

SOME CANADIAN POETS.

III. CHARLES SANGSTER.

Mr. Charles Sangster is probably the best known and most popular, as he is certainly the oldest and most voluminous of Canadian Poets. Much of his finest work has been done at Kingston, where indeed he has lately retired to regain somewhat of the strength lost in his arduous public duties of Ottawa, and Kingston claims him as her own, just as Montreal would claim his fellow-worker. Reade. Of the two published volumes of his poems, the earlier of 1856, containing *The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay*, is much the larger and contains some of his truest and freshest efforts. The long poem mentioned above upon the great Canadian rivers, is by no means unworthy of the subject, and to Loyal Canadians it will appear that higher praise cannot be given. Thoroughly untried with a sense of the grandeur of his theme his rich imagination is touched by every change in the rivers' course, and the strings of his lyre answer the touch. Changing with the river from the deep strong flow into a mad rush of wild rapid and broken grandeur, into the musical laughing of the shallows, and then again resuming its still quiet flow, only to change it for ever varying forms of rhythm equally beautiful, while through it all comes out the stateliness of that noble old Spenserian Stanza that holds in its rich setting some of our greatest jewels of poesy clustering round the *Fairy Queen*. It is indeed a work that Canada should be proud of. As an example of one of the graceful lyrics so skilfully introduced we may quote the following stanza from that *To the Isles*.

Here the spirit of beauty keepeth
Jubilee for ever more;
Here the voice of gladness leapeth,
Echoing from shore to shore.
O'er the hidden watery valley,
O'er each buried wood and glade,
Dances our delighted galley,
Through the sunshine and the shade—
Dances o'er the granite cells,
Where the Soul of Beauty dwells.

Among the masters which Mr. Sangster has most to acknowledge we may, perhaps with greatest distinctions, trace the influences of Thomas Moore and Edgar Poe; more than once do we hear the sound of the joyous harp of the former and detect the deep mysticism of the latter though always in a modified form and one in which it would be difficult for even Lord Macaulay to find the crime of plagiarism. When will critics learn to realize that there is nothing absolutely new, no thought that the mighty intellects of Assyria and Egypt, Greece and Rome have not fathomed ages ago, nor even then was it a new discovery? Let us cease from accusing our cotemporaries of using thoughts belonging to a neighbour when in reality they may have both cribbed the idea over a school

task in the translation of Homer. But to return to my author:—His greatest charm and power consists in a description of some common or trivial thing of everyday, life; here the poet is always true, and like Burns sings a true philosophy in the language native to his soul. We quote in this connection a few lines from what appears to be the best, or one of the best, of his earlier attempts, *The Yellow Curl*:

To others, valueless,
To me, a most inestimable prize,
That doth possess
True loveliness.
It speaks of childish joy, and manhood sighs.
At quiet evening, when my work is done,
I live to look upon

That Yellow Curl.

And I will hoard the gem,
Will keep the golden treasure as secure
As a rare diadem;
Blossom from a graceful stem;
I look on it, and know that thou art pure
Thoughts crowd on thoughts, and fancies strange
and new,
Love to do homage to

That Yellow Curl.

There are many more of a like character, simple, true, and to the average reader beautiful, but lacking the polish and delicate finish that a classical taste might demand. This is the reason that, although Mr. Sangster has acquired a well deserved popularity, his verses have been so severely criticized by the press. Yet some of his lines are graceful indeed, witness the following extract from *The Impatient Lover*:

Haste hither, my love, the river
Is tinged with the pale moonlight,
The leaves of the dark trees quiver,
And throb in the parting night.
Why linger, my love why linger?
Swift fly the hours away,
And soon will Aurora's finger
Point to the dawning day.

The second volume of Mr. Sangster's poems, entitled "*Hesperus and other Poems and Lyrics*," was published in 1886, and displays more culture though less freshness than his former volumes had done.

"*Hesperus*, a legend of the stars" is a telling in verse of the wondrous birth of the planetary system, and here our author would follow in the steps of such great masters as Homer, Dante, and Milton; but his cosmogony is short and weak in comparison with the great originals, and he has had the wisdom to see this and make his poem a shorter one than the prelude gives promise of. Had we not the ideals of these great masters before our eyes we might find much to admire in this work, but as it is a comparison is always induced which must of necessity end