

Notches on The Stick

Autumnal poetry is now in order, and some of the best we have seen this year has come from poets within the Canadian border, or of Canadian origin. We quote the following by Ethelwyn Wetherald, from a leading New York journal:

Autumn Fire.

The fires of the autumn are burning high;
Bright the trees in the wood are blazing—
A wall of flame from the brilliant sky.
Down to the fields where the cattle are grazing,
O the warm, warm end of the year!
Even the shrubs their red hearts render;
All the tushes are bright with cheer,
And the tawny vine has a touch of splendor.

The fires of autumn are burning low!
Blow, ye winds, and cease not blowing!
Blow the flames to a ruddier show.
Heap the coals to a hotter glowing.
Ah, the chill, chill end of the year!
Naught is left but a few leaf-fashes;
White is the death stone, white and drear,
Over a desolate world of ash.

But the most exquisite word spoken of autumn in recent days may be found in Carman's sprightly lyric:

October.

There is something in the autumn that is native to my blood—
Touch of manner, hint of mood;
And my heart is like a rhyme,
With the yellow and the purple and the crimson keeping time.

The scarlet of the maples can shake me like a cry
Of bugles going by,
And my lonely spirit thrills
To see the frosty stars like smoke upon the hills.
There is something in October sets the gypsy blood astir;
We must rise and follow her,
When from every hill of flame
She calls and calls each vagabond by name.

The jubilant tone of this lyric is noticeable, as well as its musical and descriptive excellence. It has quite a vernal note of exultation, as if the frost and flying leaf might have a mission of benevolence and be prophetic of hope, as much as the arriving bird and the opening flower. The "Melancholy days" to Carman seem not essentially melancholy; and he would seem bent on reversing the old poetic tradition, just as Coleridge did when he wrote his poem on the Nightingale. Milton's "most musical, most melancholy," was emphasized by Keats; but Coleridge puts in all his emphasis:

"And hark; the nightingale begins its song,
Most musical, most melancholy bird;
A melancholy bird, O idle thought;
In nature there is nothing melancholy."

Then, it follows, there is nothing melancholy in Autumn. But is there any mood in nature till it is invested with the color of our thought? That has been and may be a question. It seems certain that we read joy or sorrow in our great mother's face, as it may suit the habitude of our spirit.

I have this morning read an Autumnal Ode, by Francis Sherman of Fredericton, published in The Independent, which takes rather a mournful tone in view of the growing sombre season. The poet begins with the question:—

"How shall I greet thee Autumn? with loud praise
And joyous song and wild, tumultuous laughter?
Or unrestrained tears?
Shall I behold only the scarlet haze
Of these thy days
That come to crown this best of all thy years?
Or shall I hear, even now, those sad hours chime—
The shedding of thy last relinquished leaf—
Till I, too, learn the strength and change of time
Who am made one with grief?"

He inclines, in the end, rather to tears, and adopts the note partly of sorrowful reminiscence, and partly of subdued prophecy. He cannot be exultant, for the idea of waning and decay thrusts itself incessantly upon him. There was a time when Autumn brought him gladness, but then he had not learned that.

"All things must die"

Under the sky,—
That everywhere (a flaw in the design)—
Decay crept in, unquenching the muse,
Creed, empire, man-a-arms, or stone or flower,
In my unwisdom then I had not read
The message writ across Earth's face, alas,
But scanned the sun instead."

What is wisdom, then? To descend from poetry (if it be a descent,) to doctrine and philosophy, we suggest the inquiry. I, too, have longed for the permanence of earthly things, and rested my mind, if not my heart, on the forms most like types of the permanent. Groves that cannot fade, streams that never dry or congeal, suns that never go down—these are conceptions that never lose their charm to the mind. But reason and religion, with advancing knowledge, ask for a temper in which we shall do more than to acknowledge that change is best—as it is certainly the order here of all existing forms. Spencer looked on "Mutability" as the curse of time; and the poets have lifted their voices in a minor concert bewailing the common fate. Shakespeare mourned at seeing "The hungry ocean gain advantage on the kingdom of the shore," as typifying our gradual loss of all that we here most desire to

hold; while Herrick tempests his liveliness over the daffodils, and weeps inwardly at least, to see them "haste away so soon." Yet only by mutation, by death, by decay, come plagues, evolution, ascension.

