

THE WORLD OF BOOKS.

William Sharp.

Among us Canadians, and on this side the water generally, the poems of Mr. Sharp have been strangely overlooked. To all lovers of high verse, the loss is a serious one. The student of English literature, moreover, can no longer afford to be ignorant of those younger singers, on whom it must devolve to sustain the supremacy of English song. Of these Mr. Sharp is not the most widely recognised, as yet; but he is, I think, the strongest and most genuinely inspired. His verse has not, for the most part, as captivating a melody as that of Mr. Gosse, but his genius seems to me more vital, more stimulating, more exuberant, and of a larger mould. This I say while yielding to no one in admiration for the true impulse, the technical mastery, the clarity and sweetness of Mr. Gosse's verse. But Mr. Sharp seems to have perceived that English poetry is in need of some fresh motive, and his instinct has told him this fresh motive would be found in a return to Romance. A step, and a great step, in this return to Romance is the little volume before me;—which, by the way, though issued only a few months ago, is already becoming scarce and a treasure for the lovers of rare editions. Happy is the bibliophile who has possessed himself in time of this dainty parchment-bound volume, or who succeeds in picking up a copy at some remote bookstall.

Mr. Sharp's feeling for the romantic, the supernatural, the heroic, the weirdly suggestive, does not lead him into any contempt for that vital and selective realism, which (as I have said on all possible occasions) must form the basis of all true art. All the external manifestations of Nature are scanned by this poet with a clear and sympathetic vision. The spirit of a scene is caught by his brooding observation, and then rendered with vivid fidelity in a few direct strokes. A distinctive quality in Mr. Sharp's genius is felt in his first-hand rendering of nature, and in the unhackneyed tone of his interpretations.

The present volume* is, as its name implies, arranged in two sections. The first section, *Romantic Ballads*, contains four poems of the supernatural, which are of themselves sufficient to establish Mr. Sharp's claim to be regarded as a powerful and original singer. They are permeated in every line with that unquestioning realization of the supernatural which gives such thrilling effect to "The Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel." I know of no more impressive poem of its kind in our language than "The Weird of Michael Scott," which has all the sincerity, simplicity and ghostly horror of some of the old Scottish folk-songs, combined with a unity and concentration which heighten all the effects many times over, and which were generally beyond the reach of the early balladists. Mr. Sharp does not dilute his material. He remembers Keats's injunction to "load every rift of his subject with ore." He has woven together, in the one wild ballad, several of the most terrifying legends of diablerie and Gothic witchcraft, and the blending is so skilful that one is carried on irresistibly, with ever-deepening fascination of strange terror, to the splendid and awful close. The ease with which Mr. Sharp produces most nerve-thrilling effects is indicated in the following stanzas:

But as the darkness grew and made
Forest and mountain one vast shade,
Michael the Wizard moaned in dread—
A long white moonbeam like a blade
Swept after him where'er he fled.

And through the wood there stole and crept,
And through the wood there raced and leapt,
A thing in semblance of a man;
A human look its wild eyes kept,
As howling through the night it ran.

"The Death-Tide" is not a narrative but rather a lyrical ballad, shorter than its predecessors, but not less admirable. Its haunting cadences and weird refrains are not less fruitful of a creeping sense of awe, but there is something more alluring, more delicious in this fear than in that evoked by such work as the "Michael Scott." The lyric is a sort of ghostly and dreadful yet piercingly pathetic love-song.

In the "Poems of Phantasy" the note is sweeter, softer, less strenuous; but that strange and wide-eyed sense of the supernatural is not for a moment absent. The magic dealt with here, however, is more of white magic, the spells are those of fairy rather than of wizard, and the pervading atmosphere is of beauty and of tenderness. It is difficult to choose where all are well nigh flawless, but the two I quote will serve to give the tone of this section, and also, perhaps, to give color to my claim that in this species of English verse Mr. Sharp is the greatest living master:

Last night through a haunted land I went,
Upon whose margins Ocean leant
Waveless and soundless save for sighs
That with the twilight airs were blent.

