

lived up to advance notices. Miss Leslie lived in Fergus in our youth, we think on Tower street, near the bridge. We knew her as the author of two books, one about the Kings and Queens of Scotland, the other on English history, with prose and verse and illustrations, and nicely bound. Miss Leslie used to sell these herself and nowadays they are considered of some value, because they are scarce. We did not suspect that Miss Leslie had once written a novel that was libellous and to which she would not attach her own name.

Mr. Johnston says that Miss Leslie disguised her characters rather thinly. We can quite believe it. Mary Paxton, heroine of the story, is probably Mary Leslie herself. If so, she must have had some angry relatives, including the doctor and a minister or two. The hero is the driver of the mail stage from Gibbeline to Cromaboo. We would not know about the characters, for the book was printed in Guelph in 1878, which was 70 years ago, but the names of the places are easy to guess. Gibbeline is Guelph, of course. (The Guelphs and the Gibbelines were warring families in Italy long ago.) The Gibbeline Stage Road is undoubtedly the Eramosa Road from Guelph to Erin. Overton would be Everton. But Cromaboo eluded us for a while. The name itself meant nothing but the evidence soon piles up. It was on the Eramosa road, 20 miles from Guelph, on the Credit Valley Railway. Its chief tavern was "The Harp of Erin." The doctor lived on an island in the river. A high gravel hill rose beside the village—and so on. It must be Erin, as it was 80 years ago. But listen to the opening paragraph of the first chapter of the book:

Cromaboo is the most blackguard village in Canada, and is settled by the lowest class of Irish, Highland Scotch and Dutch. It consists of seven taverns, six churches, and about one hundred shabby frame houses built on little gravelly mounds. Fights are frequent, drunkenness flourishes, vice abounds. more tobacco is smoked there than in any village of the same size in the Dominion; swearing is so common that it passes unnoticed, and there is an illegitimate child in nearly every house—in some two, in others three, in one six—and the people think it no sin. Yet, even in this Sodom, there was at the time of which I write, a Lot. That's pretty hot stuff. We couldn't believe that Erin was ever like that. Later, the writer changes the picture a bit. The number of taverns is cut to two; churches to two or three and a few, very few, decent characters emerge.

The novel interested us greatly. It follows the old pattern of the time, when a great deal of class distinction survived in Canada. In those novels, at least, the illegitimate son of a titled man was superior to an honest workman. The servant could not sit at the same table as his master. Children of ten or twelve became servant girls. No decent young lady went out with a man unless she was chaperoned—and so on.

The old novel is not expertly done, by modern standards. It contradicts itself in spots. It has extra characters that clutter it up with their stories. The story does not end, either happily or unhappily, and is not complete. Obviously Miss Leslie planned a sequel, and she says that in the introduction. Perhaps the hot reception her first novel received discouraged her, and made her turn to history afterwards, or perhaps she wrote it and never had it printed. Anyway, this adds an interesting chapter to the literary history of Wellington county.

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