A new conception of the old law is gradually dawning upon us,—the blessedness, the hopefulness of this perpetual order of mutability, which advances us to some better thing than the present or the past. "As the essence of music lies in change," writes Vida Souder, in her suggestive book on the Spiritual Life in the Poets, "and the chord indefinitely prolonged, would be no music at all, so it seems to us with the deeper harmony of the world. It is curious to see how this love for transition as distinguished from permanence, pervades nearly every allusion to nature in our modern poetry. The power delicately to seize fleeting effects, elusive phases of beauty,—is not this what lends interest for us to a poet's work? Not the moments when the beauty is fixed, but when it is fugitive, are the favorites of our poets." She then quotes a lovely passage from Shelley, descriptive of the quickly vanishing phases of a sunset, and the transition of day to evening. If, then, the law of change is best, should we not survey it with cheerfulness, or, at least, without heaviness or sorrow? "Consider this," said Marcus Aurelius in his Meditations, "and suffer as the Universal Nature shall appoint you. O man, you have been a citizen of this great State, the Universe! What does the exact time matter? . . . Why complain, then, if you are sent away from the State. . . by the same Nature who brought you there, as the manager dismisses from the stage an actor he has employed. . . Depart, then, well-pleased; for He who sends you away is well pleased too." Keats struck most notably the chord which thrills through Mr. Sherman's poem. Emerson in his noble Threnody on his child struck the chord most in harmony with the dawning reason,—the note to be prolonged in future poetry:

"What is excellent,
As God lives is permanent."

There are some fine descriptive passages in Mr. Sherman's poem:

"For now thou comest not as thou of old
Went wont to come; and now mine old desire
Is asked not at all
With sunset-vision of thy splendid gold
Or fold on fold
Of the stained clouds thou hast for coronal.
Still all those ways and things are thine, and still
Before thy altar burneth the ancient fire;
The blackness of the pines is still the same,
And the same peace broodeth behind the hill
Where the old maples flame.

"I counting these, behold no change; and yet,
To-day, I deem, they know me not for lover,
Nor live because of me.
And yesterday, was it not thou I met,
Thy warm lips wet
And purpled with wild grapes crushed wantonly,
And yellow wind-swept wheat bound round thy hair,
Thy brown breast half set-free, and half draped
over
With long green leaves of corn? Was it not thou,
Thy feet unsandaled, and thy shoulders bare
As the gleams of fields are now?"

Referring to Marcus Aurelius—that was a marvellous man who grows upon us the more, with further consideration of his life and character. A wonderful, typical man; a spirit reacting from the spirit and being of his dreadful time; not a Christian at least in the outward form, yet sublime as any martyr; all the more appealing in his virtuous humanity, as seen against the dark background of his time, where he stands as the sculptured image of an angel. When according to the hollow rite of his age, they defied him after death, the people could not but take the matter seriously. He was in their memory like any loftiest canonized saint of Rome. His words have fallen upon the ears of every age, and the loftiest intellects have been most aided and cheered by him. To us he seems nobler than Zeno, than Epictetus, than Plato, than any of the sages. Emperor, truly august! thou too, hadst a gospel for the sons of men, and hadst thou known Jesus of Nazareth, truly, thou hadst not persecuted his followers. Thine is an appeal to our higher reason, and thine own life enforces it! What is it thou didst say? "If any one shall convince me of an error: I shall be glad to change my opinion; for truth is my business, and nobody was ever yet hurt by it." Wherefore then, are the sons of men so fearful of that which never hurt them?

But one thing in the consideration of him fills us with misgiving and awe. Not the loneliness of his life, nor the crucifixions of his spirit, from the crown of thorny gold he wore, and the nessian purple that wrapped him round; nay, but the sight of the son who succeeded him, and to whom he resigned all his authority. It gives new force to the words of Ecclesiastes: "He begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand. . . what is the wise man more than the fool? . . . I hated all my labor which I had taken under the sun; because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise

man or a fool?" This strange history is repeated, over and over, through the ages. The misgiving comes from a consideration of the mysterious laws that govern mental inheritance, the qualities and organization that come to us through birth, and these set over against all subsequent precept and example. It seems not so strange to us that "Cain was Eve's," as that Commodus came from Aurelius. The well-nigh perfect organization seems, at the next stage—its reappearance in his successor—nearly disorganized. It is dross, to begin with. Out of the godlike man the brute-demon.

