

AS I LAY A THINKING.

DEDICATED TO THE MONTREAL BOARD OF HEALTH.

As I lay a thinking, a thinking, a thinking,
Merry sang the bird on the Christmas berry tree,
And there came a cheerful shout,
From the children's merry rout,
Popping in and popping out,
Round the tree.
As I lay a thinking "I love the children's glee."

As I lay a thinking, a thinking, a thinking,
Sadly sang the bird as she sat upon the tree:
And I saw the fevered face
Of the fairest in the race,
And a boy, with simple grace,
Bathe her brow.
There another form appears,
'Neath a tender mother's tears,
And the hand of death is here
On a babe!

As I lay thinking "Death hath sad sway."

As I lay a thinking, a thinking, a thinking,
"Birdie," I cried, to the songstress on the tree:
"Say—must it be? must the little ones thus pine,
In the merry Christmas time,
And leave heart-ache in the chime
Of its bells?"—
And the birdie only answered "Cruel man—cruel man!"
And I lay a thinking—"Cruel man?"

As I lay a thinking, a thinking, a thinking,
The birdie touched my eyes, and caused me to see—
Trooping forth, from city sewers,
Ghosts and elves, and ghastly ghoures,
Stealing in at midnight hours,
Where children sleep!

And murdering them!—
As I lay a thinking, "Cruel man?"

As I lay a thinking, a thinking, a thinking,
"Birdie," I cry, "my loves are dear to me—
Is there no land,
Where men do understand,
And with earnest, valiant hand,
Combat Death?"

And the birdie carolled forth: "Oh, come!"
"England's the land—I am going home."
And I lay a thinking, "Going home?"

The birdie carolled on, as she sat upon the tree:
"The *sewers* there," quoth she,
"Are as clean as clean can be,
And the *water* filtered free,
From its foul impurity—
Come, follow me!"
And away flew she—
As I lay a thinking, a thinking, "What might be!"

As I lay a thinking, a thinking, a thinking,
"Farewell, my birdie!" I cried most dolefulle,
"But I'll stay and help the men,
Who with heart, and voice, and pen,
Clear out every filthy den,
And save life!
We will trap our cruel sewers—
Filter water clear and pure,
And bring comfort to the poor
Of Montreal!"

And I lay a thinking—"We must stay."

J. B. E.

[Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.]

CANADIAN AND OTHER POETRY.

BY JOHN READE.

Poetry in Canada is at a discount. Epic, dramatic, lyric, spasmodic, it is a drug, a very assafoetida pill, in the literary market. The publishers keep it at arm's length; the public turns up its nose at it. It has no exchange value at all. It is even worse than worthless.

Editors have a nervous dread of it. They would give a weekly salary to the assassin who would strangle it at its birth. They, themselves, know not what to do with it. Type, the fire, or the balaam box, which? The question is distracting. Oh! save us from our friends who have the gift of rhyme. Their poetry is a day-mare and a night-mare, an intolerable burden. And the coaxings, and parleyings, and begging letters! Snub them? This evil is like a hydra. If you snub the very head off it, there it is again all alive-oh! It has a terrible vitality. It is not even vulnerable. You cannot hurt its feelings. Printers, printers' devils, newsboys are all down on it in vain. You might as well kick an India rubber ball. Confound it, if you attempt it you only kick your own shins. Yes, you may curse it, but it is calm and rhymy all the time.

At last we begin to think that it is like war and other things, a necessary evil.

But, *halte la!* it is not poetry we mean, after all. We have known pretty hard people to be affected by poetry. There is poetry in every human heart. It is not poetry, we mean. It is the sham which calls itself poetry. If we were to utter blasphemies against poetry, we should dread the silent scorn of the "simple great ones gone," who touched the earth and made it musical. It is these native rhymesters we detest, these brawling Canadian poetasters! Poetry in Canada, forsooth! Gold in Bowmanville! No such thing! Poetry does not grow in Canada.

It comes from beyond the sea and beyond the line. Did we not once see Bayard Taylor and fall down and worship him? Did we not drive Dr. Charles Mackay to his wits' end by our adulation, even applauding him when he blundered? Did we not pretend to comprehend Mr. Ralph Waldo Emerson, and even to admire his nasal twang as if it were Apollo's lyre? And are we not still ready to pay enormously for a glimpse of Mr. Tupper or any other mighty genius of those favoured lands where true poetry is cultivated?

But for a mere Canadian—one of ourselves—to be jingling rhymes is simply unbearable. And those who are impudent enough to do so, will not even confine themselves to Canadian subjects—the beaver and maple leaf—so that sometimes one cannot tell which is Canadian and which is not.

Not many years ago some one discovered a plagiarism in some lines written in an album. After the discovery they were pronounced beautiful, having, however, received rather harsh treatment during their short masquerade. Who was supposed to know whether they were pretty or not while they lay under the stigma of Canadian authorship? Who, indeed?

At the gay capital some years ago many persons were similarly deceived into laughing at some verses of the late Mr.

Moore. Those who humbug us in this way ought to be hanged.

