

## SOME CANADIAN LITERARY WOMEN.—IV.

ANNIE ROTHWELL.

WHETHER it is better to be the daughter of a distinguished father, or the father of a distinguished daughter, is a question that may be left to Mrs. Rothwell and Mr. Fowler to decide. With Mr. D. Fowler, R.C.A., of Amherst Island, the art-loving public is well acquainted. In the hall of his home there hangs, among others, the diploma (with medal) of the Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia in 1876, for "Artistic Excellence in Painting and Water Colours." It is one of a very restricted number, only twelve in all, awarded to five countries; six others getting none. It was also the first, and is, so far, the only international recognition of Canadian Art, and it may, perhaps, be fairly said that, together with the foundation of the Royal Canadian Academy by the Marquis of Lorne and the Princess Louise in 1880, it forms the point at which its history begins.

Mrs. Rothwell's maternal grandmother was only daughter of Robert Martin Leake, Master of the Report Office, an important and lucrative appointment in the Court of Chancery. He descended in the direct line from Sir John Leake, a highly distinguished admiral, as all histories tell, in the reigns of William and Mary, and of Anne. An intermediate link was Stephen Martin Leake, Norroy King-at-Arms. Other members of the family have been Colonel Leake, the distinguished traveller in Greece, and General Robert Martin Leake, Mrs. Rothwell's great-uncle. On her father's side, and in his possession, a series of life size portraits in oil carry her progenitors back to her great-great-grandfather.

Annie Fowler, born in England, was brought when scarcely more than an infant to the country now so dear to her, where, with the exception of a three years' visit to the old country, she has always resided. Her childhood and youth were passed on Amherst Island, within an hour's reach by daily steambot of Kingston. The place offered more opportunities for social intercourse than are common in most Canadian country neighbourhoods, as several English gentlemen had taken up their residence on the island, three or four clubs for mutual amusement and improvement flourished among them, and there were frequent visits from officials and officers of the garrison in Kingston. Mrs. Rothwell was educated at home, chiefly by her mother and a governess, whose duties were turned to pleasure by the love of learning displayed by their pupil. She was so fortunate as to grow up in a household pervaded by the atmosphere of books, magazines, illustrated papers and pictures—the sort of home life which in itself is a liberal education. To have an insatiable love of reading the best literature, with abundant means of gratifying that passion, is better than to wrestle with an unwilling spirit, and an augmenting pile of examination papers.

A large library with uncalculated leisure to spend in it, and a quiet country life within reach of the security and influence of an old and refined city—these are among the chief things that make a literary life worth living. Mrs. Rothwell is at present a resident of Kingston. Shortly after her return from England she was married to Mr. Richard Rothwell, brother of the Rev. John Rothwell (member of a well-known family in County Meath, Ireland), who was for twenty years or more Church of England minister on the island; and, after twelve years of married life, was left a widow.

Whether rightly or wrongly we are very apt to judge the characteristics of the people who interest us by those of their immediate progenitors. From so well-known and admired an artist as Mr. Fowler we look for a daughter of artistic tendencies. But Mrs. Rothwell does not paint. Unwilling to renounce the customary belief in the influences of heredity, we take up her novels with certain distinctly defined expectations. Such at least was the case with the present biographer. Here, it was thought will be found word painting or portrait painting—possibly both; fine appreciation of "values," shades of character delicately drawn, leading types boldly outlined, or sketched against a sufficiently indicated always subservient background; lengthy descriptions on every other page—a tiresome thing when the writer gives the stock impressions made by the objects described upon the mind of man for generations past, a delightful thing when the writer takes the trouble to examine the impression made upon her own individual mind, and report results.

These expectations are not always realized in a perusal of Mrs. Rothwell's stories, but, what is, perhaps, higher praise, the actions, feelings and passions of the people to whom she introduces us are never out of drawing, nor falsely coloured. The touch of reality, the atmosphere of everyday life, is especially noticeable in these novels. They are without exception studiously quiet in tone. This air of reserved force, this neglect of cheap and meretricious effects, and the absence of palpable endeavour, are usually the last achievements of well-disciplined minds. In Mrs. Rothwell they strike one as resulting from inborn good taste, and naturally pure habits of thought, rather than discipline. It is useless to deny that objections can be made to this mental attitude. If a novelist or an acquaintance makes no direct and obvious effort to please, it requires a certain amount of culture on our part to discover that they are pleasing. On the other hand, there is a large class of novel readers whom not to please must be a peculiar gratification to a superior writer of fiction.

Annie Rothwell is leisurely in her methods, but her plot and characters are held with a firm hand. The heroine of a tale written by the poor little story teller in the "The Poet of the Breakfast Table" began her fictitious career as a blonde, and ended it as a brunette, not by the use of any cosmetic, but simply through inadvertence on the part of her author. This is the sort of error which our writer is least liable to be guilty of. She is thoroughly acquainted with each of her personages, as

well as the scenes and places which they inhabit. The fatal pool in *Avice Gray*, with the wood paths all about it were known, she declares, "every inch of them by heart," and Mr. Beckett's quarries in "Loved I not Honour More!" are not altogether imaginary. The characters, if not drawn from life, are at least entirely life-like. This is apparent in even the heroines of Annie Rothwell's stories, who are very evidently a woman's heroine. They are marked by a large endowment of those moral qualities which always render their possessor admired and revered by her own sex.

