

A WEEK IN A BOY'S LIFE.

(TRANSLATED FROM JACQUES JASMIN.)

I.

Chill was our sky: the swallows all had fled,
A feeble glimmer by the sun was shed,
The silent fields were lying bleak and bare.
When All Saints' Day drew nigh:
And from each palsied bough on high
The yellow leaves, condemned to die,
Dropped, eddying slowly through the air.

II.

One evening, from our peaceful town,
While countless stars were gazing down,
A brother and a sister strayed
In melancholy mood,
And when before a Cross they stood,
They innocently prayed.
Bathed in the moonlight's purity
Abel and Rose long bent the knee;
Then, like some organ in a fane,
The mournful voices of the twain
Poured forth two prayers that blent in one,
And soared to Heaven in unison:
"Mother of Christ! benignant Maid!
Father at home lies sick with pain:
Oh! send thine angel to his aid—
So shall our mother smile again,
And we, thy children, will adore
And love thee, sweetest Virgin, more and more."
The Virgin could not slight the prayer—
Scarce had they reached their home,
When, from a door that opened there,
A woman, youthful still, and fair,
With joy beheld them come:
"Poor darlings! Death hath turned aside—
The fever is subdued—
And since your father hath not died,
Show God, dear lambs! your gratitude."
So, kneeling on the bare, rude planks
Of a poor garret, they gave thanks,
Beside a bed, with serge o'erspread,
Whereon, with cool and painless brow,
Hilaire, the honest father lay—
A soldier in his youthful day,
A humble mason now.

III.

The morrow dawned with smiling gleam,
The sunlight once again
Was soon illuming with its beam
Each patched-up window pane,
When Abel came with noiseless tread,
Stole forward to his father's bed,
And opened the curtain by his head.
He, newly waked, beheld his son with joy,
And cried: "I looked for thee—remain, my boy.
Our home is poor: my toil procures us food:
God for your sakes has spared me—God is good.
For thou art young—not fifteen quite—
Thou knowest how to read and write—
But thou art coy, and grave, and prone to dream:
Still, life has work for everyone, I deem.
I know that thou art delicate and frail,
Less strong than comely; and thine arms would fail
To smite the stone with sinews hale:
But our Collector, wise and kind,
Notes that thy manners are refined,
And to befriend thee is inclined.
Go, then, and do his bidding: but no sloth,
And no conceit, my boy—leave that to fools—
Writer and artisan are workmen—both—
Pens, hammers, are their tools.
Mind, like the body, wears our life away—
Enough, dear child! I trust that thou,
Dressed in black cloth, wilt ne'er allow
False pride to scorn thy father's mean array."
Abel's blue eyes were lifted up with joy—
Fond kisses passed between the man and boy,
Mother and sister, also, had their share:
Next morn, the stripling to his patron went,
And for four days that followed, their content
Was boundless as the air.

IV.

Alas! the pleasures of the poor are brief!
The Sabbath morning brought a mandate stern:
"Hilaire to-morrow must to work return.
If he be absent, in that case
Another hand will take his place.
By order of the Chief."
The volley from a cannon fired
No deeper anguish doles,
Than by this message was inspired
Within four wretched souls.
"I'm cured," the father cries,
And struggles hard to rise,
But falls back feebly—if he works, he dies!
A week of rest is wanted: ah! poor friend!
Thy life and death upon thy toil depend.
All four were mute—through Abel's heart
A thought like lightning seemed to dart.
It dried the tears within his eyes,
And lent the boy a noble mien:
Strength in each muscle seemed to rise,
While blushes on his cheek were seen.

Then, forth he fared, and quickly went
To the rough foreman's tenement.
Soon he returned: his heart no more
By sore distress was wrung:
Ne'er had he looked so gay before,
Smiles in his eyes, and honey on his tongue.
"Rest, father, rest! Thou hast a week of grace.
Rest from thy toil—thy wonted vigour gain—
A friend that loves thee will supply the place
Which thou may'st still retain."

V.

Saved by a friend! So, friends still love and feel!
Would this were certain in our world of woes:
To-morrow's light the secret will reveal—
Good sons exist—but friends? alas! who knows?
'Tis Monday morn: our Abel drudges hard—
Not at the desk, but in the builder's yard.
His sire was wrong: for, though he seems to be
So frail, his work is as the work of three:
Deftly he crumbles up the lime,
And kneads the mortar for each wall,
Light as a bird, he loves to climb,
Till the pale workmen tremble for his fall.
He walks a dizzy platform with the best,
Smiles as he mounts, and smiles when he alights:
Here, there, and everywhere, no task he slights,
But toils to save his father—and is blest.
And thus his honest comrades there,
Who guessed the secret of the boy,
Watched while the sweat uncurled his sunny hair,
And clapped their hands with tearful joy.

VI.

