

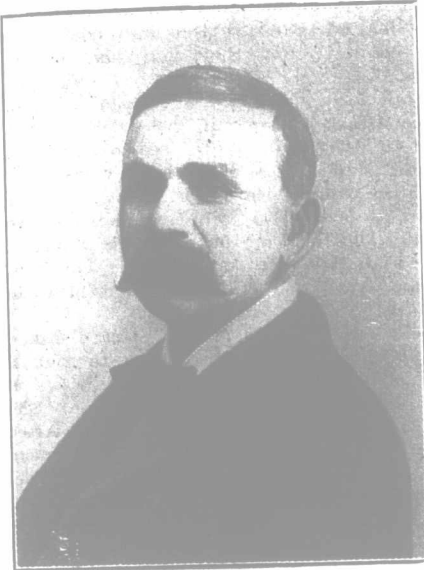


HOME MAGAZINE



Life, Literature and Education.

Thomas O'Hagan, M.A., Ph.D.



Among Canadian poets who have been coming to the fore during the past few years, must be placed Dr. Thomas O'Hagan, known, as well, as the author of several prose works of decided literary value. His first volume of poems, "A Gate of Flowers," attracted considerable attention, and was translated into French. His second, "Songs of the Settlement," appeared in 1893, and became immediately popular, winning the commendation of such competent critics as Chas. G. D. Roberts, Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Charles Dudley Warner. It is made up chiefly of short poems and sonnets, bearing, most of all, on the farm, the good old pioneer days, and the old, yet ever new, charm of forest, and river, and twinkling stars, and as one reads them one can scarcely fail to read also between the lines, and see in Dr. O'Hagan one who, in spite—or, perhaps, as a result of—long years spent in the strenuous acquirements of the "higher education," still loves the old farm, and sees in the simple life spent close to nature's heart the nearest approach to earthly happiness. "Go forth," he says, in "Lowly Valley"—

"Go forth, my heart, and seek some lowly valley,
Beneath a sky of bright and tender hue,
From which kind stars rain down their mystic splendor
And wake the earth with tears of heavenly dew;
Let not the summit peaks of distant glory
Shut out the peace that reigns within the plain;
Better the flowers that bloom within the valley
Than tempting heights lit up with arid gain."

Some of his poems are pathetic, others humorous; yet all are such as

should appeal to the great farming public.

Dr. O'Hagan's prose works already published are, "Canadian Essays," and "Studies in Poetry," besides contributions on historical, literary and philosophical subjects to various Canadian and American magazines, especially Quarterly Review, American Catholic Review, Catholic World, Donahoe's Magazine, Rosary Magazine and Mosher's Magazine. He has also on hand two new prose works which will appear at an early date, "Studies in English Literature," and "Studies in Poetry, Vol. II." As an outcome of his travels, he expects to bring out a book on what he learned of the life and art of Europe, entitled "With Staff and Scrip."

Dr. O'Hagan, as his name implies, is of Irish descent, and was born in Toronto, Ont., in 1855. He was educated at St. Michael's College and the University of Ottawa, from which he graduated in 1882, with honors in English, Latin, French and German. Later he studied at the Universities of Syracuse, Cornell, Chicago and Columbia, and he has recently spent considerable time in Europe in travel and study at continental universities. At present he is devoting his time exclusively to literary work and lecturing, and his further efforts will be awaited with much interest. Dr. O'Hagan is described by those who know him as a man of sterling integrity, an out-and-out Canadian, and a hater of sham and humbug in every form.

The following selection, "The dance at McDougall's," from his poems, is given, not as an example of the highest type of his work—for, from a purely literary standpoint, he has written better—but as a reminder of earlier and less conventional days than now:

In a little log house near the rim of the forest,
With its windows of sunlight, its threshold of stone,
Lived Donald McDougall, the quaintest of Scotchmen,
And Janet, his wife, in their shanty, alone:
By day the birds sang them a chorus of welcome,
At night they saw Scotland again in their dreams;
They toiled full of hope 'mid the sunshine of friendship,
Their hearts leaping onward like trout-lets in streams,
In the little log home of McDougall's.

At evening the boys and girls would all gather
To dance and to court 'neath McDougall's roof-tree;
They were wild as the tide that rushes up Solway
When lashed by the tempests that sweep the North Sea.
There Malcolm and Flora and Angus and Katie
With laughter-tuned paces came tripping along,
And Pat, whose gay heart had been nursed in old Erin,
Would link each Scotch reel with a good Irish song,
Down at the dance at McDougall's.

