

DEBORAH

By Alexander Louis Fraser

Note: In a reference the other month to "Canadian Singers and their Songs" we commented on the fact that included in the selected list was the Eastern Poet, Mr. Alexander Louis Fraser, and that the sonnet, an autographed copy of which appeared in that book, was one which Mr. Fraser had contributed to this magazine.

While the Midsummer number was on the press, the editor of the B.C.M. had the pleasure of receiving the following poem which we are pleased to be able to pass to our readers without delay.—Editor B.C.M.

"Alas! my country, Peace has fled thy fields.
Six score years have gone by since Joshua gave
His measured farewell, calling on the stone
Neath Sheekem's oak, to hear his people's vows
That they their father's God would ne'er forsake.
Alas! their promise proved like morning dew
And records of the past—how Moses found
A sea-walled lane; how Amalek he smote;
How Jericho, encircled, fell as when
A dyke, before wind-lifted waves, falls flat.
Those records were unread; and for their sins
My people suffered hard and trying days
Oppression's foot oft made them cry for pain,
Deliverance was again, alas, forgot.
Then through the tanglewood of this new time
Unaided Might essayed to cut a way;
So Peace and War, for us alternating,
Have filled the record of these six score years!
What pleasure that with Lapidoth I live
While cross our land such evil shadows lie?
Heart-breaking stories hear I every day
As neath my palm-tree, seated, I confer
With people from my sorely-harassed realm.
How Jabin's terror falls on every one,
How Sisera's iron chariots sound our doom,
How pagan multitudes laugh us to scorn!
Though I am but a woman yet I feel
That God now bids me fan the fading fires
That die too soon within a people's heart.
Israel nor blossom yet nor fruit has borne,
And our eclipse can be but momentary.
Then, late our God who hears us when we cry
Gave me assurance that our time had come;
So I'll to Barak, son of Abinoam,
And bid him by the Kishon take his stand,
And call on Zebulun and Naphtali
Ten thousand men at once to mobilize,
For Sisera, by strategy misled,
Will muster all our forces by that stream;
But God will give them all into our hand,
And Kishon's wave ere night will crimson flow."

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So going unto Barak thus she spoke:
"Rise! Barak, son of Abinoam, rise!
The hour has struck; the gates of Destiny
Will open swing, and our ill-fated land
Will come at last unto its heritage
Speed thou to Tabor's Mount, nor slack thy pace,
Thy bugle blow among the circling hills,
The call is God's, and He will lead you on
While Sisera will meet discomfiture.

Barak! dost thou stand hesitant? Can'st thou
Survey the land's distress unmoved? Ah, would
That I a man's habiliments might wear;
That this weak frame could feel a little while
A great man's strength, then I at once would pass
Across these aching hills, and, summon loud
The forces that depend on leadership.
Thy going is conditioned, dost thou say
Upon my going, too? Then God forbid
That I keep thee from meeting this great hour;
This day is big with issues, but know thou
The honor of this victory falls from thee,
A woman's hand shall slay fell Sisera."
So saying, they passed on and Barak called
The sons of Zebulun and Naphtali,
Ten thousand men, the flower of those two tribes.

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Then Sisera was ware how Israel
Had gathered forces for his overthrow;
So, summoning his chariots, he repaired
To Kishon's bank whither now Deborah
With urgency bade Barak lead his men;
And Barak, feeling God had gone before,
Marched unafraid to meet the enemy.
What blows were dealt upon that fated field!
And Israel hewed as some strong woodsman does
When trees fall prone before his swinging axe,
And lanes were cleared through Jabin's vaunted ranks;
Chariots were driverless like vehicles
One seas by city livery stands at noon
In some great centre of the western world.
Then God unstopped the bottles of the sky,
And soon the Kishon swelled up to the brim,
And Canaanites were floating down the stream
Like logs that sometimes choke the river's way
As they are rafted down to feed the mill,
And Sisera, when he saw the day was lost,
Alighted on his feet, pursued by Fear,
And sought the tent of Heber on the plain
Zaanaim, as when a frightened hare
Takes the first opening when a hound pursues.
Now Heber's father had in former time
Gone up and bade adieu to nomad life,
So Heber now was friend to Sisera,
But Jael, Heber's wife, was sore displeased,
That Heber's house and Jabin's house were friends,
And oft she watched the conquerors go down,
And oft she watched the conquerors return
With maids and needle-work and gold as prize.
So all this day when sore the battle ran,
She paced her tent floor, and in secret wished
That victory might come to Deborah;
And oft so anxious grew her thoughts that she
The tent forsook to see if tidings came,
And then it was that broken Sisera,
Reeling from blows that Israel dealt to him,
Came, as when some lone shipwrecked mariner
Tells breathless how his mates shall ne'er tread land
Again,—so Sisera seemed. Then Jael bade
Him share her offered home, "Let fear not come
Beyond my threshold; all is safe within."
So routed was he, and so prone the forts