What bliss for Abel, when at close of day
The workmen homeward press.
He quickly doffs his spattered dress
And dons his black array.
Then, three fond traitors all conspire
To cheat the unsuspecting sire,
Who hails his son's arrival from the desk:
Abe prates of bills and contracts, in burlesque,
And with an artful wink replies
Whene'er his conscious mother winks her eyes!
So passed three days: the patient quits his bed:
Life seems more sweet—an unfamiliar boon—
Thursday—his malady has fled—
Friday—he gaily leaves the house at noon.
But Friday! God created thee for woe!
Cheered by the sunshine's welcome heat,
Hilaire speeds onward, vexed at seeming slow:
He yearns his friend and substitute to greet—
He longs his name to know.

VII.

And now, the house is nigh: but no one stands on high,
And yet the bell for dinner has not rung:
Great Heaven! what crowds are at the building's base—
Foreman—mechanics—neighbours, old and young.
But why? A man has fall'n: Oh! piteous case!
His friend, perchance: his soul is on the rack.
He runs—the workmen shudder at the sight,
And strive to keep him back.
He elbows through, with frenzied might:
Oh! helpless sire—oh! horror wild—
The friend that saved him is his darling child!
He finds him toppled from a scaffold's height,
Stretched—almost dead—upon the bloody ground:
And while the father shrieks for fright,
To aid his son all sadly cluster round.
Alas! the boy who dies,
Past aiding, only sighs:
"Master! I could not—quite—work out my week—
One day is lost—but in poor mother's name
Thy pity for my father I bespeak."
Men wept to hear the fond, pathetic claim.
At length the sufferer turns his eyes
Upon his father, bends his face
Towards him for a moment's space,
Petitioning a last embrace;
Fondles his hand, and, smiling softly, dies!

VIII.

They kept his place for lone Hilaire—
They proffered goodly pay,
Alas! too late! his only care
Was soon to pass away.
No gold his sorrow could efface—
No skill his life could save—
He went—to take another place,
Beside his darling's grave.

Montreal.

GEORGE MURRAY.

Another craze in the way of Volapük, Esperanto or Universal Language is "World English" which Alexander Melville Bell proposes by kindly "amending" our alphabet and spelling on scientific principles. Nine new characters would be introduced for consonant sounds and all the rest of it.

Edward Everett Hall has taken to writing in "popular style" the household and other problems of free trade and protection for one of the Chicago papers. That fine pen might be better employed.

LITERARY NOTES.

It is to be hoped that Alice Baker will publish in pamphlet form her admirable article on the descendants of the Captives of Deerfield.

Charles Muir, the poet, dwelling at St. Albert, on the Saskatchewan is a candidate for the vacancy in the English section of the Royal Society of Canada.

The Montreal Society for Historical Studies sends a representative to Deerfield, at the end of July, before a Summer School there, to read original notes on Hertel de Rouville who raided that hamlet nearly 200 years ago.

Miss Annie Robertson Macfarlane is coming to Canada for some months to gather material for a history of the country to be included in Putnam's series of "Stories of the Nations."

J. K. Foran, of Aylmer, has been publishing, in an Ontario weekly, a story of the Têtes-de-Boule, back in the Gatineau Country. The writer spent a winter among these Indians and writes from knowledge.

We hear no more of Ch. J. Parham, of Ottawa, who published a wonderful little collection of "Lyrical Translations" from the Oc, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Provincial Dialects a few months ago. What has become of our friend?

Mr. Edgar, M. P., well known for his Political Songs, has been translating some of the shorter pieces of the French Canadian poets into English. The more these writers are known to us the better for all.

A little work that should meet with steady sale is "The Canadian Birthday Book", with poetic selections for every day in the year, by "Seranus." There are six editions in the market. A cheaper one still would sell very widely, as the book is meant to be a *Vade Mecum*.

We are coming to native book-making, when you have a work written by a Canadian author and illustrated by a Canadian artist. That is the case with "Shanty, Forest and River life in the Backwoods" by Josiah Fraser and the illustrations by William Brymner.

James Russell Lowell is still as active as a young man. Beside his book of poems, dating back only a couple of months, he is about to publish a volume of "Political Essays", covering the transient work of thirty years.

It is not very complimentary to learn that a little book called "Slips of Tongue and Pen", by J. H. Long, of Peterborough, has not received in this country that favour to which it is entitled. An American reprint, on the other hand, has been selling through several editions.

A letter received from Calgary gives a keen account of Ernest Chamber's accident. It was a narrow escape. His leg is broken in two places, and he will have to use crutches for six or seven weeks, but will work in four or five. Mr. Chambers is a most promising young journalist, and did good work for the *Star* during the N. W. rebellion, and for the 50th anniversary of the rebellion of 1837—38.

The *Empire* is right in calling on some one to write the history of Canada during the war of 1812—15. A full history is wanted, especially as the British and Americans have theirs, while the scenes of nearly the whole war were on our soil. Coffin's history, so far as it goes, cannot be beat, and no future writer can treat of that war without consulting him at every page.

The fifth volume of the "Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada", lately distributed, is perhaps the best and the most satisfying of any that has yet appeared. All the transactions of the society are ably represented, and some very good and well-known names appear on the list of those who read papers. The Royal Society of Canada is a National institution and its success is a reflex of the growth of the country.