

AMONG OUR BOOKS

WE who love books are permitted the indulgence of enthusiasm when that love is stirred. And just now it is kindled within me into a genuine emotion by this most beautiful place of books, which belongs not to any private individual, but to all Canada.

Boston has her magnificent new library, rich in marbles and frescos; New York, Philadelphia,—a score of big American cities have their great archives;—but none have the æsthetic charm, the grace and dainty loveliness of this, the parliamentary library of our own Dominion.

Cleverer pens than mine have written happily of its delights in the past, and will write again many times in the future; for its charm is perennial, and none, not even those who live outside the dear world of books, can resist its fascinations. The Canadian to whom all literature is as a dumb thing, yet brings his visiting friends into this the crowning beauty of the graceful Governmental pile, saying proudly, "This is our parliamentary library."

Words are weak, inexpressive, impotent. How we who write fling them petulantly from us,—as one by one they prove themselves so incapable of portraying the thought—the truth we would make real.

Brushes and palette are better—yet even these fail of the atmosphere, save when held in master hands.

To so clothe our subject that it becomes a living picture to the reader; to give the very spirit of a place; to choose words and phrases fit and strong and graphic,—this is the perfection of a writer's art.

Yet, poor words! We misuse and abuse them so by our exaggerations, our extravagances and redundancies, is it much wonder that they have grown impotent to convey the message we give them?—dead husks, dried, juiceless orms, from which all life has fled.

And, so to-day, writing from this lovely literary Arcadie, I throw the words impatiently from me in vain endeavor to find those that will fitly describe all the mellow grace and beauty of this "round house" of books.

That it is dome-shaped, with roof-crown reaching far up into an ever-freshening air; that it is well lighted with light that drops easily down in gentle shielding for tired eyes; that it is of just such and such dimensions, and contains in volumes one hundred thousand or two;—what matters it? Neither you nor I care one whit. It is the spirit that is life; not the form.

And the spirit,—how shall I catch and prison it in words; even though I push aside paper and pencil; step for a moment into the center of the pretty æsthetic scene, and look about me,—

All golden and brown and crimson,
All crimson, gleaming and grey.

The words drop into meter of their own accord.

Up and down and around is the mellow blending of warm brown and crimson; in the carved wood,—was ever Canadian pine so

bent on showing its possibilities of beauty as in these dainty alcoves and miniature galleries?—in the chairs and desks, with their blotters and pads and half-open volumes, wooing one to literary delights; in the fine artistic bindings of soft fawn and crimson, with relief touches of greens and blues; in the glint of gilt letterings. It is such an harmonious blending, such a cheery, home-like, glowing place, that our æsthetic sense is lulled into a great peace as we gaze.

Yet this is not all;—the charm lies deeper than coloring, grace of carving, or glint of gold.

It is the voices of the books that appeal to us; in the stillness and the glow they are speaking. These browns and crimsons are more than mere color—they are emblematic of the brains and hearts that beat out thought and spirit into the pages between.

Quietness, did I say?—Nay, as I stand here, beside this tall, white statue of our Queen, the air is full of voices that call to wisdom and calm.

"Listen," they say; "we are the product of brains and pulses and nerves, once all

to dream in,—to grow wise in. But it is through just such struggles of brain and heart that you have been brought into being. Every book among your thousands represents human experience gained by work, or passion, or fierce fight. Every page has been marked by a life beat in some strong swift pulse.

And the story is never altogether told.

Concerning "Tarot," someone very unkindly suggests that the title might be abbreviated by the dropping of the first two letters, and gain in expressiveness thereby. We congratulate our Bohemian coterie on its really splendid attempt to be decadent, miasmatic and "soul tortured." We realize the fact that it is difficult to inhale Old World pessimism under New World skies, to be properly appreciative of Yellow Book-ism; and we are grateful—or we hope to be, when duly educated by Ta-rot,—that such a center for the dissemination of literary hysterics should be established in our midst.

Now we shall know what it is that we have unconsciously hungered for; we shall discover our yearnings; we shall outreach to the indefinable and the vague; we shall be fed on a symphony of faint lilies and fierce furies; we shall "have ideals, breathe freely and deeply, and live intensely."

