

Then came a change. A cold wave, as we now say, swept over us. It had swirled across the great western plains in a terrible blizzard, but when it reached Ontario its force was nearly spent. Yet the wind blew raw and chill, dull heavy clouds covered the sky, and the thawing ceased. The boys put away their marbles, and the girls their skipping-ropes. The birds sought the shelter of deep thickets. Only the crows braved the weather, and they were blown helplessly about under the low, drifting clouds, cawing vehemently in futile protest against the adverse winds.

It remained cold for more than a fortnight, and then the weather began to grow milder and brighter. The birds came out again. The blue-birds and gray-birds were lively and hopeful. But the robins warbled plaintively. It was as if their recent disappointment in the weather had filled them with a distrust of all appearances; or perhaps they were despondent because their mates had so long delayed their arrival from the south.

Slowly the winter left us. The snow grew gray and old looking, and day after day sunk away a little until large spots of ground were bare and began to dry. Tiny rills gurgled and rippled on the hill-sides, a little torrent coursed impetuously down every ravine, the ice in the ponds and larger streams broke up, and the valleys were flooded with turbid water. In the woods the sap had begun to ascend the trees, and some farmers were making maple sugar. The swamp willows were putting forth their soft, grey catkins. On city streets the red maple was in flower, and the lilac branches that grew out over the garden fences were tipped with swollen buds.

The bay was still covered with ice, but it was gray and porous, and the first swell from the lake would be sure to break it up. Already the deep water was showing in spots near the docks. Men were busily at work on the vessels tied up there, refitting them for the new season's work.

After a week had passed I took a tramp into the country. The snow had disappeared from the fields, except where it had drifted deep in the corners of the zig-zag fences. The ploughed lands looked very wet; here and there the water lay in pools or filled the furrows. Blue-birds flitted from stake to stake along the fences. The female robins had just arrived, and the male birds were seeking their acquaintance with mellow warblings, but as yet all such courteous advances received no encouragement; their future mates were shy and quiet, and entirely ignored their ardent wooing.

I struck into a hardwood bush where some maple trees had been tapped. The sap was dropping very slowly into the buckets, and the run was evidently over for the season. There was no snow in the more open places, but the hollows were full of water, and even on the level I sank at every step to the ankles in the soggy leaves and earth. A valley, thick with cedars, lay below, through which a little river ran. The spring freshet had just gone down, and great blocks of ice, covered with a deposit of mud from the flood and dripping from their edges, lay stranded among the trees. Farther up the bank the snow still lay as deep as ever in the thickets of cedar and pine.

Coming to a clear spot at the foot of a great hemlock, ancient and sombre, I stooped and scraped away in aimless fashion the fallen beech leaves that had drifted there. I was astonished to see the wet, half-frozen earth covered with the tender sprouts of various seeds and plants. They were not more than half an inch long, but fresh and very vigorous. And what if there should be even a more wonderful growth than these! I could not hope that any of the spring flowers were out, yet I felt that they might be. I went on eagerly with curious eyes. Near the top of the slope, close to a snow-bank, there was a large plot of trailing arbutus. I searched keenly for a blossom under the leaves, but found that the flower buds had only begun to swell. Near by was a hepatica plant. A fresh sprout had started under the liver-coloured leaves, and what seems most extraordinary, this tender shoot had grown right up through a sheet of ice quite one-third of an inch in thickness. The ice still surrounded the shoot and covered the roots of the plant, and the ground about was frozen so hard that it was almost impossible to sink a knife-blade into it.

Presently I came to the upturned root of a large elm tree, that had fallen years before. In the sheltered corner between the trunk and the root were growing the fresh green fronds of last year's ferns; they must have been covered all winter with drifted leaves or snow. Slowly I strolled on. A little farther down the valley, near the foot of the bank, was a sunny open space sloping to the south. A dry knoll here was almost covered with the brown-green shoots of the adder-tongued lily. They were quite an inch high, but not yet unfolded. Some of them had pierced through the dead leaves in their vigorous growing. I glanced up the slope. There, just a few feet above me, was a cluster of white blossoms. The sight was so unexpected that I was a little dazed and doubtful about it at first. Remember it was only the 14th of April, and my first spring season in the woods. The flowers were pure and delicate beyond all imagining—white, with just the faintest tinge of blue at the base of the petals. The cluster was large, several half-opened buds showing among the blossoms. The flower stems were short, less than two inches long, and gray and fluffy. Frost had killed all the leaves, and they had been broken off and blown away by the wind, but the plant was readily recognized as a hepatica. And so I found the first spring flower.

A. STEVENSON.

THE liberality of Mr. J. Herbert Mason in giving a thousand dollars to Upper Canada College for the purpose of establishing a gold medal to be awarded annually to the student most distinguished for excellence of character deserves commendation. We are not sure that the terms and conditions on which the medal is to be awarded are yet definitely settled, but they should be such as will make Mr. Mason's generous gift produce the most desirable results.

