

the diminution of rainfall will destroy the surrounding territories. This, he says, has already occurred in historic times, whole countries having been desolated by the shrinkage of the Caspian. He recommends that a deep and broad cutting should be made from the Caspian westward to a point where it would be five metres below the level of the Black Sea, and a smaller cutting from that point to the Black Sea. The water of the latter, which is 15 metres higher than that of the Caspian, would then cut a deep and broad channel for itself, and refill the Caspian to its old level, giving, in fifty years, straight ocean communication between the Mediterranean and Persia. The distance between the Black Sea and the Caspian is 160 miles. The period required for refilling might be reduced one-half by a cut connecting the Don and the Volga, so that the waters of both rivers, instead of those of the Volga only, might fall into the Caspian. Mr. SPALDING calculates that the two cuttings might be finished in six years, but says nothing of the expense, which might, however, be reduced by the employment of convicts and the penal regiments of the army.

In his last annual report, just received, the energetic Chief of Police, of this city, makes a wise recommendation which, we trust, will be acted on—that the police be authorized, on their own complaint before the Recorder, to arrest the inmates of all disreputable houses of all descriptions, whenever the scandal is manifest or the locality unsuitable; and also that the police should not be compelled to wait for citizens to lodge their complaints, for, as a rule, the latter, either through repugnance or fear, are seldom willing to do so. Last year the detective force of Montreal recovered a sum of nearly \$52,000, or \$8,000 more than in 1874.

We are informed that the French have at last relinquished their claim to an exclusive right of fishing on the Newfoundland shores, but still hold to a concurrent right. This is a most important concession. Our fishermen there can now compete with them, and the Western Shore can be settled, and magistrates appointed to administer the law. The Emperor of Russia is said to be appointed arbitrator in the settlement of the French and British treaty rights in reference to Newfoundland fisheries.

We have received the penultimate sheets of the *Hansard*, and the whole, when bound, will make a handsome, portly volume. This publication should by no means be allowed to drop. The public have a right to be consulted in the matter. The work is the best record that we have of the current history of the country.

## CANADIAN POETS.

## FOURTH PAPER.

## JOHN READE.

A few years ago, when we first came to this city, a total stranger, we happened on an old copy of the Montreal *Evening Telegraph* and our eye fell on the following lines:—

## GOOD NIGHT.

## I.

Good night! God bless thee, love, where'er thou art,  
And keep thee, like an infant, in His arms!  
And all good messengers that move unseen  
By eye un-darkened, and on noiseless wings  
Carry glad tidings to the doors of sleep,  
Touch all thy tears to pearls of heavenly joy.

Oh! I am very lonely, missing thee;  
Yet, morning, noon, and night, sweet memories  
Are nestling round thy name within my heart.  
Like summer birds in frozen winter woods.  
Good night! Good night! Oh, for the mutual word!  
Oh, for the loving pressure of thy hand!  
Oh, for the tender parting of thine eyes!  
God bless thee, love, where'er thou art! Good night.

## II.

Good night, my love! Another day has brought  
Its load of grief and sorrow to my heart,  
So full already, joy is crushed to death.  
And hope stands mute and shivering at the door.  
Still, memory, kind angel, stays within,  
And will not leave me with my grief alone.  
But whispers of the happy days that were  
Mad glorious by the light of thy pure eyes.  
Oh, shall I ever see thee, love, again,  
My own, my darling, my soul's best beloved,  
Far more than I had ever hoped to find  
Of true and good and beautiful on earth?  
Oh! shall I ever see thee, love, again?  
My treasure found and loved and lost, good night!

## III.

Good night, my love! Without, the wintry winds  
Make the night sadly vocal; and within,  
The hours that danced along so full of joy,  
Like specters have come from their graves,  
And sit beside me at my lonely fire.  
Guests grim but welcome, which my fancy decks  
In all the beauty that was theirs when thou  
Didst look and breathe and whisper softly on them.  
So do they come and sit, night after night,  
Talking to me of thee till I forget  
That they are mere illusions and the past  
Is gone forever. They have vanished now,  
And I am all alone, and thou art—where?  
My love, good angels bear thee my good night!

These lines were read carelessly as a man will read in a listless mood, when he has nothing better to do than to skim a stray newspaper. But somehow their music struck us and our attention was arrested. We looked at the verses again. There was no trick of rhyme to help them. Their music was solely due to exquisite rhythm and the artistic marriage of the pathetic sentiment to the soft lapse of the cadences. We read them over once more and with such critical insight as we were possessed of. The result was that we opened our pen-knives, we owned a pen-knife in those days—"sliced" out the piece bodily, and carefully stowed it away in our pocket-book.

