

SOME CANADIAN POETS.

II. JOHN READE.

Perhaps there may be some doubt in the minds of many of my readers as to whether Mr. Sangster should not have the second place among Canadian Poets in preference to the one I have chosen, and I confess the choice was not an easy one to make; however, though Mr. Sangster has done more work and of much more popular style, yet his poems lack somewhat of the classical strength and purity so apparent in Mr. Reade's, for which reason I have placed the latter first. In 1870 Mr. Reade published his only volume of poems *so far*, and from that date till 1880 many a charming little sonnet or poem flowed from his pen into the columns of the public press and became a household memory to more than one of his readers. Since that date, he has been prevented by a busy editorial life from giving the time to poetry which his talents certainly deserve. Let us hope that some day not far distant will see a second volume appearing under his name. Mr. Reade is evidently a man of no mean learning and his muse is an educated one, which at once places him above the untaught genius struggling with thoughts and feelings which he has never learned how to express. His longest poem "*The Prophecy of Merlin*" was written while Prince Arthur was here in Canada, and at that time an impression prevailed in some circles that he might remain as our permanent ruler. Had he done so, the poem would have had a point which it has to a certain extent lost. But yet there are many beauties and original ideas throughout the whole poem that render it much more than a mere copy of Tennyson's *Idyll* (in which style it is written), and without which it would perhaps be displeasing by comparison with the great prototype. The plan of the poem is as follows: After the departure of Arthur, in the barge with the three queens, to the land of Avalon, Sir Bedivere is left alone to mourn in utter despair; unto him Merlin appears and foretells the future of Britain under Kelts, Northmen, Saxons, Danes, and Normans, and how they all blend into one mighty nation. The three queens he saw in the barge with Arthur shall reign as Elizabeth, Mary, and Anne, and then after many years shall come another,

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 ages won
By knightly deeds in every land and sea
Shall be *VICTORIA*.

Her long and prosperous reign is described in fitting language and then comes the point of the whole poem in the name Arthur of one of her sons who is to inherit the greatness and goodness of his distant predecessor in ruling a Western land, Canada, which is yet unknown.

Many of the best poems that follow are upon Scriptural subjects, one of which, "*Rizpah*" will be found elsewhere quoted *in toto*. Most of the others are also excellent among them we may mention *Vashti*, *Balaam*, *Jubal*, and *Sisera*.

Mr. Reade does not often indulge in a portrayal of the "tender passion" but when he does, it is with considerable grace and skill; witness the following extract from "*Good Night*."

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, wherever thou art! Good night.

The patriotism and loyalty of the man are every where apparent, and this is very refreshing in an age when the good old fashioned royalism is only a thing to be laughed at, and downright treason is permitted in the pulpits, and press, and upon the public platform. In this connection we may mention the following poems, *Shakspeare*, *The Fenian Raid*, *Dominion Day*, and two Poems on the Prince of Wales. But perhaps it is in translation that Mr. Reade has found his special forte. Those grand passages of Homer's *Illiad* telling of the parting of Andromache and Hector are given by him in English verse so good that they lose hardly any, if aught, of their original beauty. Who does not remember the graphic scene here translated.

- - - - - And in the arms
Of his dear wife he placed the little child.
She clasped the treasure to her fragrant breast,
Tearfully smiling. And her husband's soul
Was touched with pity, and he nursed her hand,
And called her by her name: "Andromache,
My love, fret not thyself too much for me!"

and again, the following from Andromache's lament for her dead husband.

Then to his widowed mother all in tears,
My boy will come, my sweet Astyanax,
Who erstwhile, fondled on his father's knee,
Shared in the choicest tit-bits of the board;
And when, at eve, his childish prattle ceased,
Lulled by his tender nurse, his little head
Reposed on downy pillow, and his cheek
Glowed with the silent pleasure of his heart.

Parts also of the chorus taken from the *Agamemnon* of *Aschylus* he has beautifully translated, along with several more extracts from the *Illiad* and parts of *Euripides*, *Horace*, *Virgil*, *Ovid*, and a few French authors.

Here we quote in full his poem, entitled *Rizpah*; to any one at all acquainted with the Old Testament story it needs no explanation.