

LITERATURE IN THE NORTH-WEST.

Not long ago a literary critic who had spent a few months in Manitoba complained in an American literary journal that the Canadian North-west was no place for a literary man. He deplored the utilitarian spirit of the people, and enlarged his indictment by asserting that the people were not readers, that the great majority of them had gone to the North-west to make money in a hurry, at all events to make it. He further endeavoured to strengthen his position by pointing out the circumstance that two or three leading political writers had endeavoured to live in Manitoba, but they had to succumb, and seek the older fields whence they had come.

It would, indeed, be odd if a writer, political or otherwise, remained all his days in one place; if he did not travel as other people do, the knowledge which such a person might possess would be extremely limited, and his usefulness would be of short duration.

That the people of the North-west, especially those of Winnipeg and the leading towns, are not a reading people, everyday facts, as stated by those who have come in contact with them for years, do not sustain.

The observing visitor to the splendid rooms of the Manitoba Historical and Scientific Society does not fail to note that their rooms are well patronized. The tables and shelves of the reading-room are plentifully covered with such magazines as *Cornhill*, *Harper's*, *Atlantic*, *Good Words*, *Chambers's Monthly*, *Littell's Living Age*, *Macmillan's Magazine*, *Sunday Magazine*, *Blackwood*, *North American Review*, *Westminster Review*, *Edinburgh Review*, *Quarterly Review*, *Popular Science Monthly*, *Longmans' Magazine*, *Fortnightly Review*, *Contemporary Review*; and the leading illustrated papers are well represented, so are the chief journals, and the daily and weekly press, the world over. But the most magnificent features in connection with these rooms are the library of 13,000 volumes, of which 5,000 were contributed by the late Mr. Isbister, one of the best friends of popular education which the present century has produced, and the museum which is on the second floor. Small and unpretentious as this museum is, it speaks in practical eloquence what this great North-west holds in the shape of minerals and archaeological specimens, to say nothing of the ornithological, entomological, and last, but not least, the botanical, and geological.

Here then is a field of practical literature which offers a most profitable inducement to the young Canadian; and it is not a surprising fact to find many young men who are attending college occupying spare moments in studying practical botany and geology from the works of the library and the specimens of the museum.

Add to this a most courteous and painstaking secretary, Mr. Hughan, whose heart is bestowed on his work, and to whose efforts much of the success which has attended the institution is due. The Society has received little or no public aid; it is self-supporting, and whether in regard to the mental pabulum which is to be found within its walls, or the excellent lesson it teaches, it is doing most valuable service.

It has already laid the foundations of self culture broad and deep in the city of Winnipeg, and the fruits of its labours will be of the right kind in due season.

The legislative library and reading-room in charge of Mr. Robertson, formerly of Ottawa, is a snug literary retreat in which I frequently find not a few of Winnipeg's litterateur, quietly perusing a magazine or some work of reference. This library contains 10,000 volumes, and the law library—altogether devoted to legal tomes, and which is contained in the Court House—comprises 3,000 volumes. Then there are numerous private libraries, and those connected with churches and other institutions, which show a great total of books.

There is a commendable absence of much of that cheap trashy literature in the book stores which is to be found in the older cities of the venerable East. The taste is more in the direction of sound reading, with a great deal of local, musical, and histrionic talent.

A few ladies and gentlemen of cultivated tastes recently formed a society for the promotion of art. With two or three exceptions, all are amateurs, but from what a casual acquaintance leads me to believe they will be heard from as substantial growth progresses. In Regina, the nucleus of a parliamentary library has been laid. The people there are of cultivated tastes, and notwithstanding many drawbacks, they will not permit themselves to retrograde.

The clergymen of the North-west, irrespective of denomination, are about as earnest a class of men in the advancement of education as may be found in any quarter of the globe. They, in addition to the duties of their calling, have done much towards laying the foundation of a literary taste amongst the people. They are readers and travellers. They never fail nor falter in lending a helping hand to the cause of literary advance-

ment, and many of them have already produced evidence of considerable literary skill.