For the night was as day at McDougall's log shanty,
The blaze on the hearth shed its halo around,

While the feet that tripped lightly the reel "Tullagorum,"
Patter'd each measure with "ooch!" and with bound,
No "Lancers" nor "Jerseys" were danced at McDougall's,
Nor the latest waltz-step found a place on the floor,
But reels and strathspeys and the liveliest of horn-pipes
Shook the room to its centre from fireplace to door,
In the little log house at McDougall's.

Gone now is the light in McDougall's log shanty,
The blaze on the hearth long has sunk into gloom,
And Donald and Janet who dreamed of "Auld Scotia,"
Are dreaming of heaven in the dust of the tomb.
While the boys and the girls—the "balachs" and "calahs"—
Who toiled during day and danced through the night,
Live again in bright dreams of Memory's morning
When their hearts beat to music of life, love and light,
Down at the dance at McDougall's.

* * *

His lines on the tragic death of Sir John Thompson, at Windor Castle, England, in December, 1894, appropriately entitled "Tears of the Maple," are in his more serious mood, and conclude with the following strong stanzas:

The greater life of him who died
Is vital in our hearts to-day,
For deeds have power and soul to plan,
To shape our lives, to mould our clay.

Whatever things are done for God
Have root in soil beyond our years,
And bud and bloom in beauteous form,
Devoid of earthly hopes and fears.

This life is but the vestibule,
The altar-stairs that lead to heaven,
Around whose feet the nations kneel,
And pray that peace and light be given.

And looking through the mists of years
I see, as in a dream, a land,
Fashion'd and form'd in toil and prayer,
A gift of God divinely planned,

Where 'neath the light of northern Star,
With truth and honor for a wall,
A nation dwells secure in peace,
With God, our Father, guiding all.

The Gray Squirrel.

This is one of twenty-nine lessons in Nature Study for Primary Grades, in a well-bound volume, by Mrs. Murry, just issued by MacMillan & Co., New York; Morang & Co., Toronto. (Pp. 191; 60c.)

"We had had the mother (a gray squirrel) of these babies for about six weeks, when, on Monday morning, March 15th, our janitor found in the cage five little squirrels. Two died shortly after birth. The little squirrels were perfectly naked—not a hair on the whole body. The bodies of the two largest were two inches long, the tails one and one-fourth inches long, and the legs three-

fourths of an inch long. They were very dark red, with the heads darker than the body. The ears were no larger than flaxseeds. Their eyes were as large as sweet peas, but were tightly closed. Their toe-nails were black with a white tip.

"The mother purred to them. The babies mew'd like kittens. We saw two of them getting dinner. Their front feet moved in a happy way while nursing. We made them a nest of cotton in a box when they came. Their mother tore up much paper and added to the nest.

"When they were a week old their bodies had become plumper, and they began to bleach out a little. We took one of them from the cage. It squealed like a little pig. When a week and a half old the little ones began to squeak like mice whenever things did not go to suit them. Their little ears began to stand out. The mother, when she feared someone was going to hurt one of them, planted her front feet firmly upon its body."

The account quoted proceeds to record, at intervals of two or three days, the changes in appearance and behavior of this little family of gray squirrels, born and brought up for three months in a schoolroom—getting their hair, opening their eyes, cutting their teeth, learning to eat, were all closely observed by these city children in the nature study of a gray squirrel.

"When ten and a half weeks old the babies were still washed by their mother, which she always did by lapping them with her tongue. She still suckled them, though a few times she resisted their demands. They now looked to be almost as large as their mother. The smallest one was a downright tease. It made a practice of skipping up behind one of the others and biting it, and stealing the food from the others, and biting them when they wished to eat. We had to take the little hector out of the cage and give him a cage for himself."

The account states that the children watched with the greatest interest, and reported all the changes, and that they loved the little squirrels and the mother, Fanny, very much.

We can easily believe that children in the primary grades were deeply interested in the development of this squirrel family, and that the interest would be carried into the composition and drawing lessons based upon their observations. Apart from the value that training of the perceptive powers has, the related composition, reading and drawing lessons are more educative than would be the ordinary routine ones occupying the same time.

As we read this chapter we could not help thinking what a wealth of unused material the teacher of farmers' children has been neglecting in the past. There has been many a yellow duckling or pet lamb whose story would have been written with zest by a child who dawdled over compositions on iron, winter, and the blessings of contentment.

It need scarcely be remarked that, to the child who reads this story or hears it read, it is not nature study. Personal observation and judging are necessary to that kind of lesson.