

LITERATURE IN TORONTO.

TO some it might appear that any one who attempted to write upon the subject of literature in Toronto would approach his task with some such despondent feelings as must have possessed those unfortunate persons who, we are told, had to make bricks without straw. Perhaps they might go so far as to say that even the clay is not forthcoming, and that that article upon the subject would be the best which resembled a certain celebrated chapter upon snakes in Iceland, which contented itself by asserting that such animals did not there exist. However, we venture to think that those who so said would not only be uncharitable in thought, but wrong in fact. It must be admitted nevertheless that literature in Toronto is a thing that does not obtrude itself upon the notice of the casual observer. The casual observer is more likely to hear of activity in almost every other sphere of thought. He will hear of astronomical societies, of mathematical and physical societies, of musical societies of every kind; the artists unite into a well-known and extremely energetic association; lovers of the natural sciences unite for the purposes of mutual benefit; the theosophists have bound themselves together and elected officers; and, if we are not mistaken, even those who take an interest in hypnotic phenomena, if they do not yet boast a regularly constituted body, yet find opportunities of meeting and investigating the mysteries of mesmerism. Nor is the stage without its enthusiastic admirers, as not a few admirably acted plays or operas have proved. There is activity in all these, but apparently one may seek in vain for any similar movement in the realm of letters. True, the various Colleges have their literary or debating clubs, but these are limited to members of the universities, and, save on public nights, the public hears little of them. True also there is the Canadian Institute, but few will hazard the assertion that literature finds there a congenial home. There is indeed an admirable institution calling itself by the classic and literary appellation of "Athenæum," but he probably would err who surmised that the Muses were the sole object of its cult. Notwithstanding these rival claims, however, it must be admitted that there is in Toronto a certain amount of literary activity, even if it does not exhibit itself in the form of a literary society. Indeed any city which could boast among its residents an ex-Regius Professor of modern history of Oxford, the more renowned predecessor of the renowned E. A. Freeman, Professor Clarke, and also until, alas, the other day, the President of University College, could not but be a literary centre of some little importance. The presence, too, of the various educational institutions which now cluster about the Provincial University with their various professorial staffs tends to keep up and to propagate a love for letters. Nor must we forget that of men and women who, though busy with more practical vocations, still possess the inclination and find the time to devote some portion of their attention to intellectual pursuits, Toronto has no small number. In fact, of authors, both male and female, the Queen City is well stocked. Mr. D. B. Read and Mr. E. Douglas Armour, Dr. O'Sullivan, Mr. Lefroy, Dr. Withrow, Mr. O. A. Howland, Professors Baldwin and Alexander, Dr. A. F. Chamberlain, Mrs. Curzon, Mrs. Harrison—these, to make a choice of names almost at random, have done good and serious work that has made its influence felt beyond the boundaries of the Province. That recognized poet, too, if we are not mistaken, Mr. Wilfred Campbell, first exercised his graceful talent when with us. And few if any of these pens are idle: the names of some are often seen appended to papers or to articles; others, let it be hoped, are busied with more ambitious projects. Then, again Toronto teems with periodicals of a more or less literary stamp. In the columns of the *Educational Monthly* there not seldom appear papers on subjects not wholly connected with the technical side of tuition. The various weekly papers and the Saturday editions of the journals devote much space to purely literary topics. Special mention, too, may be made of the new monthly magazine, which has the courage of its conviction that there is a clientèle for such a venture, a courage we are happy to uphold. There are also other and significant proofs of a strong if not always visible undercurrent of literary activity to be found in the fact that in places where literature is not altogether supposed to thrive, in clubs namely, there have been seen in Toronto such spectacles as weekly papers read before good audiences on subjects which, if not purely literary, were yet treated in literary manner

and afterwards collected and published in book form. And even in the midst of political associations it is no uncommon thing to hear of "literary evenings" well attended by both readers and hearers. While the University of Toronto and that of Trinity College each has now instituted what it is hoped will be a yearly recurring event, a course namely of public lectures on usually capitally-chosen subjects admirably handled by men living in the midst of intellectual inspirations. There is also yet another field of work, rarely noticed except by those whose attention is by necessity of vocation called to it, the field namely of the preparation of text books. In this field there are in Toronto many hard and conscientious workers whose labours are all too little recognized. It is labour, too, worthy of abundant recognition, implying as it does abundant scholarship united to few or no opportunities of public approval. Within the past few months alone such men as Messrs. Chase, Robertson, Wetherall, Davis, Sykes, McIntyre, Squair, Libby and others have been busy with the editing and annotating of such works as *Cæsar*, the "Sketch Book," Wordsworth, the "Siege of Antwerp," "Les Frères Colombe," and others. Surely it is not necessary further to seek for proofs of the existence of literary activity in Toronto.

We may admit, then, that Toronto has a galaxy of writers—of all varieties of magnitude no doubt, and no doubt most of them, by ourselves at least, magnified by feelings of local friendliness and patriotism. Yet it must be confessed that it is largely a galaxy of fixed stars: component members act too much alone, instead of lending to each other the aid of their mutual attraction—and, let it be said, repulsion, not altogether an undesirable force in literature, where perhaps a difference of views is more effective as a motive power than even similarity. There is in reality no association of literary men formed for literary purposes. There is of course the Press Club, but there are many who devote themselves to literature and yet are unconnected with the Press. Nor, as far as we know, has the Press Club ever quite stood in the place of a Mermaid Inn to men seeking literary fraternization. There is, too, the Canadian Institute, an institute in which one might very legitimately expect to see the claims of literature highly respected. Yet a glance at its published proceedings and transactions hardly shows this to be the case. Science there thrives vigorously, especially perhaps geology; so does archaeology; but for papers and discussions upon topics purely literary one may all but seek in vain. Neither has the Canadian Institute, despite its possession of a comfortable if not commodious building, been exactly a home for the Muses. Its list of papers and magazines is a truly admirable one, and its reading-room of a winter afternoon is always a most tempting haven; yet neither the one nor the other seems hitherto to have attracted together those literary spirits to whom fraternization and conversation over books and periodicals are so productive a stimulus. It is not easy to discover the reason for this. Does it want an infusion of young blood? Are its leaders men whose thoughts and inclinations turn rather to science than to literature? Is the idea of meeting together for mutual aid in the shape of informal conversation foreign to its spirit?