The population of Winnipeg is to-day as orderly, law abiding, and as fond of intellectual entertainment as the inhabitants of the most staid town in the Dominion. The wave of inflation which unstrung men's nerves has gone forever, and the prairie metropolis has settled down to those substantial methods of advancement which, after all, are the natural resources of an Anglo-Saxon people.

G. B. E.

JOTTINGS ALONG THE C. P. R.

I LEFT Calgary on Tuesday, July 6th, at half-past ten o'clock at night by the through train from Montreal bound west for the Coast. I had telegraphed in the morning to Medicine Hat to secure a section, which I found duly reserved for me: when I entered the car I had it made up or rather down at once, and was soon wrapped in as profound a slumber as I can ever hope to achieve in a Pullman Sleeper. I had been warned to rise early in order to enjoy the scenery to be met with at the summit of the Rockies, and accordingly five o'clock found me up and dressed, and my first glance from the window revealed beauties undreamt of before. We were passing through a wild region of tall slender spruces and pines in a narrow rocky defile: some were mere bare, naked poles, others scantily clothed at their tops with ragged foliage, which lower down changed into a dark, heavy black fungus, indicative of primitive decay, and giving these youthful trees a melancholy depressing air, as if they were wearing their own mourning. There is something to me irresistibly suggestive of crape about these sombre trappings of nature's vegetation.

We are evidently at the summit, as there are no mountains in sight; we see several small lakes lying close to the track, all gloom and shadow in the early dawn, and presently come upon a brawling torrent, some forty feet wide, which is, I learn, the Kicking Horse River. We are now in the celebrated Pass of that name, by which the line descends the west slope of the Rocky Mountains; the river rushes and tumbles along beside us, tossing its foaming waters over huge boulders and rocks, as if striving to escape from its narrow bed. We begin to move slowly, with the powerful air brakes in full play, down the steep hill which follows the course of the river to the valley below (a grade of four feet to the hundred). I must confess I held my breath as I gazed from the window and watched our engine snorting and groaning while it crept slowly and carefully along, as if feeling every step of the way. The line twisted and turned round steep walls of rock, and I could see the conductor on the locomotive with the engineer and fireman, their heads well out to the front watching carefully over the lives of the passengers entrusted to their charge; and I was also aware of a sense of gratitude to the iron horse which was bearing us so steadily and surely down this apparently perilous decline.

The scenes that began to unfold themselves before me, however, soon turned my attention from all thoughts of personal danger, and I became perfectly absorbed in the wild beauties of, I believe, the most magnificent mountain scenery in the world: certainly I can imagine none which could possibly equal, much less surpass it. Peak towered above peak on both sides of the line, carved and moulded by the hand of nature in every possible form of crag and precipice, as if lavish of design; their snow-clad summits glistened in the early sunlight with such dazzling brightness that the eye was glad to travel slowly down, over the reddish yellow rocks on which the snow is resting in shady nooks and crevices, to the bare walls of the same warm colour below, then on to the dark forests of spruce and fir which straggle up from the sea of green beneath. Words seem too feeble to express or describe the grandeur and solemnity of such scenery; one could only gaze in awe and admiration, and realize how small and feeble a thing man is beside the works of God.

About half way down the hill a beautiful valley opens out, formed by the north fork of the Kicking Horse River; blue woods recede into purple forests, and these again swell into an amphitheatre of lofty mountains, whose peaks have caught and held the first rays of sunlight, and are glowing in rainbow lines, while all below is mist and shadow. Soon the bottom of the descent is reached, and the river, increased by the streams running into it, widens into a broad shallow bed more than half clay, and spreads itself over it in several channels, which are fordable at Field, where we now pause for breakfast, as there is no dining car attached to the train (it had been dispensed with the preceding night after supper, to avoid its weight down the Kicking Horse Pass, and another car was to be attached for dinner).

Field is quite a typical mountain station consisting of a few log shanties and cabins roughly put up on a clearing in the forest, at the foot of Tunnel Mountain, with the Kicking Horse River flowing quietly below it.