

ondon's fine picture of the last full-blooded indian of Lorette, constructed a legend which few can read unmoved.

Judge Routhier has printed but one slender volume of verse, entitled "*Les Échos*," but it is good enough to have a more ambitious name. One half of the collection is comprised of purely domestic pieces, occasional verses and complimentary fragments, each in its way tender and sweet and graceful, according to the poet's mood and the character of his subject. Patriotic songs and religious hymns, or perhaps evangelical poems would be the better term to apply to them, compose the other half. The book is prefaced by a scholarly introduction in prose, which is written in the picturesque style of the Judge's "*Causeries du Dimanche*." Of the verses a good deal may be said in the way of praise; the verisimilitude is correct, and the sentiment, in all cases, is wholesome, bright and sympathetic. There are poems, here and there, of the heart, but they are more tender and gentle than warm or sensuous, Judge Routhier being nowise Swinburnian in his conceptions. Of course, a sensitive, Christian glow, full of life and delicacy and hope is everywhere throughout this book, and this fervent, pious grace illumines the evangelical pieces throughout. The sweetest poem in the series is, beyond doubt, the pathetic and beautiful "*Death of Christ*," which is modelled on a plane of true art. The story of the crucifixion is devoutly told, and like the companion piece, "*Le Christ Vivant*," is high in motive and lofty in strain and manner. The patriotic poems possess strength and a ringing measure. "*Nos Martyrs*" deals with incidents in the lives of those early Christians who made such heroic sacrifices for their country, and church, in planting the seeds of their missions on uncongenial soil more than two centuries ago. Those who have read the three large volumes of the "*Relations des Jésuites*," will remember the fate of De Brebœuf and Lallemant. Judge Routhier's facts come from that source, but the rich presentation of feeling, deep sympathy with the spirit of our early annals, and impassioned energy of description, are distinctively outpourings from his own breast. Of the "*Échos Domestiques*" the best are "*Nos Petits Cercueils*," the legend of "*Stella Maris*," "*Une Fleur du Ciel*," "*La Nuit*," "*L'Académie des Femmes*," and "*Le Pantheon*," the latter written in Rome in 1875. "*Deux Vertus de la Femme*" exhibits much delicacy of treatment, and is in a pleasant vein.

I have left myself little space in which to speak of the last poet on my list of representative singers of French Canada. Benjamin Sulte is better known to the English reader by his prose writings than by his poetry. Early in his career he wrote many songs and lyrics, but of late his copious studies and investigations into the history of New France, have compelled him to neglect the muse for a time. His songs are strongly imbued with the impulse of patriotism. The common people are his heroes, and, like Beranger, he has sought to give colour and beauty, and sometimes romance, to the every-day lives of his fellow-men. Excellent and artistic work may be found in "*Les Laurentiennes*," "*Les Fondateurs*" and "*La Cloche*," these being the best examples of his manner and motive.

II.

There are few good novels written by Canadians of either French or English origin. The French are, perhaps, more successful, but even their work is stilted and often commonplace. I know of but four novelists who have produced anything like fair average work. They are P. J. O. Chauveau, Joseph Marmette, Napoleon Bourassa, and Pamphile Le May. The first of these published his only novel, "*Charles Guérin*," some thirty-two years ago, in Montreal. It is a tale of habitant life, has the air of being founded on fact, and the character-drawing and incident are extremely clever. The plot is not intricate, and the bits of description are tolerably well managed, but the conversations drag and the story lacks "go." In its day it held a place in French-Canadian literature which is difficult to accord to it now, but as a picture of country life it will long retain an assured rank. Joseph Marmette has written about half-a-dozen novels, all in the historical vein, the incidents connected with the life of the heroine of Verchères, Count Frontenac's exploits while Governor of New France, and the trying times under Intendant Bigot, affording him themes exciting and dramatic enough. Marmette is a good historical painter. He uses plenty of colour and covers his canvass with considerable art, but he manages his plots rather carelessly and his people have little vivacity. His women are worse than his men in that respect. "*L'Intendant Bigot*" is the best story that he has given us. It possesses a good deal of fire and character, and the various episodes described have the merit of truthfulness. Those who love the story of Frontenac's administration will like to read the romantic incidents in his career as they will find them depicted in Marmette's "*François de Bienville*." In this romance the love story is very prettily told, and the glimpses of social life in the seventeenth century are cleverly revealed. In power, however, it is not so strong a book as the "*Bigot*." In all of Marmette's novels there is room for revision, and