And passing, hearing never stir
Of footfall, or the startled whirr
Of birds, I said, "In this land lies
Sleep's home, the secret haunt of her."

And then I came upon a stone
Whereon these words were writ alone,
The gull who reads, its body dies
Far hence, that moment, without moon.

And then I knew that I was dead,
And that the shadow overhead
Was not the darkness of the skies,
But that from which my soul had fled.

**Romantic Ballads and Poems of Phantasy*. By William Sharp. London: Printed for the author by Walter Scott, 24 Warwick Lane.

THE WANDERING VOICE.

They hear it in the sunless dale,
It means beside the stream,
They hear it when the woodlands wail,
And when the storm-winds scream.

They hear it—going from the fields
Through twilight shadows home—
It sighs across the silent wealds
And far and wide doth roam.

TWO MEN UPON THE WIND. No more.

The House of Malcolm stands:
It comes at dusk, and o'er and o'er
Haunts Malcolm's lands.

He rides down by the foaming line—
But hark! what is it calls
With faint, far voice, so shrill and thin,
The House of Malcolm falls.

He lifts the revel cup at night—
What makes him start and stare,
What makes his face blanch deadly white,
What makes him spring from where

His comrades feast within the room,
And through the darkness go—
What is that wailing cry of doom,
That scream of woe!

No more in sunless dells, or high
On moorland ways is heard the moan
Of the long-wandering prophecy—
In moonlit nights alone

A shadowy shape is seen to stand
Beside a ruined place:
It waves a wildly threatening hand,
It hath a dreadful face.

Mr. Sharp is author of two other volumes of poems—*The Human Inheritance*, now out of print, and *Earth's Voices* (London: Elliot Stock). He is also author of *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Record and Study*, of those altogether admirable brief biographies, *Shelley and Keats*—in the *Great Writers* series; and of several introductory essays, of special value, prefixed to works which he has edited.

CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS.

The Poets of Maine.

It is usually as easy to criticise an anthology as it is hard to make one. Tastes differ, and that which one man holds worthy of praise may be condemned by a no more competent judge. At first glance, the work of the compiler seems to be simplified when, as in the case of the work before us, the aim is to be inclusive, for then comparative excellence only is sought. How much is involved of research and weighing of claims does not appear on the surface. It will be apparent, however, to any who examine *The Poets of Maine* with the considerate attention which the book deserves. These will gladly concede, we fancy, that Mr. Griffith has discharged his delicate and difficult duty with never failing tact and admirable taste.

This, to quote the publishers' statement, is a representative volume. It is not merely a collection of the poetry of Maine, but an evidence of the poetic sensibility, taste and culture of the great mass of its people. More than 50 of the men and women whose verse is quoted have acquired more than local celebrity. To readers of the newspapers and magazines the names of two or three hundred more will not be unfamiliar. Coming down to "the humbler poets," we find in their own work—as we are here made acquainted with it—good reason for the honor that has been done them. How many readers of *PROGRESS* ever heard of Oscar Laighton, for example? He is one of the unnumbered and almost unknown whom only such an enterprise as this brings to light; yet here are verses that prove his right to a place among the poets:

Sweet wind that blows o'er sunny isles
The softness of the sea,
Blow then across these moving miles
News of my love to me.
Ripples her hair like waves that sweep
About this pleasant shore;
Her eyes are bluer than the deep
Round rocky Appledore.

Her sweet breast breathes the scattered spray
Soft kissed by early light:
I dream she is the dawn of day
That lifts me out of night.

And the quotation might be many times paralleled, for the average merit of the collection is high. It will serve our purpose, however, to say that, while the editor has omitted no one who had the shadow of a claim to recognition, he has sought unweariedly and successfully for the best work that each has done. Thus comes it that the book is full of surprises: old friends confronting us every now and then; new ones taking hold of our affections and refusing henceforth to be banished.

