. It can be seen from this that Harold's environment played a large part in placing him on the road to fame, and the end of that road has not yet been reached.

Harold's first words of poetry were spoken at an early age, the age of five. Imagine the scene, a small boy is leaning albow deep in dust on the window sill and gazing intently at the street below. The apartment is filled with the pure, city air, and the sounds from the automobiles on the street are like sweet music to the inhabitants. Suddenly, the boy turns his childish face to his mother and repeats his first poetic words:

"What a fuss,
From the bus".

Harold's mother, on hearing this beautiful, although I must admit, somewhat brief poem, hurried to her scrapbook and recorded it for us,—and for posterity. On her husband's return from work, he was shown the poem by his wife who announced immediately that her Harold was to be a great poet. Her husband, an interior decorator, agreed and prophesied that someday Harold would be as great an artist as his father, perhaps even greater.

For a time, no further signs of poetic genius were evidenced by Harold Mink, but as he advanced in years and entered school, he often surprised friends and teachers alike with his ability to rhyme. Typical of Harold's grade school poetry is the following stanza:

"To a Grade VII. Teacher"

Hail to thee, sweet teacher,
Thou lovely you are not.
All our studies feature
All your finest thought.
Those you passed, all love you,
Those you failed, do not!
Harold was neither a brilliant nor quiet student and during his younger days often was the recipient of well-merited punishment at the hands of his teachers. In the squabbles, Harold's mother always took his part, and sought every opportunity to remind his teachers that Harold's artistic nature made him sensitive and that he should be treated accordingly. Harold's father, now head of a large paint and decorating firm, did not take Harold's part, the most probable reason for this being that his wife did. At any rate, it is fortunate for us that the teachers were in agreement with father for one of those incidents produced the following poem:

"The Dictator"

Oh, terrible, domineering man,
Who now prepares to strap me.
I know your little plan,
And will expose it if you tap me.
You wish to be another Genghis Khan,
And rule your school, as he once ruled the east.
My father is an influential man,
To keep your job, this strapping must be ceased.

Harold's angry moods did not last long, however, and many of his poems were written in the joyous mood that was his true character. One of his greatest works was written during his high school days. In the summer, it was the habit of several of the high school boys to leap on their bicycles and drive the twenty miles from Moncton to Shediac for a swim in the beautiful Northumberland Straits, and the following poem is the result of one of these trips.

"To the Beach"

Once more unto the beach, dear friends, once more.
Unless some mishap turns us from our course,
In winter nothing so becomes a man
As quiet study in a classroom dark.
But when the song of spring sounds in your ears;
Then dig your wheels from out the cellar black.
Tighten the bolts up, bring the can of oil
Disguise the rust spots with new coats of paint.
Then lend the eye a joyous aspect,
As if it saw the fun that's yet to come.
Now on your bike and to the shimmering sea,
Where mighty waves beat on the mightier rocks,
And glittering sands await our shoeless feet.
For all this, pedal hard toward the shore.
Anticipate the first, glad, breathless dunk,
And cry, "The last one in's a dirty skunk." *6.

Harold's first affair of love was tragic and sadly left an impression on him that caused him to give up writing poetry for a two year period. Nevertheless it was at this time that Harold's two epic love poems were written. The first of these was produced when he saw Rita Muldoon from the window of his apartment.

"To a Girl, Seen from a Window"
Oft have I gazed from out this window clear,
And many a lovely face and figure seen.
To many a motion picture have I been
Where all the beauties of the world appear.
But never have I gazed, as I do here;
On majesty and beauty so serene,
On loveliness much fairer than a queen.
That made my heart leap, like a startled deer.
But soon the vision passes and is gone
Far from this window and my field of view;
To pass by other windows, other men.
When she arrived, a light like unto dawn

Lit up my world with all its golden hue;
But now the dusk, I am alone again.
The next time that Harold chanced to see this lovely vision from his window he hurried after her and handed her a copy of his first poem. It was then that he was informed of the tragic facts related in the following poem.