"The man who wrote that is a poet, and I shall hear of him again," was the mental reflection then and there made. The poem was signed by the meaningless letters X. Y. Z., if we remember aright, and dated from some such outlandish place as Maseocher, but we felt confident that the name of the author would yet appear, and we were not mistaken.

Anyone who will so far risk his life as to penetrate into the arca of the *Gazette* office, in this city, will find sitting in the p-nubra of a large room, and in front of a large table, a tall, thin, handsome, black-haired, black-bearded and dark-eyed man, in the prime of life, hard at work at some of the multitudinous drudgeries of newspaper-making. A huge pair of shears is at his right; an immense paste pot at his left; in front towers a mass of "slips" and manuscript; around him the floor is so littered with newspapers that, if you are not too much awed to forget your classics, you will compare him to Marius sitting among the ruins of Carthage. He may be approached with impunity, for he is not the fighting editor of the *Gazette*. He is gentle, low-voiced, almost timid. He will greet you with a smile and treat you with the greatest courtesy. It is the poet whom we sought, and his name is John Reade.

Mr. Reade is an old journalist and an adept in every branch of the profession, from the rapid editing of a local paragraph on the hem of his sleeve cuff, to the composition of the most elaborate editorial article on any subject of current interest. It is violating no secret, for there is internal evidence to show that he does some of the best work in the columns of the *Gazette* to-day, as he has done in years past on most of the journals of this city, while his name as contributor to all the periodicals which have, from time to time, struggled for existence in Canada, was always regarded as one of their claims to popular support. Although a very rapid writer—a qualification of importance in a journalist—all his articles are distinguished by literary finish and maturity of thought. The reason is that he writes from a full mind, and that his vast stores of reading are always at the disposition of his pen. We speak deliberately when we affirm that there is perhaps not a more accomplished scholar in Montreal, one more conversant with all the phases of literature, with the ancient languages, with the French and German tongues, while if he has any special bent—as most men have—it is towards the study of philosophy, theology and the serious branches of historical and critical inquiry. The proper place of such a man would be a professorship in one of our highest institutions of learning, as incumbent of the Chair of Belles Lettres or Modern Languages, and it is simply a pity that in a large city like Montreal, where blatant mediocrity is so much prized and showy men carry off the honors, two real poets, like Heavysege and Reade, should be entirely overlooked, and allowed to waste the golden days of their prime and the bloom of their talents in the thankless and often mechanical work of journalism. But there is no use meralizing, and we must turn from the poet to his poems.

In 1870, Mr. Reade published a handsome volume entitled *The Prophecy of Merlin* and other Poems. The work achieved a *success d'estime*, as it was bound to do, from its merits, and it brought its author's name well before the public. But if it had been issued in London or New York, as it should have been, it would have proved a source of emolument as well as reputation, and encouraged the poet to continue in the career of his choice.

The *Prophecy of Merlin* is a composition of considerable length, written in blank verse, and in much the same spirit which dictated Tennyson's *Idyls of the King*. The mention of the Laureate suggests a comparison from which Mr. Reade has nothing to fear. He may be called the Tennyson of Canada. When we began this series on the Canadian Poets, some months ago, a gentleman of Quebec wrote to us expressing the hope that we would "not forget John Reade, the sweetest of our poets." Sweetness is precisely his characteristic, and it is the sweetness of Tennyson, rather than of Longfellow, marked by terseness of thought, and extreme tenderness of sentiment.

The analysis of the *Prophecy of Merlin* is briefly this. Sir Bedivere watched the barge that bore King Arthur to the valley of Avalon, till it disappeared from sight. Then standing

upon the beach, surrounded by the dead, he lifted up his voice and lamented the end of the Arthurian reign.

And then he drew his blade, and threw it far  
Into the Lake, and, as he saw it sink,  
"Would God," said he, "that so I followed him."  
But with the strain his wound began to bleed,  
And he grew weak, and sank upon the ground,  
And swooned.

When he awakes, Merlin stands watching by his side, and after staunching his wound and giving him wine out of a golden flask, and thus restoring him sound and whole, the Prophet consoles the Knight. He reminds him that there is no use bewailing the irretrievable past.

As in the forests of Broceliande,  
The leaves fall year by year, and give the oaks  
All bare to wintry blasts, so swept away  
Before the breath of Time, the race of men  
Passes away, and may be seen no more.  
And yet the breeze of Spring is no less sweet,  
Which plays around the tender budding leaves,  
And ends to life their beauty, that it is  
As well a requiem as a baby song.