The first of this author's novels to appear in print was "The Lost Lady Brathwaite," published in England, in *St. James Magazine*. Then followed a series of stories, published respectively in *Chambers' Journal*, England; *Appleton's Journal*, New York; the *Dominion Monthly*, and the *British North American Magazine*. Not any appeared in the *Canadian Monthly*, though she engaged in a competition for a prize of \$200, offered by that publication, and not successful there, she received a cheque for the same sum for the same story from the publishers of *Appleton's Journal*—an equal testimony to its merit. More recently she has had a long novel called "Requital," printed serially in the *Toronto Mail*, and a shorter story called "Loved I not Honour More!" published in book form by Messrs. Hunter, Rose, and Company, Toronto.

The best of the novels to my mind is "Loved I not Honour More." They all possess these necessary attraction of readability, but the one I have named is absorbing. Toward the close there is a strikingly dramatic scene, in which the pure, proud-natured heroine is compelled to disclose her unsought love to her true-hearted lover. Not in a sudden gust of emotion, but deliberately, and repeatedly, and in cold blood—cold with terror and self-loathing—for the sake of saving his life. The whole scene is finely conceived and exquisitely wrought. That long, perilous night walk, the man's half rapture, half repulsion, and utter wonderment; the girl's anguished choice between the twin horrors of seeing her lover shot down at her side, or shielding with her caresses one who had not hinted his passion for her. Yes, it is very admirably done.

The plot of "Requital" is slight, and the story is long. It concerns the career of a man who loves one woman, is loved by another, and endeavours to avoid a wife thrust upon him in a third. The last one is a sensible and agreeable young woman; the second is alluring but weak, and almost too unhurried in the transference of her affections from the wrong man to the right one. The first mentioned lady retains the heart of the rascally hero through the entire story, marries him in the last column, and dies in the last paragraph. Whether or not the story is worth telling, it is certain that it is well told. A great deal of careful workmanship has been expended on it, and I hope that its admirers will forgive me for saying that if consciousness is a defect—as when it gives one the idea of abruptness, or of too much pre-meditation, it undoubtedly is—it is a defect from which the author of "Requital" is entirely free. Mrs. Oliphant, Henry James, and many less known novelists have for years enjoyed the same freedom.

Now, having said the worst that I can think of about "Requital," it must be added that it contains sentiments worthy of remembrance and quotation. The reader shall judge for himself. Here are a few of them:

"Happy are ye when ye fall into divers temptations, cannot have been said for nothing, and the crown is promised to him that overcometh, not to him who has had no strife in which to overcome."

"You'll never make me believe that a man must be more honest because he treads a muddy road instead of a pavement; or a woman likely to be more virtuous because she can milk a cow."

"To know that love is dead is keener pain than any which love can inflict on us while living."

"She makes me think of the sea, under whose grey calm we know lies the wreck."

"Certainly the woman who can preserve the dignity and grace of her demeanor while descending the steps of a railway carriage, need scarcely fear the loss of it on any other occasion."

"A very practical and agreeable use [of beauty] is to secure to the owner the good-will and the soft things of this world, which, in spite of the manifest injustice of the arrangement, it will continue to do until some very marked change takes place in human nature."

"When we make for ourselves a whip of scorpions, and writhe under the lash, we are apt in our torments, to forget that only ourselves can feel the pain of the self-inflicted blows. Perhaps this is the real reason why shame is the heaviest of all punishments to be borne, consisting as it does in the knowledge that others are acquainted with our deeds and their consequences, and the belief that they are of equal importance in their eyes and in our own; could we once rid ourselves of this mistaken self-conceit a large portion of our mental miseries would soon cease to exist."

There are noticeable bits of condensed thought in other novels of Mrs. Rothwell's, but in *Avice Gray*, as far as I can find, not one. This is only another way of saying that the current of the latter story is strong enough to sweep away every tendency to philosophic asides between writer and reader. To change the figure, the story of *Avice Gray* is not an aggregation of details, with no strong interest to bind them. The plot is well thought out, and well worked out; it is perfectly proportioned, and instinct with life. Mutilate any part of it, and every other part must suffer.

Annie Rothwell has contributed not only serials but short tales and two-part stories to *Appleton's Journal*, and it is a satisfaction to know that she has been well paid for them. Of this writer of fiction I have heard on good authority that she takes the deepest interest in Canadian politics, that she would prefer to hear good speeches at an election meeting to reading most of the new novels, and would rather witness the movements of a battalion in the drill shed than go to the opera. Love of her adopted country is perhaps her ruling passion, which was fanned to fever height by