"Lord, what is man, whose thought betimes
Up to the seven fold glory climbs?"
not only because his own soul sometimes grovels, but because he can bring a being to the world to make it shudder,—and that being the child of his love and trust, for whose instruction the treatise that has inspired the noblest minds was vainly written. This staggers and appals. It should make us humble, at the least.

PASTOR FELIX.

RUSSIA'S GREAT RAILROAD.

Will Extend Over Acres of the Vast Siberian Plains.

It is now announced that the Russian government has made provision for keeping the harbor of Vladivostok, the Pacific terminus of the trans-Siberian railroad, free from ice throughout the winter. It has begun the construction of two enormous steamers for ice-breaking, and it is believed that, though accompanied by considerable expense, the undertaking will succeed. These measures for rendering Vladivostok accessible by sea during all seasons of the year, if that is possible, are in line with the policy which is now collecting at that point a powerful army and navy, and do not indicate in the least that Russia will content herself with frozen Vladivostok as her winter seaport on the Pacific and the permanent terminus of the trans-Siberian railroad. From latest accounts this mighty engineering project is over half completed and work on all the unfinished sections of the line is being pushed as fast as possible. There seems to be no limit to the expense which the Czar, who officially inaugurated the enterprise when Czarovitch, and who takes the greatest personal interest in it, is willing to incur in the consummation of this plan of joining Russia's centre of strength with the eastern coast of Asia. Many engineering difficulties have been encountered on the way. The western part of the line, now in operation, was comparatively simple, though from the nature of the country, which is somewhat low and in places swampy, rivers are so frequent that scores of costly bridges have had to be built. The work in the eastern half of Siberia has presented more trouble because of the rugged surface of the country. At Irkutsk, on the shores of Lake Baikal, a ferry has had to be substituted for the short detour around the south of the lake because of the very precipitous shores. When the headwaters of the river Amoor are reached, east of Irkutsk, still another problem presents itself. This river is an usually overflowed, and it is feared that unless Russia does not relish the postponement of the completion of the road while the banks of the Amoor are being dyked, and has entered into an agreement with the projectors of the Manchurian railroad, which is to run from Nertschinsk, in the foot-hills of the Yablonoi, or Slavonoi mountains, to Vladivostok, a much shorter route. It is estimated that trains will be running over the entire route from Zlatoust to Vladivostok before the end of the century. This event will mark the beginning of the era of Russia's domination over Asia. It will enable the Czar to place a large and effective army on the shores of the Pacific or at any point in the northern half of the continent, with promptness. Co-operating with this land force will be Russia's powerful navy. Incidentally, the railroad will develop the vast expanse of the Siberian plains, most of the area of which is capable of profitable cultivation. Already

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this region is dotted with large cities, but the lack of communication has isolated them and kept them from being of use to the Empire. Siberia is more than a convict colony, as the world will doubtless learn when its apparently limitless mineral and agricultural resources have been opened up by the railroad. Thus the project of communication, which was begun with a definite military object in view, to further the boundless ambitions of Russia's rulers; has a distinct bearing upon the world's commercial relations.

KLONDIKE'S SCHOOL HOUSE.

Shipped in the Mold of a Steamer all Ready to be Nailed Together.

The first schoolhouse in the Klondike was made in sections ready to be fitted and nailed together at once upon reaching its destination, and was shipped in the hold of the steamer Humboldt. Its teacher will be Mrs. L. C. Howland. "The idea of teaching school in the Klondike is not entirely my own," said Mrs. Howland. "You see, my husband is going up there and when we were discussing things somebody mentioned that it would be a good idea for me to start a school. This interested me, as I had heard how hard it was to do nothing in that land, and I began to discuss it among the company that was going up on the Humboldt. The result was that we decided to carry out the idea and at once began to get pointers from people who knew all about the country. The school building may look a little peculiar, but it is built according to directions. There is a flat, sloping roof, so that the snow can be easily shoveled off. The windows are high above the ground. That is to prevent the snow from drifting over them. Everything has been considered that will be conducive to comfort. We have a big wood stove that will be placed in a corner and ought to keep things warm. There will be only one door, and that will open into the schoolroom. This part of the building will be arranged so that one door must be closed before the other can be opened. This will avoid all draughts."

