

ARCTURUS:

A CANADIAN JOURNAL OF LITERATURE AND LIFE.

SATURDAY, MAY 28TH, 1887.

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Terms, in advance, \$2.00 a year, or \$1.00 for six months. Subscribers not paying in advance will be charged 50c. extra. Clubs of three, \$5.00; clubs of five or more, to one address, \$1.60 each. Subscriptions may begin any time.

Advertisements.—\$1.00 per line per annum; six months, \$2.50; single insertion, 20c. per line. No advertisement charged less than five lines.

Business communications should be addressed, Business Manager, ARCTURUS, Room U, Arcade (Victoria Street entrance), Toronto.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES.

PARTY journalism is often justly blamed for captious and unnecessary criticism of opponents, and for blundering and insincere attempts at defending party coadjutors. The fictions embodied in Parliamentary procedure and rules of debate have long helped to keep the debates of the House of Commons at a higher level than the wordy combats of newspaper hacks, but it is becoming more palpable every session that restraining decencies are losing their hold, and that our great representative body is degenerating from the true spirit and form of its great prototype in its best days. That model of all representative assemblies in Great Britain is now struggling for its very existence in the choking gripe of closure and obstruction. But our experience is different and Canada's statesmen have not just now to deal with questions involving issues of such gravity as the Irish Gordian knot. Yet our Parliamentary debates have been marked, at intervals during last session and the present, by episodes tending to lower not only the characters of individual members but the dignity of the whole House. The debate on the manner in which the returns of the recent election were gazetted furnished a strong instance of this. In the first place the matter was comparatively a trivial one. The neglect and delay might have been quite accidental, and it could not operate to the detriment of any member who had a clean record and a good defence against any possible election petition. Yet, to read some of the speeches, one might imagine that Magna Charta had been violated and the Bill of Rights endangered. The debate ended with an anti-climax more humiliating to the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery and his friends than anything the Opposition could do—the reading of his letter of explanation. Probably in a whole library of public documents no letter could be found written by a gentleman and a man of business that would cause the writer to cut so contemptible a figure. No whining schoolboy could produce anything equally destitute of grammar and sense, and looking, on the face of it, so much like a “shuffle.” Of course it may be a perfectly truthful statement of the case, but it looks so much like a confession of carelessness or incompetence that most men would have preferred to confess the truth of the accusation of partiality, and to brave the consequences. No one likes a subordinate who has the habit of making lame excuses. Nothing is so destructive of dignity on the one

side and temper on the other; but as in this case the House has very little of either to lose, it may, and we hope will, let the matter drop.

Book Notice.

THE CANADIAN BIRTHDAY BOOK. Compiled by Seranus. Toronto, C. Blackett Robinson.

In the entire lack of a comprehensive collection of Canadian verse, this Birthday Book will doubtless be welcomed by some readers. The selections are drawn from many sources, and, generally speaking, they have been judiciously made, so far as the limitations which the compiler set herself would permit. Much good verse has thus been rescued from undeserved oblivion and given a new chance for fame through her efforts. Further, the work is valuable in calling attention to the quantity and quality of French-Canadian poetical literature. Among our English-speaking people M. Louis Fréchette has hitherto been looked upon as the embodiment of this literature, and his reputation among them is due rather to the honour conferred upon him by the French Academy than to a knowledge of the comparative merits of our French writers.

Still, all books of this class are open to a serious objection. It is of course a graceless task to attempt to show that what has been done might have been done better. But this is precisely one of the chief functions of the reviewer of a growing literature. Indiscriminate eulogy harms both writer and reader, and in every way injures the cause which the over-benevolent critic has most at heart. Mediocre books of native writers have been so unduly puffed in Canada that when a really good book is written people are incredulous about its merits. The author's chances of success are thus greatly lessened, and a serious injustice is done. The growth of a native literature cannot be forced by any such hot-bed methods, and it is time the attempt were given over.

The fault of this book from a literary point of view is the exceedingly fragmentary nature of the selections. Perhaps it will be said that this was necessary from the very nature of the work which the compiler set out to accomplish. If this be the case the necessity is greatly to be deplored. It cannot at any rate be said that a birthday book was itself at all a necessity. Most earnest readers of this collection would probably have been more than willing to dispense with the birthday pages entirely. Looked upon as a work of art, a perfect poem is an organic unity from which no part can be taken without injury to the whole. Though no perfect poems have been written in Canada, it is likely that most of our poetic writers had an ideal of the kind referred to before them as they wrote. They made their work as nearly perfect as they were able. A much more satisfactory view of our literature therefore would be obtained from a collection of complete poems, even if fewer writers were represented. A shattered Venus is better than none, no doubt, but let us not therefore wilfully break up our statuary for convenience of packing away, or for other