"Heartbreak"

To the end of the world I'd have followed you,
One word from your lips to have. To Egypt, to Turkey, to Burma too,
And even the Yugoslav.
But I did not have to follow you far,
I was on my own feet carried I met you, you shone like the evening star,
And you gave me that one word, "Married".

This sad love affair left little inspiration in Harold's mind for the next two years, and he spent most of the time touring the province at his father's expense. He did, however, finish one narrative poem, which he had begun in the days before his tragic love affair. Again the apartment window served as a vantage point from which he was able to see the episodes narrated in the following poem:

"The Big Policeman"

There was a giant traffic cop,
And he stoppest one of three,
"By thy uniform and shining badge,
Now wherefore stoppest thou me."

"You have turned up a one way street"
The policeman was so stern,
"There is a sign if you can read:
Up this street do not turn!"
"I am a stranger in this town",
The driver said, quite white.
"I could not read your sign because
The sun, it was so bright."
The cop he laughed a hearty laugh,
"To the judge you'll tell it please.
You also through a red light went
Out of that now, try to squeeze."
The street ahead of him was clear,
No car was in his sight.
And he was sure that he would not,
Give in without a fight.
His foot down to the starter went,
He really must get free.
The traffic cop, who quicker was,
Grabbed the ignition key.
"My boy, there's no place you could hide,
In city, wood or thicket,
You can't escape the law my friend,
I'm giving you a ticket."
The moral of this story is,
In heat or winter frosts,
The fine for bucking a traffic cop is twenty bucks, plus costs.

Harold's travels around this great province gave him an appreciation of the wonders of nature which could not be found in his earlier works. The beauties of his native province became an inspiration to him which started him writing once again. Below are several of his most famous poems.

(The Petitcodiac River Tidal Bore is one of the two main tourist attractions at Moncton. Tourists, however, are often disappointed by the small size of the wave, and many remarks like this one are heard. "Why, I've seen bigger waves than that comin' up the Hudson, an' I didn't even hafta' leave home".)
Only a few short hours have gone,
Since a mighty river flowed down to the sea,
But the river has lost its strength and its brawn,
And only a small creek remains running free.
Beside the river's a little parle,
Where people talk, and children play.
Around the trees, the small dogs bark,
And the benches are filled with tourists gay.
But hark! What is that distant sound,
That is like the ocean's mighty roar?
Around the bend with a leap and a bound,
Comes that wondrous thing, the bore.

The mud is brown, the wave is white,
The people give a drawn-out sigh,
For the mighty bore as it comes in sight,
Is a full twelve inches high.

"Magnetic Hill"

(This phenomenon, Moncton's second main tourist attraction, genuinely amazes visitors to the Hub city. One woman was heard to remark, "Well! Isn't that the strangest thing you ever saw? I wonder whatever made it happen down in this uncivilized part of the country, instead of in Ontario or Quebec or some place nearer home.)

"To the bottom of the hill, please drive,
And stop when at it you arrive.
Turn off the engine when you stop
And you will coast back to the top".
The people read the sign again "Impossible", said all the men.
They drove the care to the bottom low,
What would happen next, they did not know.
Their throats were dry, their eyes were glazed,
You could not say they weren't amazed.
The car began, without a stop
It backed the full way to the top.
You may wander far o'er land and sea,
And many a strange thing you may see,
But a stranger thing you never will,
Than our own amazing Magnetic Hill.

"A Monctonian in St. John"
(It must be noted here that Harold's views on St. John are necessarily a little prejudiced against the city due to the traditional intercity rivalry of St. John and Moncton.)

I. The Arrival.

It's called "Canada's city of sunshine", *7.
But the day that I picked for my jog,
I thought that a much more appropriate name
Would be "Canada's city of fog."
I walked through the streets of the city,
(It was very hard on the feet.)
I met an experienced mountain climber,
Who practised along King Street.