That literature in Toronto is sadly in need of a local habitation and a name, there is no one but will admit. On every side men may be heard deploring the fact that there is no concerted action, that there is no opportunity for meeting together for mutual encouragement and help. So deeply has this want been felt indeed, that last year a very laudable private attempt was made to form a salon—to which perhaps allusion may be made without apology. And although it was not without its benefits and resulted in not a little literary interest and activity, yet it must be confessed that a salon is a thing not quite congenial to Anglo-Saxon soil. The self-consciousness which seems to seize the Anglo-Saxon so soon as he or she dons the evening costume and enters a drawing-room is fatal to that untrammelled intercourse between mind and mind which is the essence of that inspiration which the literary worker finds in coming in contact with a fellow spirit. Nevertheless, in the absence of any other mode of intercourse, such salon was a decided boon, and its many members look back no doubt to its meetings and its hospitable benefactress with feelings of kindly gratitude. But the question is, is it not possible in this populous town to found some sort of institution whereby those who take a real interest in things literary may make some effort to join their forces and to aid each other, if by nothing else, at least by enter-

ing within the sphere of each other's orbits, and, by social intercourse and conversation, giving each other the benefit of their various bents of mind and thought? The social clubs thrive, the rowing and yachting clubs thrive, the Military Institute thrives, what is there to prevent a Literary Institute from thriving? It need be on no grand scale, grandeur would perhaps be fatal to it. If a few of our more wealthy *littérateurs* would, at the commencement, lend the aid of their purses, and if all our *littérateurs* would lend the aid of their hearty support, the thing, we venture to say, could be done, either independently of all existing institutions, or in combination with one or other of them. It is a crying shame that here in Toronto, with its large and growing number of readers and writers, there is absolutely no opportunity for mutual intercourse. On the value of this it would be waste of time to descant: the history of literature, especially of the literature of England in the eighteenth century, attests it. We take it for granted that the fact is so well known that few if any would hesitate to be ready with the small annual fee which would be necessary. That the thing is pecuniarily feasible few will doubt; but that it will require zeal and energy, and above all concerted action, all will grant. We hope this will be by no means the last word on the subject.

THE ARCHIC MAN—VIII.

JUST as Glaucus was about to read his verses on the beautiful little child, up came Rectus with the dark-eyed bit of humanity in his arms. Glaucus, it seems, had also been down to the shore, and had taken the subject of his song into his confidence, for she said, pointing to him with her little finger: "Glauk make poshy 'bout me."

Messalla: "Where is it little one?"

"Didn't got it"—and she opened wide the large brown-black soft, yet brilliant, eyes. She then ran up to one who wore glasses and said: "Gi me a glad—"

"A what?"

"A glad ouh mi ti?" and she put her fingers over her nose.

"You don't want glasses."

"Me do," she said, and ran down the path.

A cloud now began to cover the sky in the north-west, and the child returning pointed up and said: "Doo skies wun togeder and hit someting?" Not a bad description of a thunder-storm.

This speech, which amused us, led to one or two remarks about the language and ideas of children. The mother of the little girl told how when her daughter was asked a few days ago how she was, she replied:—

"I'm better, but not too much better." And McKnom told how in one of his morning walks he found a little boy of three speaking to the trees and saying: "Bad wees! Bad wees."

"Why bad trees?" asked McKnom.

"Cause," answered the little fellow, "wees gwoes here: won't gwo fore our 'ous."

Madame Lalage: "Silence now for Glaucus."

Glaucus began:

"Ella, bella, stella!
Little fair one!
Little star!
How you scare one,
When you fain would run too far!
How you cheer one,
When you're near one,
With your little smile so cunning,
Laughing, jumping, running,
Little fair one!
Little star!"

Irene: "Very sweet!"

Glaucus:

"With your dark eyes twinkling,
Running, rolling, smiling,
Darkest care beguiling,
With the little funny wrinkling
At the end of either eye,
Whose dark lashes,
Shade the sparkling
Of those living diamonds darkling,
Giving flashes,
Whereby we espy,
Charming, cute and clever,
All the little soul's endeavour,
All it openly avouches,
All it thinks of on the sly,
There, behind those willowy lashes,
Every little purpose crouches,
Then out dashes
Like flame-gleanings in the night,
Or a tiny playful kitten,
Pouncing on a quivering shadow,
Or a sunlit wavelet glad, so
That it springs with joy,
Which nothing ever written
Could describe;
(Better aught within my might,
It would deride);
Or as billows in a dark dell,
In the shadow of some steep fell,
Leap to light;
Or a swallow past dark eaves in her flight,
Ella, bella, stella,
Little fair one, little star!"

Madame Lalage: "Very sweet indeed. How strange that a man who has no children of his own should love children so much!" she remarked, but so as Glaucus could not hear.