

CANADA'S POET LAUREATE.

BLISS CARMAN.

(From Page 4)

"The crouching heart within me quails like a shuddering thing.

"As I turn on my pillow to the door;

"There in the chill-white dawn, when life is half withdrawn,

"Comes the dream-curdling wolf at my door."

I think that these verses plainly show that Carman's soul was tormented with no slight depression of spirits during the period of writing of "Behind the Arras." Whatever it was it laid hold of him with terrible, malignant tenacity, very difficult to shake off. Like Shakespeare after "King Lear," he finally rids himself of his dark mood, together with its cause with not a word of personal explanation, save this: "Once a life is fully conscious of that pulse which yearns and goads, doubt, fear and failure take their flight and cease to trouble. The physical side of personality is the only soil and substance through which the spiritual and intellectual life are reinforced. We are not wholly animal, but we are fundamentally so; and our spiritual strain which we so cherish and seek to cultivate, can never be made to grow away from its physical base and source. . . . There can be no saving the soul alive, either for men or nations, if the body be allowed to sicken in ignorance or neglect."

After passing through this period of storm and stress, the poet is oppressed by the overcrowded city and longs for the wilderness again. "I am too sick at heart," he says, "to war with failure any more," and he bursts out as follows:—

"Give me freedom, give me space,

"Give me open air and sky,

"With the clean wind in my face

"Where the quiet mountains lie.

"I am sick of roofs and floors,

"Naught will heal me but to roam;

"Open me the forest doors,

"Let the green world take me home.

"I am sick of streets and noise,

"Narrow ways and cramping creeds;

"Give me back the simpler joys;

"Nothing else my spirit needs.

"Give me three days' solitude,

"Sea or hill or open plain;

"And with all the earth renewed,

"I grow strong and glad and sane."

He must have obtained his desire, for henceforth we hear no more of the "Wolf, wolf, wolf," but on the other hand, he begins to publish a series of short exquisite lyrics, which raised his fame to a very high pinnacle. His recovered peace of mind can be shown vividly by quoting his "Morning in the Hills." I make no excuse for quoting this poem in full, for I do not know, in the whole range of North American literature, a more beautiful, or a more perfect example of verse:—

"How quiet is the morning in the hills:

"The stealthy shadows of the summer clouds

"Trail through the canyon, and the mountain stream

"Sounds his sonorous music far below,

"In the deep wooded wind enchanted clove.

"Hemlock and aspen, chestnut, beech and fir,

"Go tiering down from storm-worn crest and ledge.

"While in the hollows of the dark ravine

"See the red road emerge, then disappear

"Towards the wide plain and fertile valley lands.

"My forest cabin half-way up the glen
"Is solitary, save for one wise thrush,
"The sound of falling water, and the wind
"Mysteriously conversing with the leaves.

"Here I abide, unvisited by doubt,
"Dreaming of far-off turmoil and despair,
"The race of men and love and fleeting time,
"What life may be, or beauty, caught and held
"For a brief moment at eternal poise.

"What impulse now shall quicken and made live
"This outward semblance and this inward self?
"One breath of being fills the bubble world,
"Coloured and frail, with fleeting change on change.

"Surely some God contrived so fair a thing
"In a vast leisure of uncounted days,
"And touched it with the breath of living joy,
"Wondrous and fair and wise! It must be so.

In another beautiful lyric, "In the Heart of the Hills," the theme is much the same:—

"Then twilight falls with a touch
"Of a hand that soothes and stills,
"And a swamp robin sings into light
"The lone white star of the hills.

"Alone in the dusk he sings,
"And the joy of another day
"Is folded in peace and borne
"On the drift of the years away.

"But there in the heart of the hills,
"My beautiful weary one,
"Sleeps where he laid him down,
"And the large sweet night is begun."

From these beautiful and perfect nature poems Carman can turn at will to a passionate and sensuous love lyric, rarely if ever surpassed in recent literature.

"I loved you when the tide of prayer
"Swept over you, and kneeling there
"In the pale summer of the stars,
"You laid your cheek to mine.

"I loved you when the auroral fire
"Like the world's veriest desire,
"Burnt up, and as it touched the sea,
"You laid your limbs to mine.

"I loved you when you stood tip-toe
"To say farewell, and let me go
"Into the night from your laced arms,
"And laid your mouth to mine."

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