Now, indeed, shall Canadian literature leap to foremost place, and Canadian Art—spelled with a big A—sweep its genius brush across the wide world's canvas. (That sounds Tarot-ic.)

Now we shall realize the artistic beauties of skeletons and cross bones, wild hair and horned heads, with incongruities,—nay, Tarot recognizes not the existence of incongruities—with wondrous harmonies, of gentle doves alight on grinning skulls. Italics, too, large caps, and exclamation points, dashes, devils and doubts;—these are component parts of Ta-rot.

Great is Ta-ro!

And if these congratulations fail to congratulate, let Ta-rot comfort itself with the thought that they are proffered by one who, like itself, "is critical, but from the standpoint of the neglected."

Mrs. Mary Anderson-Navarro writes her reminiscences of Longfellow for the *Ladies' Home Journal*. She describes her last visit to the poet. "Until the spring then, he said, as we parted, 'if I am still here. I wonder if we shall ever meet again! I am old and not very well!' He apologized for not seeing us to the carriage, as was his wont, but stood at the window watching us leave. Its sash was covered with snow. His face looked like a picture set in a white glistening frame, for the sun was shining, and his hair and beard were nearly as white as the snow itself. I can see him still, standing there, waving his last farewell."

REVIEWER.

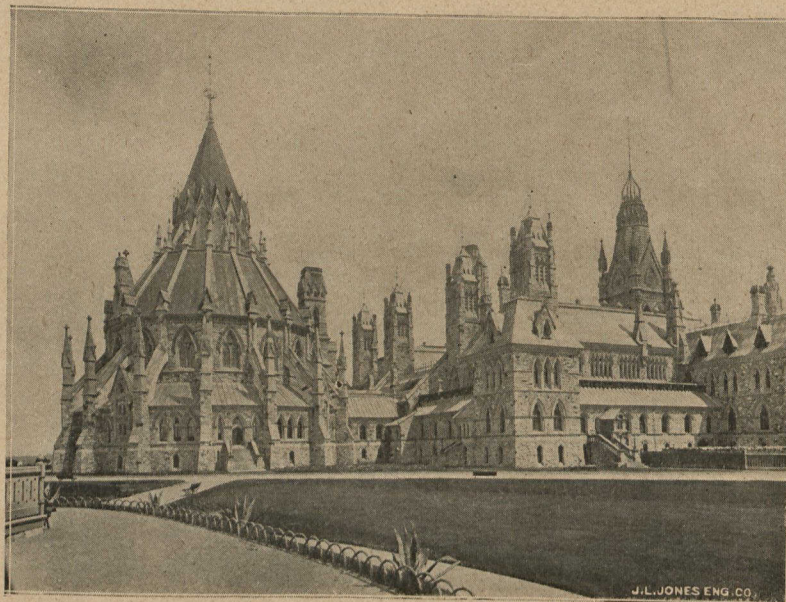
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OTTAWA LIBRARY.

a-quiver, but long since stilled; men burnt their passion out upon our pages, penned their philosophies, indited their experiences, garnered their wisdom. They passed, but we remain. Ye too shall go as they have gone. Is the passion and the pettiness and the striving worth while?

"Yet, ye are human,—and by these humanities we are made,—by our records each generation shall profit, until ye shall rise to greater levels than now are dreamed of."

Across the corridors is a Chamber where even as I write men are struggling for party victories; appealing to prejudice, arousing passion, fighting, as gladiators will, not for truth nor wisdom, but for precedence and power, until all the air is turbid with miasma, and none can see the right.

In the beauty of this most beautiful library the books gleam out in their crimson and brown,—fiction and philosophy, poetry and science, theology and statistics. If the sound waves of strife reach them from that Chamber, they give no sign.

Yet, as a breath of air wafts through an open window, fresh from the far-off hills and white-iced river, the leaves of a thousand volumes stir softly, and bending, I seem to hear them say, "O poor humanity!"

Ah, lovely, cheery library! you are a place