

AMONG OUR BOOKS.



IT is our whim to make belief that we require light fiction for summer months,—*vers de société* and love stories of the lightest. Nothing pleases us more than when the doctor declares that we require complete rest,—“a month in the country, and no reading, mind you, except the very lightest.”

Wise doctor! He knows something of human nature, and how it loves a pretence of excuse.

I think the “no reading” is better without that after clause; since no thistle-blow of fiction is as wholesome as the pretty

natural fluff that floats airily under summer skies.

“No reading” is an excellent dictum for those who may have the lovely literature of nature spread before them,—in lake and river, forest, field, and the chasing shadowy cloud-land,—yet even these are wedded to their books, and must at least preserve the form of reading.

Nevertheless, I object to this ‘light literature’ theory. One book worth the reading, even though the pages be turned but slowly, is worth a score of effervescent tales, be they ever so harmless.

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And books worth reading are not necessarily stupid or yet heavy. Naturally, few of us want a Robert Elsmere, or even Ian Maclaren’s “Mind of the Master” for midsummer days; yet here is a book upon my desk, of especial interest to Canadians, that is altogether enjoyable, and is neither heavy nor dull.

Gilbert Parker’s “Seats of the Mighty” is one of the best our clever novelist has written,—and that is saying much. “A Romance of Old Quebec” he terms it, and a delightful romance it is.

Dear old Quebec,—quaint historic treasure-house of our modern land! How vividly Mr. Parker brings its fascinating days of French rule before us; and how charmingly he weaves the pretty romance attaching to that sturdy, honest British soldier, Robert Moray, and brave-hearted, yet womanly little Alixe.

The *Bookman* declares Mr. Parker to be a Canadian Bret Harte minus the humour, but plus a certain spiritual distinction; yet I think, in this work at least, he ranks rather with such writers as the Robert C. Blackmore and Stanley Weyman. Certainly his Robert Moray suggests both the cumbersome, good-hearted John in “Lorna Doone,” and “The Gentleman of France”; yet neither of these books show the analysis of character, the ‘spiritual distinction’ betrayed in the portraiture of Doltaire.

I doubt whether any modern author has created a more complex character, or yet given more subtle delineation of the same.

Whether Doltaire be purely a fictitious personage, or whether there is historic ground for the character, I know not. Bigot, De Vaudreuil, Mountcalm, Saunders, Lobiniere,—these we hold in our country’s history; but this inimitable Doltaire,—peasant and prince, devil

and philosopher, courteous to kingliness, cruel unto torture, whether he be constructed from a shadowy name, or purely fictional,—is clothed upon by the artist with a reality that brings him to the foreground,—the one strong, tense, dramatic figure in a dramatic epoch of our country’s history.

Kirby’s “Chien D’Or” has, up to the present, been the one historic romance of Quebec City; but henceforth “The Seats of the Mighty” will take first rank as the book of enchantment which all shall conjure with, who, in time to come, shall walk within the walls of Canada’s Ancient Capital.

One is strongly tempted to quote the many vivid, descriptive bits, did space but permit; the portraiture of General Wolfe, for instance:—

The melancholy line of his figure . . . his straight red hair, his face defying all regularity, with the nose thrust out like a wedge, and the chin falling from an affectionate sort of mouth; his tall, straggling frame, and far from athletic shoulders . . . that searching, burning eye, which carried all the distinction and greatness denied him elsewhere. There resolution, courage, endurance, deep design, clear vision, dogged will and heroism lived; a bright furnace of daring resolves which gave England her sound desire.

There are also little philosophies and epigrams,—thought breeders for the reader, that give a reflective charm to this book,—while the spiritual touch gives distinct refinement.

But after once meeting with Gilbert Parker, one could never imagine other than refined work coming from his pen.

It is a book to be most heartily recommended as one of the pleasant and profitable outputs of the season.

And not its least attraction lies in its illustrations and maps of old Quebec.

“The Seats of the Mighty,” a Romance of Old Quebec, by Gilbert Parker. Copp Clark Co., Toronto.

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We turn now to another type of book, yet still of Canada and from a Canadian pen. This is a tale of the North-West in the sixties and seventies, told by the Rev. John McDougall, who has spent all the years of his life in pioneer mission work in that vast country. “Saddle, Sled and Snowshoe,” which is just issued, is a sequel to a volume by the same author published last year and entitled “Forest, Lake and Prairie.”