as they are immeasurably superior to most of the stories we have, the author ought to recast and improve them. Napoleon Bourassa is an artist, but twenty years ago he published a novel entitled "*Jacques et Marie*," which enjoyed considerable popularity in the country. It is good reading to-day, the style of the author being quaint but amusing. The scene of the story is laid in Acadia, and it treats of the expulsion of the Acadians in a touching and sympathetic way. The book has power, but the arrangement of details is bad, and the workmanship is too hurried to be good. The book has its readers, however, the subject being dear to Canadians, and the love story is, on the whole, not badly done.

Le May has been spoken of in this paper as a poet. He is also a novelist of fair abilities. Perhaps his best book is his last, "*L'Affaire Sougraine*," founded on fact, and published only a few months since. It treats of a dramatic tragedy which occurred in Quebec a year or two ago. An Indian's wife was discovered dead by the roadside. She had been last seen alive in company with her husband, with whom she was not on friendly terms. It was found that she had met her death by violence, and suspicion was at once fastened on Sougraine, who was arrested and tried for the murder of his wife. While the case was pending in court Le May printed his novel, and the first edition was barely disposed of before the prisoner was acquitted by the jury and discharged. The story has considerable merit, and some humour and satire, the latter being levelled with keen spirit against an objectionable member of a former local Government.

The outlook in fiction literature in French Canada is not highly encouraging. Poetry has a better chance to succeed, but the novelist is yet to come.

GEORGE STEWART, JR.

NATIONAL LITERATURE

AN article in a recent number of THE WEEK, entitled, "*A Field for Canadian Achievements*," contains a phrase that recalls to my mind a paper I read before the *κύκλος* club in Montreal, seven or eight years ago. The words that turned my memory back were "a distinctive national literature," and as well as I remember, the title of my paper was the question, "Can we have a distinctive Canadian Literature?" I shall not forget the storm of indignant denials that arose as I answered that question in the negative, and many were the patriotic sentiments uttered during the discussion that took place. Though somewhat roughly handled by my critics, I still held my answer to be just; and looking back to-day upon the position I then held, I see but little cause to change my ground.

The writer of the article in question says, "a large and appreciative audience is ready-made in Canada, waiting to welcome, to honour and immortalize, the right man in the walks of literature." I cannot say if this be true or otherwise; but I do know Canadian works have been issued from Canadian publishing houses, some wrought by the hand of genius, some polished by the touch of the scholar, that have not paid the cost of publication, while inferior compilations and unreadable literary "bosh" have, I am informed, put satisfactory shekels in the pockets of the compilers or authors. True it is, that newspaper puffs and never-be-tired book hawkers are to a great extent responsible for the latter; but, I ask, would the London drawing-rooms, that recognize and applaud genius, be influenced by the most persistent book-agents or the most fulsome newspaper puffs. Surely Macaulay dealt a death-blow to the latter system. If Canada is ready to welcome, honour and immortalize the right man in the walks of literature, which I take to mean a really transcendent genius among men, why does she not grant a just meed of praise and profit to her present best workers? In how many Canadian homes will one find the current literature of the day, of England and the United States, where even the names of Canadian authors of merit are unknown?

Though part of my life associating with literary men, I cannot claim to be one to any greater extent than Mr. Silas Wegg, in that I have occasionally "dropped into verse," so I cannot speak with the knowledge and authority of one, yet the opinions of a very interested spectator, whose friends are in the thick of the fight, may be of sufficient concern to claim the attention of your readers.

From my unscholarly point of view let me try to answer the question, "Can we have a distinctive Canadian literature?" Yes, most probably we can, and will, when all the unknown and undreamt changes and influences of centuries have wrought their impress on the people; when revolutions have marked eras in our history, and history, itself grown old, is phosphorescent with the halo of romance; when to our descendants eighty-ton guns and turret vessels are as javelins and Athenian galleys to us; when our railways are as Roman roads, and our present manners and