

Soul-Standards of Archibald Lampman

BY DON MUNDAY

So often has it been said that the world has suffered an irreparable loss in the death of this or that poet at an early age, that one naturally hesitates to say the same of Archibald Lampman, who died in his thirty-eighth year in Ottawa in 1899. But this much may safely be said, that appreciative readers of Lampman's poems certainly regret that "his star went down before its brightness waned"—indeed, before reaching the zenith.

Like many a poet, it was in descriptions of the beauties of Nature that he developed his powers of expression before seeking other fields. Yet his keen love of Nature never obscured sympathy with his fellow-men. "I love the face of every man whose thought is swift and sweet." He is never didactic; he slips as easily into a reflective mood as an eager river into its quieter reaches. We are told that he was on "the side of socialism, and *reasonable* propaganda to that end." He was too intent on "the beauty at the goal of life" to rail at present wrongs. We may well apply to the poet himself, his description of Richard Stahlberg in "The Story of an Affinity"—(surely such a word as "affinity" was a sad choice in view of the special meaning it has acquired.) He learned:

"To meditate the words and ways of men,
Weighing their motives and the forms of life
In the fine balance of impartial truth.
He saw how fair and beautiful a thing
The movement of the busy world might be,
Were men but just and gentle . . .
Yet . . . he lost not faith,
Nor grew distempered, as the weaker may
Amid the forceful fraudulent stir of life;
For he found many . . .
Men, wholesome, tolerant, temperate, and sincere,
And women who are the safeguard and the hope
Of human destiny, the pioneers
Of man's advancement and the larger life."

The reader is apt to be struck by Lampman's persistent pleas for gentleness in speech and action.

"How beautiful is gentleness, whose face . . .
Swells everywhere the buds of generous thought;
So easy and so sweet it is; its grace
So soon smoothes out the tangled knots of pain."