Neither of these volumes make pretension to great literary merit; they do not claim to be artistic, but they are full of vigour. The breezy strength and simplicity of the wild North-West as it was seventy years ago is in them; and as simple records of pioneer adventure in the Canadian territory, now so mightily redeemed, their pages are full of interest.

The earlier volume describes the boy life of the author, when, on the appointment of his father to an Indian mission station at Norway House, Hudson Bay, he began at early age to endure the hardness and undergo the stirring adventures of the early missionaries.

The later volume is more finished in style, and carries on the record of the boy into manhood,—a splendid, strong manhood, which he spends in mission work beside the great Saskatchewan and out upon the plains.

Although written by a missionary, the recital is healthily free from “preaching.”

The honour and power of mission work is wrought in very certainly throughout the pages, yet quite incidentally. The book is, what it aims to be, a simple record of stirring out-of-doors adventure,—a most wholesome and inspiring record of wholesome and purposeful living.

I have read no books better fitted to inspire our Canadian boys with a healthy interest in their own undiscovered country; nor any more calculated to put into our growing youth the strong, sturdy, self-reliant spirit of a real man-

hood, an heroic muscular Christianity.

The volume is nicely bound, and suitably illustrated by J. E. MacLaughlin.

“Saddle, Sled and Snowshoe,” by Rev. John MacDougall. Briggs Pub. Co., Toronto.

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Marion Crawford’s books are always attractive, but perhaps never more so than in the lovely laziness of summer time, when his picturesque word paintings of sunny Italy harmonise so well with our spirit of *dolce-far-niente*. We do not like Mr. Crawford out of Italy, any more than we enjoy Kipling out of India. They each need their environment in order to paint at their best.

In “Adam Johnstone’s Son,” the author has his favourite setting of Italian skies and seas; all, also, of those little cynical philosophies that woo the reader to amusement or thought:

“Every woman knows the calendar of her own face. The lines are years; the streaks are months, perhaps, or weeks, or hours. . . . This little wrinkle came one day with a doubt. The hair is worn away, as though by a crown that was not golden. . . .

People often speak of dead people with a sort of faint look of uncertain beauty,—the same which many think appropriate to the singing of hymns. . . .

A proportion of the stone-throwing Pharisees owe their immaculate reputation to their conspicuous lack of attraction. They stand in a place apart. . . . and secretly wish that they ever had the chance of being as bad as we are, without being found out. But the great army of the pure in heart are mixed with us sinners in the fight. . . .

You may know the Pharisee by his intimate knowledge of the sins he has never committed. . . .

Very piquant cynicisms and philosophies are these, and Mr. Crawford gives us not a few such.

Yet I do not like this latest novel, although written with all of the author’s customary charm. It is strained somewhat. The situation is repellant even to grotesqueness. It may be a Continental possibility, even a probability, yet we shrink from it as an offence to good taste, if from no higher reason.

It is not a healthy tale, nor one to lift us higher, although it possesses all of society tone and form.

“Adam Johnstone’s Son,” by Marion Crawford. McMillan & Co., London. Copp Clark, Toronto.

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When the author of “Donovan”—our favourite Edna Lyle—undertakes to write a story for children, we may be sure it will be worth the reading.

“How the Children Raised the Wind” is a charming little story, simply and prettily told. The little daughter and son of a minister; noted “daddy’s” anxiety concerning the debt on the new church building, and devised a naive and utterly childish plan,—founded on their street experiences,—by which to increase the fund.

Fay could dance; Mowgli could play his organette; Poodle (their dog) could carry a collecting basket around his neck with “Pity the Poor Church” on it; and thus equipped, they started off on a vacation afternoon to collect pennies.

The experiences of the little ones, and the successful issue of their venture, are charmingly told.

Altogether, the story gives a delightful hour to children, while elder folk smile a tender amusement over its clear-typed pages.

“How the Children Raised the Wind,” by Edna Lyle. Clarke & Co., Fleet St., London. Briggs, Toronto.

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BOOKS RECEIVED.—“Varied Occupations in String Work,” by Louisa Walker. McMillan & Co., New York. Copp Clark, Toronto.

REVIEWER.