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A CANADIAN POET.

BY T. G. MARQUIS, IN 'DOMINION ILLUSTRATED MONTHLY.'

Some fourteen years ago the children of the High School at Chatham, New Brunswick, a saw-dust strewn town on the banks of the Miramichi, had their curiosity intensely aroused by the news that the 'new teacher' was a distinguished poet,—having already won a place in *Scribner's Monthly*, then one of the two leading magazines of this continent. This, to their minds, was equivalent to having a world-wide reputation; and a few of us were ready to worship our poet with as much reverence as we now give to Shakespeare, Milton, or Browning. When the poet arrived we were amazed to find that he was little more than a boy; and had it not been for the venerable aspect given to his countenance by a pair of glasses, I am much afraid we would have doubted the reports, and looked upon him as being like unto ourselves.

His influence soon began to be felt. He was a man who could not fail to reach the young heart, joining in our games with all the vigor of his athletic nature; and giving us personal help in our studies with his keen, young intellect. His influence over the minds of the elder pupils was very great, and the hour of his arrival gave some of us our bent. From that hour we loved literature; to one among us it became a passion that even a residence in flat, unpoetic, grain-growing, cheese-producing Ontario cannot eradicate. Every line from his pen has had the power to call up happy memories of days spent under the graceful birch; of rambles by the Miramichi and near the willow-clad city of Fredericton; of hours with the poets, particularly with Shelley, the one who had more power to touch our hearts than any other singer in our language.

'Ave,' C.G.D. Roberts' latest poem, has been before me for several days, and the metre, the thought, the rich coloring, the exquisite pathos, the fine sympathy, have so taken possession of my heart that I have been impelled to write a word in his praise, and to indicate what I believe to be Roberts' place both as a poet and a patriot.

The poem is one of the happiest, from an artistic point of view, that he has ever written. It is in memory of Shelley, and, while characterizing his work and life with marvellous power and fidelity, it gives his influence on the poet himself in so subtle a manner, that it leaves not the slightest doubt as to the sincerity of the work.

Minds unacquainted with Acadian scenery and Roberts' work as a whole, will not, perhaps, at a first reading, or even after many readings, feel the full force and beauty of this poem. What, they will ask, can Tantramar have to do with Shelley? Not much, it is true, but it has a great deal to do with Roberts. Shelley has been to Roberts a grand song impulse, a source of never-dying music; and with Shelley is associated the spot in nature that first

lifted his heart above the material aspect of earthly scenery, and made song take possession of his brain. Those vast Westmoreland flats, 'miles and miles, level, and grassy, and dim,' that red sweep of weedy shore, the blue hills, the sea mists, 'the sting of buffeting salt';—his life is full of them, and they are to his eyes what Shelley is to his mind. Through them he has been taught to look for the beauty, the sublimity, in all nature, just as Shelley has been an inspiration to him in his own lyrical efforts; and the introduction, to anyone acquainted with Roberts' previous work, will be considered not only a fine piece of poetry in itself, but most fitting for this ode. Shelley strikes 'with wondering awe his inward sight,' and these are the very

troughs and tide-worn caves;—are all pieces of local coloring given with a realistic force without a rival in American literature.

His compassionate breast
Wherein abode all dreams of love and peace,
Was tortured with perpetual unrest;

'his eager brain;' 'the avatar of song, Love, Dream, Desire and Liberty;' 'Thy bright and chainless power;' 'the breathless child of change;' all these and many other such expressions give us a fuller insight into the soul and brain of Shelley than all the volumes that the learned compilers have written in these latter days. One stanza is so perfect in its grasp, and so full in its knowledge of Shelley, that it must be given in its entirety.



PROF. CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS.

words he uses to describe the influence of the Tantramar Marshes on his being.

This poem gives us Roberts' mature work. Since the publication of 'Orion,' we have had continuous growth, not, perhaps, so marked as we would have desired, but this poem is a distinct advance on anything he has previously done. Nearly all his old mannerisms are effaced, and his good qualities stand out strong and fine, stamping him as an original poet in force and fire. His characterizations are incomparable; 'the speechless ecstasy of growing June' with its 'long blue hours;' the 'glad bobolink, whose lyric throat peals like a tangle of small bells afloat;' the 'gusty flocks of sand-pipers;' the 'orange flood' coming 'roaring in from Fundy's stumbling

Thyself the lark melodious in mid-heaven:
Thyself the Protean shape of chainless cloud,
Pregnant with elemental fire, and driven
Through deeps of quivering light, and darkness
loud

With tempest, yet beneficent as prayer;
Thyself the wild west wind, relentless strewing
The withered leaves of custom on the air,
And through the wreck pursuing
O'er lovelier Arnos, more imperial Romes,
Thy radiant visions to their viewless homes.

The poem is a master-piece of diction; every word is chosen with unique power, and yet is free from that obtrusiveness that mars the work of even such a word-master as Tennyson. Once or twice such expressions as 'hubbub' and 'troughs' strike us as uncertain but when the mind recalls the tide-tortured New Brunswick and Nova Scotian rivers and salt Fundy's storm-

tossed waters, they are readily recognized as the most fitting words that could have been used.

But the great beauty of the poem—as the predominant beauty of any such poem must be,—is the perfect wedding of the words and thought to the rich music. There is an undertone of mourning in the opening lines; a sadness seems to creep in from the waste of waters, and the music plays a pipe-like dirge along the reedy shore. Sea-shell echoes, sea-bird cries, plaintive marsh notes, seem to haunt the flowing lines that lead up to the lyric love that mourns the death of our unrivalled Prince of Song. The organ responds to every touch of the player. The lyric note, as is natural, is struck with the greatest frequency, but occasionally the verse assumes an epic grandeur that is Miltonic in its sweep:

Ho of the seven cities claimed, whose eyes,
Though blind, saw gods and heroes, and the
fall

Of Ilium, and many alien skies,
And Circe's Isle; and he whom mortals call
The Thunderous, who sang the Titan bound
As thou the Titan victor; the benign
Spirit of Plato; Job; and Judah's crowned
Singer; and sea-divine;
Omar; the Tuscan; Milton, vast and strong;
And Shakespeare, captain of the host of song.

Poets have frequently linked names together in high-sounding lines, but no cluster has, perhaps, a stronger, more original music than this. The breaks and pauses are handled with so much skill, and the whole is so sequacious, that the most unpoetic mind must admire its strength. The stanza beginning:—

Lament, Leric, mourn for the world's loss!
is the essence of plaintive music. It resembles Adonais and several stanzas from 'The Pot of Basil,' but it resembles them only in so far as they are the expression of absolute grief. Shelley and Keats were both lyrical souls, giving unrestrained utterance to their passion, and Roberts' verse has the same spontaneous depth of feeling as their immortal sorrows.

'Ave,' is, I believe, the strongest and most original work of our poet. It is free from the faults of his early classical work, and from the intense realism of his more Canadian poems. He is happy in his theme; and critics will probably place this master-piece alongside of the best work of the kind that has been done in English since Adonais; and this not only on account of its artistic qualities, but for its intensity and depth of thought.

Roberts has now been before the literary world for fifteen years—ever since the publication of Memnon, in 1878—and Canadians, while thinking of him as the Canadian poet, have failed to give the appreciation that his work deserved. It is, perhaps, a mistake to look upon him simply as a Canadian poet. While he is this, his poetry has a universal value; and to speak of a man in that insular way is apt to detract from his influence, even in his own land. He has a gift, rare among men, of being able to take the scenes before his