## LONDON LETTER.

You see we made friends at the South Kensington Museum over Briton Riviere's delightful water-colour on the screen near the Caldecotts. And it happened in this wise. He was trying to discover by the fitful glare of the electric light, all ablaze and flickering in its usual excited style, if the long red fox were shamming or not, when, hearing my footsteps halt behind him, "*Is he pretending?*" he asked, with never a look backwards to find out whom he was addressing. On my answering, "*Yes, his eyes are open,*" he condescended to turn his small bright face in my direction. "*Fond o' pictures?*" was his next question, put in so loud a tone as seriously to incommode a pair of lovers who, with their chairs drawn close together, were silently gazing into Space. I replied in the affirmative. He then, finding time hang heavy on his hands—it was only half-past seven, and I think his mother had forbidden him to cross the threshold of the two pair back till ten at earliest—undertook to show me his favourites. He had sketched many of them, and had the drawings, elaborately dated and autographed but rather crumpled, in his knickerbocker pockets, and was, oh fatal sign, exceedingly proud of these attempts, at which he gazed long and lovingly, hardly allowing me to hold them in my hand. I should like to reproduce for you his impression of some of the figures in Raphael's cartoons, in Leighton's frescoes, the strong points of which works of art were brought out with much wealth of shading of a remarkable order done by the aid of a black lead pencil. I should like to be able to give you some faint notion of the immense condescension of his manner as he spoke of the particular beauties of each sketch. They were by no means slavish copies, certainly not: they were Impressions, as I have said; a couple of glances, a couple of minutes, and there you are. With a piece of clean paper he showed me how it was done, selecting Boxall's portrait of Landor on which to make the experiment. Flowerpieces and landscapes he despised as too easy, he remarked, as he rapidly drew in the outlines of the writer's head; he always passed 'em by. Bob, his school chum and partner, could do 'em as quick as anything, but figures, d'yer see, are more difficult; by which time the sketch was finished to the artist's entire satisfaction.

From Landor we got on to books, but my friend's taste being strictly confined to *Scraps* and *Ally Sloper's Halfholiday*, of literature beyond these productions he knew nothing, though he was willing enough to listen to a reasonable amount of information as to the many great people who were looking at us in every direction. In his turn he spoke of many things, in a simple direct way, of his every-day life in the Hammersmith slum; how he was in the fourth standard, and was close on ten years of age; how mother keeps the baby so clean, and makes puddings better than any one; how father having failed in the public line is potman in an adjacent inn, and comes home fiery red in the middle of the night sometimes threatening to kill them all; of a sister out in service in the Borough earning (like Kit's Barbara) 2/6 a week, who visits her family every Sunday, and is now, rising fifteen, in long cotton skirts and a proper white cap; of the time when at Ramsgate he saw the sea, and what he felt as venturing thereon in all good faith the cruel tossing made him desperately ill. And then he told me the following story—my principal reason for introducing him—which, as I never heard before, I venture to hope may also be new to you.

Once upon a time there was a great singer called Malibran (said my friend, pronouncing the name as it is written in English), who lived ever so far off, in Paris, and who sang most lovely; and there was a little boy called Pierre—that's French for Peter—who lived in Paris too, and who, whenever he could, used to steal off to hear her sing, because he was very fond of music, you see. Well, Pierre's father died, and he and his mother were ever so poor, so he couldn't afford ever to go to the opera; and it bothered him dreadfully for fear he should never be able to hear Malibran again. Being clever, and able to make rhymes, he took to writing poetry, and one piece he thought so good he determined to give it to her for a present. So he found out where she lived and rang the bell; but the man who opened the door said, "Go away, we don't want no boys here," and Malibran, who passed him as he stood on the steps, said, "Go away, we don't want no boys here"; but when Pierre called out quite brave "I've brought this for you, ma'am," she stopped, took the paper from him, and made him tell her his name and all about himself. As she got into her carriage she asked him to come that evening and hear her sing, and she'd see he had a nice place; but he was obliged to say "no, mother is ill and can't be left alone." So she drove away, taking his poetry with her, you know. Well, about a fortnight after that who should come to Pierre's house but a lady who told him he might go to the opera that very night, as she would stay with his mother while he was away. So he rushed off with the card she gave him, and they said at the pay-place, "Sit where you like," so he ran up to his own corner in the gallery, and Malibran sang more lovely than ever. But only fancy this, just at the end she came forward to the footlights, and she looked straight at Pierre and laughed, and then she sang his verses, there and then to him and the rest of the company. So next day a gentleman gave £300 for the song, because Malibran had put music to it; and she sent Pierre to school with the money, and he's still alive though she isn't, and is the richest man in all France.

Now I've looked through the lady's Life, and can find no mention of this incident; can any one help me? My small boy could not remember who told him, but thinks it must have been Teacher; and as he was corroborated in every particular by Bob, who was called up to make my acquaintance, that tattered and torn young gentleman had evidently often heard the story before. I left them wrangling over a little scene from "The