As yet we have no poets in Canada. They have been pronounced not to be indigenous. It is really too bad. And there is the St. Lawrence, and Jacques Cartier and—everything yet to be immortalized. Perhaps, indeed, the Imperial Government might send some out to us, after they have settled this treaty business. There are many, we believe, in England besides Drs. Tennyson and Tupper, (the author of "Proverbial Philosophy"). There may be some to spare. Some are poor and obtain pensions. If we paid the pension, would not England give us the poet? We know one who has had a pension for many years. He is the author of these lines:

"Don't put the pins into your mouth,
O Mary Anne, my precious."

He has written verses even better than these. But these, though peculiar, can be easily distinguished from any Canadian effort.

Some people are envious, and complaints are sometimes made by British members of Parliament that the excellence or usefulness of the verses do not compensate for the Government support. They were so cruel not long ago as to stop the pension of an Irish gentleman who wrote some animating strains with the chorus "Down, down, croppy lie down!" We are not told why this interesting individual called a "croppy," inferentially opposed to recumbency, should thus extend himself. Whether for this omission on the part of the author, or for some other reason, we do not know, but the poet lost his pension. It is believed he was an Orangeman.

Mr. Close, an English poet, was equally unfortunate. An older bard says that there is no greater sorrow than to remember the happy time in misery. What, then, must be the feelings of a poet, who has obtained, and alas! lost a government annuity! It is enough to silence him for ever.

Mr. Close (if he has survived his misfortune) is more popular than popular. He thus touchingly alluded to one of his progeny, who, by the interest of a Colonel Lowther, had been placed in one of the public schools:

"May God reward the Colonel kind
Who gave us such a boon;
Whose kindness got him in this school
At such an age, so soon.
Well may we love Col. Lowther's name
Long life may he enjoy,
Whose patronage has crowned our son,
Made him—a Blue Coat Boy."

Mr. Close's poems are, most of them, eulogistic. Here are some lines written in honour of a Miss Hill, who built a church at her own expense:

"We link thy name with glorious Mrs. Fry,
Whose virtues live for ever, never die!
Miss Burdett Coutts, O noble women three!
Nobler-hearted ladies there cannot be!"

Now that Mr. Close, notwithstanding the "Colonel kind," has been done out of his salary, might he not be induced to come and settle in Canada? We should then have a poet. His large family would also be a great advantage. It would be like importing the muses themselves, and all our "Col. Lowthers" would have bards to celebrate them till Doomsday. It is possible that England would spare this poetic patriarch. Having withdrawn his money, she would surely raise no objection to his withdrawing himself. And surely Mr. Close has, after the treatment he has received, no great reason for attachment to such a "perfidious Albion." But the safest way would be to appoint a Commission of Inquiry. There may be some of our rulers or their friends who have not yet travelled.

SKATING AS AN ART.

(From Land and Water.)

During the last half century skating, like various other pursuits and sports, has progressed with giant strides. It has developed, in fact, from a mere exercise into a refined and beautiful art. Not long ago it was considered something of an accomplishment to do the "outside edge" at all. Now there are as many who can do this as there were formerly who could skate at all. He is a dunce indeed who cannot do his backward roll, and even among ladies, of anything under middle age, it is considered rather mild not to be able to skate at all. The professors, those who understand the higher mysteries of the art, have elaborated them to a marvellous degree. The more intricate single figures, executed by a good skater of the present day, constitute a practical adaptation of the principles of balance, at first sight quite incredible, while the concerted figures in vogue at the club require a knowledge of time and steadiness of nerve, and a judgment of pace worthy of a combined Sayers, Angelo, and Fordham. An eight in full swing on the ice is a prettier sight and a greater triumph of science than an eight working on the Thames at Putney or Henley. To make a man a really good skater he requires a regular education, as careful and almost as laborious as that which makes a man an accomplished fencer, or a fair billiard player. Skating has this great advantage, that a thing once learnt is never forgotten—at least it can always be recovered in a very short time. It is, like all other good sport, capable of being improved upon to any extent, perfection being as impossible in skating as it is in chess or cricket. The task, then, of teaching or of learning to skate is really interminable. With every year fresh figures are necessarily invented, and fresh proficiency is acquired. The most that any one can hope to do is to be the best skater of the year.

Skating is among those subjects upon which a few words of practical instruction are worth a whole page of printed directions. Nevertheless, there are a great many lessons that may be taught by mere pen-and-ink rules, and, above all, a great many hints that can be written down to save the beginners from faults and misconceptions. It is not possible for every one to get verbal instruction from a competent master, and even in large places out of London the skaters who are considered the best, and who would be naturally taken as models, have a style spoilt by some hideous fault of which they and their admirers are profoundly unconscious. The correction of faults is perhaps a most important—certainly a more generally necessary—lesson than the description of new figures. A few chapters on skating cannot fail to be interest-