The sentimental value of the book, if one may so speak, is all its own, and it has a practical feature which will largely increase its enduring worth. A brief biography of every poet prefaces the quotations, and thus there is brought together a mass of matter such as it would be hard to find in any other volume. For the rest, we note that the book has two characteristics which we somehow expect to attach to every article that comes from the office of the *Portland Transcript*: it is both substantial and beautiful. No one who buys *The Poets of Maine* will be disappointed in either its matter or its manner; and to a son or daughter of Maine, especially those who are away from "home," the possession of the book will be a perpetual delight.

"Good Company."

When the prevailing tendency among publishers is towards good books at low prices, one could hardly expect such an enterprising firm as Messrs. Lee & Shepard.

**The Poets of Maine: A Collection of Specimens of the Fine-Tree State; with Biographical Sketches of the Poets from Over Four Hundred Verse-makers of the Pine-Tree State; with Biographical Sketches.* Compiled by George Bancroft Griffith. Cloth 5vo, pp. 886. Portland: Elwell, Pickard & Co. Price, \$3.

to do other than lead. That they have not disappointed their friends, the reading public, will be plain to any one who examines the new series which they have appropriately named, "Good Company." These volumes have thus far been issued under this general title, as follows:

- I. *The Loner*. By Sir Richard Steele.
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- III. *Fireside Saints*. By Douglas Jerrold.
- IV. *Dreamthorpe*. By Alexander Smith.
- V. *A Physician's Problems*. By Chas. Elam.
- VI. *Broken Lights*. By Frances Power Cobbe.
- VII. *Religious Duty*. By Frances Power Cobbe.
- VIII. *The Schoolmaster*. By Roger Ascham.
- IX. *The Development Theory*. By Joseph Y. and Fanny Bergen.
- X. *The Philosophy of Mirth*. By B. F. Clark.
- XI. *The Gentleman*. By George H. Calvert.
- XII. *Education*. By Herbert Spencer.

The literary quality of these books is indicated by the titles and the authors. Most of them are old friends, and there is not one but is worth reading and owning. Moreover, our readers will be interested to know that they are printed from new plates, on good paper, are substantially and handsomely bound, and are sold—one might almost say, given—at the uniform price of 50 cents.—Boston: Lee & Shepard. St. John: T. O'Brien & Co.

MUSIC, AT HOME AND ABROAD.

Why will amateurs attempt to sing songs that are totally beyond their powers? The range of pretty and effective but simple ballads is so large that it seems to me quite unreasonable that singers should torture the audience, the accompanist and themselves by giving an incomplete rendition of difficult high class music. But it seems to be true all over the world, that the instant any one with a voice (and in some cases without one) has acquired a certain rudimentary knowledge of vocal sound, he or she must needs rush in and murder the finest musical compositions. Dear friends and fellow-workers, stick to simple ballads and don't attempt, at least in public, to sing classical works, until you have had three or four years' regular training under a fully qualified master.

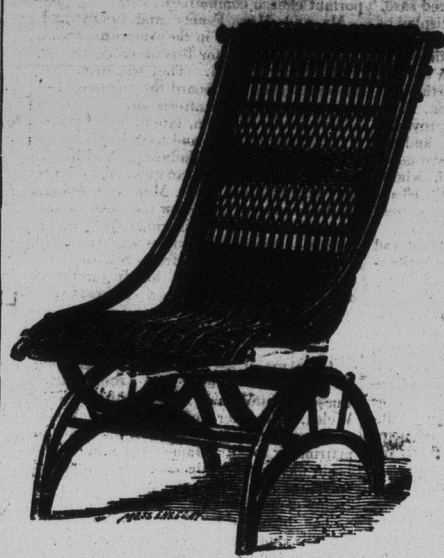
I went to the concert in Trinity school-room, last Thursday week, and the thing that struck me most was the total inability (at least on my part) to understand the words that were sung. I don't know whether the acoustic properties of this hall are against the proper hearing of words, but I do know from personal experience (some years ago) that, for myself at least, it is the easiest place to sing in, in St. John. Some of the songs were far beyond the powers of the performers, Miss Massie's being a notable exception; but even with her finished style, I was unable to notice any distinct enunciation of words.