II. First Impression

It seemed a giant city,
With hotels and movies to spare;
But when the sun broke through,
I found
'd been circling 'round King Square.

III. The Harbour

But a part of this city's romantic,
Where the ships go to and fro'.
I saw a beautiful little tug,
With a giant liner in tow.
My mind went to far away places:
To Turkey and Ceylon too,
The ship may have come from Asia
Or even from San Bedoo. *8.
When I learned where the ship had come from
My hopes took a dismal fall.
Though the crew spoke an unknown language *9.
The ship was from Montreal.

IV. Reversing Falls

I stood and watched these amazing falls
For nearly half a day.
I hope that they would go back and forth,
But they only went one way.

V. A Farewell to St. John

I've seen the New Brunswick Museum,
The falls and the Forum too,
(Where the weak, old St. John Beavers
Get beaten by you know who.) *10
Your city isn't too bad,
Though of course it can't compare
With the lovely city of Moncton,
The finest anywhere.
And when shall I return here?
Well, time alone can tell,
And so until the next time,
To you I say "Farewell".

"The City of the Stately Elms"
Here is the centre of our province fair
A lovely city, unmatched anywhere.

Here you can see a mighty river flow,
That for a century has watched this city grow.
(Where nary a C. C. F.'er has been sent)

Here culture flourishes atop the hill
And foresters, of culture, get their fill.
For here's the school where Carman, Roberts went,
Their lives in writing poetry were spent.

(Although their poem's fashion may be old
Their poems were quite good, or so I'm told.)
Yet on this lovely city, many frown;
For in spite of all its people, it's a town.
On Saturday the people from the farm
Bring to the market all the country's charm.
So take the advice the city's council sow,
And just sit back and watch their city grow.

It is with this majestic salute to the capital city of his beloved province that we must take leave of Harold Mink, for the present. Harold is busy at the present time preparing three volumes of work which he hopes to publish in the near future. They are "The North Shore, It's Cultural Background", "South of the Border, Down Nova Scotia Way" and "New England—New Brunswick's Cultural Offspring". In conclusion let us remember those immortal words, which New Brunswick's modern poet laureate penned in his tribute to St. John.
"And so until the next time,
To you I say, "Farewell.""

*1. This is undoubtedly due to the big industrialists of Toronto and Montreal, who, it is rumoured, wish to keep all knowledge of the rest of the world from the people of the Maritimes, whom they seek to control for their own interests.

*2. A slip-up on the part of the industrialists, I'm sure.

*3. This does not include literate industrialists of Upper Canada, who, I am given to understand are few in number.

*4. There are some who would place Gordon Drillon above Harold on the list of great Monctonians, but, considering the artistic qualities of these two men, Mink must surely be placed ahead.

*5. J. L. Hardy, literary critic of the Mt. Allison "Argosy", has stated that this poem was similar to poetry written by a relatively unknown English poet, a Mr. Wm. Shakespeare. To this Harold answers "It is impossible that Mr. Hardy could compare my masterpiece to the work of Wm. Shakespeare, as I have it on the best authority that no one at Mt. Allison has ever read the work of Mr. Shakespeare."

*6. Statistics show that St. John has more day-hours (or man-weeks) of sunshine than any other city in Canada.

*7. San Bedoo—a mythical Californian city mentioned in the chronicles of a western mystic by the name of James Durante.

*8. "Unknown"—to Harold Mink at least. Harold had been unable to pick up much French (or any other language for that matter) during his high school days.

*9. These lines refer to the hockey rivalry between St. John Beavers and the Moncton Hawks.

Happy are the people whose annals are blank pages in the volumes of history—Carlyle.

History tells of you; only the names are changed—Horatis Haccus Quintus.

DORE'S
Variety Repair
SALES & SERVICE
Bicycles—Washing Machines
Electrical Appliances
Oil Burners
Oxy-Acetylene Welding
687 George St. Phone 4324