Rather should Bedivere look forward to the glorious future in store for the blessed race of Arthur. This future forms the burden of Merlin's prophecy and the subject of the poem. After a rapid and pleasant historical review, he comes to the present Queen who receives a glowing tribute.

And she, the fourth fair tenant of the throne,  
Heir to the ripe fruit of long centuries,  
Shall reign o'er such an empire, and her name,  
Clasping the trophies of all nations, won  
By knightly deeds in every land and sea,  
Shall be VICTORIA.

He then takes up the praise of Prince Albert through a stretch of eloquent lines, and builds him his emblematic Crystal Palace where

The hands  
Of many nations with a brother's clasp  
Shall join together; and the Babel tongues  
Of Eastern, Western, Northern, Southern lands  
Shall strive no more in discord, but, as one,  
Shall make harmonious music, as of yore  
The sound of four great rivers that did fell  
Through fragrant splendours of the Eden-world.

Adapting his poem to the memorable visit of Prince Arthur, he thus speaks of him and of Canada:—

And of the Good Queen and the Blameless Prince  
One son shall be named Arthur—  
He shall be true, and brave, and generous  
In speech and act to all of all degrees,  
And win the unsought guardian of men's love,  
In a far land beneath the setting sun,  
A land of stately woods,  
Of swift broad rivers, and of ocean lakes,  
The name of Arthur—him that is to be—  
Shall shed new glories upon him we loved.

The next longest poems in the volume, and the most of them in that smooth blank verse which Mr. Reade wields so well, are on Scriptural subjects—such as Balaam, Rizzah, Jubal, Sisera, Jephthah and Vashti. There is also a number of lyrics, suggested by events of the time or of Canadian interest, as the Fenian Raid, In Memoriam T. D. McGee, Dominion Day (a poem after the Greek modulated pattern), The Old War Horse, The Departure of the Prince of Wales from Portland, and an Ode on the Marriage of the Prince of Wales. These are all interesting, but, in our opinion, they are the least successful of Mr. Reade's poems. He seems to us to lack somewhat the rush and swing of the lyric muse. His genius is rather meditative than expansive. His special gift is more intellectual than sentimental, except that sentiment which is the pathos of grief and regret. Hence we fancy that he would write an admirable philosophic poem, and we should like to have him try a work of the nature of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. Hence, too, the extreme beauty of his elegies, such as *Per Noctem Plurima Volvens*, *Beautiful Why Wilt Thou Die*, *Thalatta*, and the following which we cannot refrain from citing:—

## I.

In my heart are many chambers through which I wander  
free—  
Some are furnished, some are empty, some are sombre,  
some are light;  
Some are open to all comers, and of some I keep the key,  
And I enter in the stillness of the night.

## II.

But there's one I never enter—it is closed to even me!  
Only once its door was opened and it shut for evermore,  
And though sounds of many voices gather round it, like  
the sea,  
It is silent, ever silent, as the shore.

## III.

In that chamber, long ago, my love's casket was concealed,  
And the jewel that it sheltered I knew only one could  
win;  
And my soul foreboded sorrow, should that jewel be revealed,  
And I almost hoped that none might enter in.

## IV.

Yet day and night I lingered by that fatal chamber door,  
Till—she came at last, my darling one, of all the earth  
my own;  
And she entered—and she vanished with my jewel,  
which she wore,  
And the door was closed—and I was left alone.

## V.

She gave me back no jewel, but the spirit of her eyes  
Shone with tenderness a moment, as she closed that  
chamber door,  
And the memory of that moment is all I have to prize—  
But that, at least, is mine for evermore.

## VI.

Was she conscious, when she took it, that the jewel was  
my love?  
Did she think it but a bauble she might wear or toss  
aside?  
I know not, I care not, but I hope that it may prove  
A blessing, though she spurn it in her pride.

As an author's life lies buried in his works, would it be an indiscretion to find in this beautiful poem the secret of much of its author's psychological history and destiny?

From what we have conceived to be Mr. Reade's particular turn of mind, it follows that he should be an adept in the art of writing sonnets. And such is the case. In this respect we can boldly compare him to Longfellow and Lowell, the princes of American sonnetters. Our space will not admit of many examples, but here is one:—

## THE PATRIOT.

God help the man who mortgages his life  
For patriot dues! Henceforward he is safe  
No more. His noblest virtues only chafe  
The hydra that he serves to lust of strife.  
His honour, duty, reverence, sense of right,  
His self-respect, his every social tie,  
All that for which the world's best heroes fight,  
Must be surrendered, or, unless he die,  
He is a slave—mayhap, a despot-slave.  
Like Dionysius, fearful of the light,  
Or Pelagius, begging to his grave  
Through streets o'er which his conquering banners  
wave.