ing to the large mass of our readers who, from various causes, find it impossible to get access to any good club, or even individual good skater, who might put them in the way of doing those figures, or mastering those difficulties that are before them. The following chapters will contain hints rather than detailed directions; and illustrations will be added to give a clearer explanation of the more advanced and more difficult figures. It is to the more advanced skater rather than to beginners, that written instructions must always be most valuable. It is impossible by any amount of printed directions to teach a beginner to do the outside edge. But, that once mastered, a book can suggest and exemplify the various figures which he is now quite able to execute, though he could not invent them on his own account. We shall, therefore, rather hurry over the earlier lessons and pass on quickly to that point where, taking for granted the ability of the skater to do the mechanical part of the business, we have only to show him how to combine the turns and edges so as to execute the various figures. The most valuable part of our instructions, if they shall have any value at all, will be the making known to country skaters, and to Londoners who do not belong to the club, the figures skated by the English Skating Club, and the style which is *de rigueur* there. New figures, as they are introduced and generally approved, are sure always to find their way to the club rink, and our readers may rely on having an explanation of them given when they are worthy of adoption.

Our subject being skating as an art, we have nothing to do with mere straightforward skating on the inside edge. But just as children must walk before they can run, so the skater must do the inside edge before he can get on at all. We will, therefore, say just one word or two on the subject of the inside edge forwards before leaving it altogether and proceeding to the edges used in figure skating. But first of all, a word as to skates. During the last two years the use of the *acme* skate of Messrs. Starr and Mann, the American makers, has become so general, or almost universal, as to pretty well supersede all the older kinds. For convenience, lightness, and portability, it is decidedly superior to any. For figure-skating it is to all intents and purposes quite secure enough. Members of the club who have given it a long and severe trial pronounce a verdict that it has proved thoroughly satisfactory. The only thing necessary is a strong, well-fitted, laced-up boot, with a heel perfectly straight, and not, as is commonly the case, slanting inwards as it descends from the foot towards the ground. With such slanting heels the skates can never hold properly, and many people who try the *acme* skates first reject them in disgust from this simple cause alone. For racing or any kind of violent skating this pattern is hardly strong enough; the spring will fly up under a very strong strain, and the whole framework may give way under a heavy man. For more absolute security it is best to have a regular skate-boot, with the blade rivetted on to the sole of the foot. Most of the old school still adhere to this pattern, and feel more comfortable and secure with a skate that they know cannot part company with them. After all it is very little more trouble to carry a boot and skate up to the ice than it is to carry the skate alone.

The A B C of the skater's art, or rather the introduction to that A B C, is the inside edge forwards, in fact, the mere process of progression in a forward direction. No one has ever gone on to figure-skating without first learning the ugly and useless, but necessarily preliminary, step. There is nothing, unless it be a learner of the velocipedic art, more helpless and foolish-looking than a beginner on the ice. His difficulties arise practically from two causes, the awkwardness of his ankles, and the tendency of his feet to slip about in every direction, backwards and forwards, except the right one. The first of these defects must be cured by practice; a day or two will get over it. The second is obviated by attending to one simple hint—"Keep the toes always well turned out." The body must be kept well in front of the feet, and at beginning each stroke the commencing foot should start from close alongside, and, of course, *inside* the other. It is impossible to make the movement graceful, therefore the bending of the body forward is not a fault. Let the beginner attend to these two hints, and in a very few hours he will be able at least to "get along."

Of all the undignified and humiliating positions in which a human being can find itself, there is perhaps none that equals that of a beginner on skates. A feeling of utter helplessness and feebleness is combined with the uncomfortable consciousness that any moment an incautious, or even involuntary movement may bring one constantly or utterly to grief. The sensation is not altogether unlike the well-known nightmare, when, though making frantic efforts to run away, one's legs absolutely refuse to move, and one stands, an abject and powerless creature, a prey to the tortures of dismay. Besides this feeling and the loss of dignity which attends it, there is the actual pain of the tumbling about, which to different persons in different ways is often by no means insignificant. Both the tall and lean, and the short and podgy, suffer their share of bodily inconvenience, the former ornamenting their elbows and other bones with various hues of black, blue, and green, while the latter receive on less angular parts of their anatomy the more ponderous shocks of their heavy falls. So great, in fact, are the troubles, pains, griefs, and terror of a first lesson, that it is almost impossible to induce any one of years of discretion to make the attempt. Ladies are more courageous in this matter than the stronger sex, but then they have almost always a good supply of cavaliers to save them from the dangers that beset their path.

Such being the state of the case, it is evident that any man who should come to the rescue of human kind, and enable them to learn even simply to keep upright on skates without the fear of tumbling down too often in the process, would deserve the gratitude of very many people. And this has actually been done long ago, although very few of us are aware of it in England. In Russia it has long been the almost universal custom to teach ladies and children to skate by means of an iron machine on which they rest, and which makes it absolutely impossible for them to fall. One of these machines was actually started some few years ago by a gentleman near Cheltenham; but this is the only one, as far as I know, that has yet been seen in England, though its construction is simple enough, and the cost very small. Every pond which is frequented by skaters, should have some few of these machines on hire. After a bit, they would soon find plenty of occupants, and the owner of them would make a good thing by their hire. The machine, which is, in fact, a sort of cage, is constructed in the following manner: The lower part of it consists mostly of two long rails of iron turned up at their