"Do you think you can get any pupils?" was asked.
"Oh, yes. People who have been up there tell me there are a number of children only too anxious for instruction. And besides this, I am sure there will be a number of grown people who would be glad to put in a few months studying when they cannot work in the mines. I am very sanguine of success."

TOOMBS'S AWFUL THREAT.

In This Case a Soft Answer Turned Aside an Officers' Wrath.

A good story is told in the Chicago Times-Herald of how a soft answer turned a self-confident, aggressive young man into an exemplary, obedient soldier. The young man was Robert Toombs of Georgia then in his twenties. He had raised a volunteer company and joined General Scott, who was conducting a campaign against the Indians in Florida. Toombs was without military training, and had never submitted to rules and discipline, at college or anywhere else. Naturally when he met General Scott it was a case of oil and water—they would not mix. Private James White, who served in a Georgia company during that war, laughs to this day over a tilt between Captain Toombs and General Scott.

The general knew the character of his enemies and was in no hurry to attack them in the positions which they had chosen. He waited, day after day, determined not to move until the right moment.

The delay did not suit the Georgia captain, and he made no effort to conceal his contempt for the slow methods of his commander.

One night Toombs felt that he could stand it no longer. He paid a visit to the general's tent, where he found Scott engaged in a pleasant conversation with a dozen officers of high rank.

The Georgian was a man of superb physique, the finest looking American of his generation, and when he marched into the

tent with flashing eyes and a defiant look everybody gazed expectantly in his direction. General Scott greeted him pleasantly and invited him to join the circle.

"General Scott," said Toombs, in a stern tone. "I desire to know, sir, whether the army will march against the enemy within the next few days."

"I am not ready yet to answer that question," replied the general, with a smile.

"Then, sir," continued the youthful captain, "I will notify you that unless the army marches tomorrow I propose to go forward with my company into the very heart of the Indian territory."

When this astounding declaration was made, the officers almost fainted, and they expected the general to administer a withering rebuke. To their astonishment Scott never changed his genial expression. His eye twinkled with good humor, and he turned a serene and benignant face upon his audacious visitor.

"Very well, captain," was his quiet answer. "Very well, captain, use your own pleasure, by all means. Take your company tomorrow and march into the Indian country. We may follow you a few weeks later. But don't wait for us. Take your company and go ahead. Good night, captain."

Private White says that when Toombs heard this look of bewilderment, disappointment and anger came over his face, but not a word fell from his lips. He saluted the commander and bowed himself out.

"Did he march, his company against the enemy the next day?" was my natural question.

"No," replied White. "He said nothing more about it. He remained at his post and was an exemplary officer during the remainder of the war. And he was not chafed about the affair, either. He was not the man to stand such treatment."

I asked White why Scott overlooked the captain's breach of military discipline.

"Well," said the old man, reflectively, the general was a good judge of human nature. He knew that young Toombs was a gallant fellow, who would some day be an honor to his country, and he doubtless thought that it would be sufficient punishment to answer him as he did. He could not have done a better thing. The captain had lots of sense, and he never again placed himself in such an embarrassing position."

A Little Mixed.

A tall man who had been speaking with another man, and who wondered why the other man acted so queerly, says the Cleveland Leader, saw a boy near his side trying to keep from laughing.

"What are you laughing at?" asked the tall man of the boy.

"I'm laughing at what you said to that man who just shook hands with you," answered the boy.

"I don't remember that I said anything funny to him."

"Well, when he asked you if you didn't know him, you said, 'Your name is familiar, but really I can't recall your face!'"

And So It Goes.

"This article, 'How to Keep Well,' is not completed," said the editor-in-chief. "No, sir; the editor of the Health Column took some lobster last night, and he hasn't been able to work to-day," replied his assistant.

Answered.

"What are the 'Powers' of Europe?" inquired the young woman.

The veteran diplomat looked at her thoughtfully and then replied:

"For a long time past they have been chiefly conversational Powers."