And his reward—to have poor poets sigh  
Above his dust the requiem of the brave.

And here is another:—

If Homer ne'er had sung: if Socrates  
Had never lived in virtue's cause to die;  
If the wild chorus of the circling seas  
Had never echoed back poor Sappho's sigh;  
If Sparta had not, with her purest blood,  
Traced on all time the name Thermopylae;  
If Greece united through the surging flood  
Of Persian pride had not arisen free;  
If nought of great, or wise, or brave or good  
Had proved thee Hellas, what thou wast to be:  
Save that thou didst create "Antigone"—  
Thou still hadst in the van of nations stood.  
Fall'n are thy noblest temples, but above  
Them all still stands thy shrine of Woman's Love.

Attached to the volume are what the author modestly styles *Essays in Translation*, all of them most excellent, as might be expected from his scholarship and his poetic sympathy. These translations are from Hömer, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides, Virgil, Horace, Ovid, among the ancients, and from Arnaut, Chénier, Lamartine, Béranger, Victor Hugo, Koerner, Heine and others, among the modern French and German poets. The versions are in general almost literal, a *tour de force* of which the difficulty is well understood among students.

We must add to our quotations the following specimen of Mr. Reade's Latin verse:—

Ex mediis viridem surgentem ut beta columba  
Undis aspectu post tempora tristia, terram.  
Et levibus volitantibus folia albis carpit olivæ.  
Pacifera et redit, libertatemque iuratum  
Navali inclinis in carcere significavit.  
Sic terram, laetis, super aquora vasta, Columbus  
Insequitur, ventis astrisque faventibus, albis:  
Inventam et terram placidis consecit olivæ.  
Ævorum super aquora parva columba columbum  
Insula persequitur cum vatebantibus albis!  
Omnia nuntia sunt et verba, facta reguntur.  
Procerum nectitur futuro, Eterna Coloma.

We have preferred to quote largely from the poems of Mr. Reade rather than indulge in any lengthy criticisms of our own, partly because our main object is to make the poet better known to all our readers in every part of the Dominion, and partly because our own views, if fully expressed, might savor of extravagance. We make no secret of our belief, however, that we have in this city, in the persons of Heavysege and Reade, two poets equal to any, with three or four exceptions, whose names have become household words in England and the United States. Certainly—to mention only a few American poets—they are in every respect the equals of the Bayard Taylors, the Hollands, the Stedmans, the Aldriches, the Fawcetts, the Bookers, the Baileys, the Trowbridges, the Howells, and if they have not the same reputation, the fault is ours, not theirs. We conclude with the reproduction of the following noble poem, for which we challenge a superior in condensation of thought, picturesque grouping, melodious rhythm and beauty of moral.

## UNSPOKEN.

.....Quis prodere tanto relatu  
possit?  
CLAUDIAN.

There is a voice that never stirs the lips—  
Felt, but not heard; that vibrates through the soul—  
A solemn music; but no human speech  
Can give that music to the ambient air.

The noblest poem poet ever wrote:  
The brightest picture artist ever drew:  
The loftiest music lyrist ever sung:  
The gentlest accents woman ever spoke—  
Are paraphrases of a felt original.  
That lip, or pen, or pencil, cannot show  
Unto the seeing eye or listening ear.  
The thoughts we utter are but half themselves.  
The poet knows this well. The artist knows  
His hands bear not the burden of his thoughts  
Upon the canvas. The musician knows  
His soul must ever perish on his lips.  
Even the eye—the window of the soul—  
Though it may shed a light a little way,  
Gives but a glimpse of that which burns within.

The sweet unconscious tenderness of dowers:  
The boundless awe of star-enircled night;  
The tear that trickles down an old man's cheek;  
Ocean's loud pulse, that makes own our beat high;  
The vocal throb of a great multitude:  
The pause when we have heard and said "Farewell,"  
And feel the presence of a hand that's gone;  
The thought that we have wronged our truest friend,  
When he is sleeping in the arms of Death,  
The silent, fitful anguish that engulfs  
Him who has found the precious power to love,

And sees that all he loves is torn from him;  
His dying moments who is void of hope;  
Jezabel: Nero: Judas: any one  
Of all the hideous things that crawl through life  
In human form;—what mortal could express  
All that he feels in one or all of these,  
Giving the very image of his thought?

Life, Death, Hell, Judgment, Resurrection, God—  
Who can express their meaning? Who can bound  
Awe that is infinite, in finite words?  
Thus much of us must ever be concealed—  
Spite of the high ambition to be born  
Of what is noblest in us,—till His truth  
Who woke the morning stars to sing their song,  
Awake our soul to fuller utterance.