

## SOME CANADIAN SONNETS.

WITH some readers who seek for mere amusement and excitement in poetry—that is to say, with the majority—the Sonnet can never be popular. The narrow limits prescribed to it compel a concentration of thought and feeling only to be properly understood and appreciated by minds of some culture, and its delicate touches of description, its brief words of love, grief, hope, and aspiration, can wake no responsive emotion in natures insensible to the *curiosa felicitas* of expression, and who are incapable of reading between the lines. In Queen Elizabeth's time when Italian travel and a knowledge of Italian poetry were considered indispensable to a young man of rank, it was the favorite mode of versification; every one who aimed at a place among the *beau esprits* wrote Sonnets, and all people of taste and refinement read them. But this was only a literary fashion, and never extended far beyond the sphere of court influence. In Shakspeare's Sonnets, if anywhere, that exception which is said to prove every rule ought to be found. Their intense passion, their deep pathos, their wealth of imagery, are altogether unique in that form of composition. So far from appearing subject to metrical exigencies, "thoughts that breathe and words that burn" seem to unfold themselves spontaneously in a strain of magic music. Yet Stevens, a once famous critic and editor of Shakspeare, declared that nothing short of an act of Parliament could compel the English people to read them, and even now, when poetic taste is so much more widely diffused, they are comparatively few to whom they are more than a name.

To poets of a certain order, thoughtful, philosophical, self-reverent, self-controlled, and skilful in the use of language and metre, the art of expressing, through the delicate mechanism of the Sonnet's "small lute," the most subtle aroma of feeling, the most refined essence of thought, has always had a peculiar fascination. Wordsworth, who delighted in planting poetic flowers

"Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground,"

recounts its "just honors" in such a lofty strain that, well-known as it is, we hope to be excused for repeating it here:—

"Scorn not the Sonnet, Critic, you have frowned,  
Mindless of its just honors; with this key  
Shakspeare unlocked his heart; the melody  
Of this small lute gave ease to Petrarch's wound;  
A thousand times this pipe did Tasso sound;  
With it Camoens soothed an exile's grief;  
The Sonnet glittered, a gay myrtle leaf,  
Amid the cypress with which Dante crowned  
His visionary brow; a glow-worm lamp  
It cheered mild Spencer, called from Faery-land  
To struggle through dark ways; and when a damp  
Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand  
The Thing became a trumpet; whence he blew  
Soul-animating strains—alas! too few."