

THE CANADA
EDUCATIONAL MONTHLY

JANUARY, 1901.

KINGSLEY'S WATER BABIES.

BY PROFESSOR WILLIAM CLARK, D.C.L.

“THE Water Babies” appeared originally in separate chapters in *Macmillan's Magazine* from month to month, in the year 1863, and shortly afterwards was published in a volume. On the whole the reception accorded to the story was favorable, although some critics complained that it was too childish for grown-up people and too heavy for children. To some it appeared as a somewhat nonsensical fairy tale, to others as an allegory of great depth and beauty.

The present writer very soon came to the opinion that the story had a deep, spiritual meaning, representing the inner life of man, in its various phases. Some friends, who stood in doubt as to the accuracy of his interpretation, suggested that he should publish, in order that Mr. Kingsley might decide as to his meaning in the book. With some hesitation the writer consented to do so, and published his exposition of *The Water Babies* in an English monthly magazine. Shortly afterwards he received a letter from Canon Kingsley, in which he said: “From beginning to end I desire not one word more or less as regards my meaning.”

It may be well to mention that

the judgment of the present writer is confirmed by the late Mr. Thomas Hughes, author of “*Tom Brown's School Days*,” and a personal friend of Mr. Kingsley, who contributed an article on *The Water Babies* to the magazine *Atalanta* (Vol. i., p. 530), in which he speaks of the story as not only “a fairy tale, as the author calls it, but containing, nevertheless, the most complete and consistent summing up of his matured views on theological, political, and social subjects, that is to be found in any of his writings. The exposition of Judge Hughes, as far as it goes, is in complete agreement with that which is here given.

The hero of *The Water Babies* is named Tom. He is, in the first period of the story, a chimney sweep, and in the second a Water Baby. The second period, the history of the Water Baby, may be divided into three parts: (1) His life in the river before he helped the lobster out of the pot; (2) His life in St. Brandon's Isle under the discipline of the fairies, Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid and Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby; (3) The period from the time when he set off for the Otherendofnowhere to the end of the story.

The first period, that of the