I am not going to make a very original remark, but it is certainly interesting to compare the results that accrue from the efforts of a man who knows his business and from those of one who does not. The wonders that were wrought on the Mission church organ, last week, were the astonishment of most of those who heard the organ last Sunday and the Sunday previous. On the one day, hardly a stop was able to be used, and on the other the full organ was almost completely in tune—at all events, in such good tune that no one but a professional could detect anything wrong. There is this certain about this much talked of instrument that the builder's workmen are able to make pipes and voice them well, but it is also true that, up to a little while ago, they were not able to tune them. This has now been set right by the builder's very sensibly employing a first class tuner and organ man from England and it seems likely that, thanks to this able workman, who evidently thoroughly understands his business, the Mission church organ will prove to be, at least in tone, the equal of any instrument in the city. There still remains the vexed question as to the action, but it is to be hoped this will be so thoroughly examined and set right where imperfect that trouble will not come from that quarter.

The English reeds are certainly very choice and without rival in this city, and it is a most fortunate coincidence that they harmonize most beautifully with the rest of the stops of the organ.

The recitals that are announced for the five Fridays of Epiphany will be evenings of great musical worth and enjoyment. The trustees have certainly, in my humble opinion, been very wise in charging the small sum of 20 cents for the admission tickets. As a general rule, I do not like the idea, but there are special circumstances to be taken into consideration in this case—the smallness of the edifice being a sufficient reason, if there were no other. The issue of tickets for each night is limited to 350 (the seating capacity of the church) so that, come early or come late, the holder of a ticket is sure of a seat. As *PROGRESS* is printed on Friday night it will be impossible for me to give an account of each performance on the week it occurs, so that I shall have to content myself with making a few general remarks occasionally. There

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seems no doubt that this will be a most remarkable series of vocal and instrumental performances, the like of which has seldom, if ever, been given in St. John.

The concert at the Institute, Monday evening, was a performance of more even merit all round than has been given for some time. Some of the solos were especially pleasing, perhaps from the fact that they were all very old, time-worn favorites. Mrs. Gandy's performance of "Cherry Ripe" was a finished piece of singing. Mrs. Girvan sang her solo, "Where are the Friends of My Youth," with much taste. Miss Massie charmed every one with her beautiful execution in "Within a Mile of Edinboro' Town," and also in the encore she kindly gave, "Kathleen Maureen." Her voice seems especially adapted for this class of music, being hardly powerful enough for oratorio solos. Miss McKeown put too much feeling into her singing of "Way Down Upon the Swannee River," and so sacrificed the truth and attack of her notes. Mr. Christie I should have liked to hear sing a good old Scotch ballad instead of "The Wolf." The chorus generally sang well, though there was an extra proportion of bass and soprano, which sometimes was a little too prominent. "Humpty Dumpty" was a little beyond their powers. Granted, it is a very catchy, awkward piece of music, but it wants every part to be perfect, and every lead to be taken up at the exact moment, or the effect is marred, and the whole glee seems a confused jumble of sounds, without any distinct intention. The part songs, "My Own Canadian Home" and "Rule Britannia," were the best, both going very well. Mr. Morley's playing of the accompaniments was again one of the best features of the evening, only excelled by his splendid playing of a gavotte—his own composition, in which he has closely followed the well known traditions of this special class of music. It is a most charming work and I hope he will soon have it published. I must not forget to add that he arranged the quartette, "Drink to Me Only," especially for the occasion and showed again what a thorough knowledge he has of harmony and composition. Miss MacLauchlan has my humble contribution to her wreath of laurels for her able management of the whole affair.

The minstrels have got to work and had a rattling hour and a half practice at two choruses, Tuesday evening. The "boys" were evidently well pleased with their new conductor, Mr. Morley, and by the way he handled them on the first evening, I think that the coming performances will be an advance on the last, not only in the general arrangement of the entertainment but also in the work of the chorus, which will be more evenly balanced, with voices placed in their proper class. There are a few recruits, all valuable voices. The meetings as proposed at present will be held Tuesday and Thursday evenings, at the same room as before on Germain street. Non-performers will be rigidly excluded.

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