

CANADIAN AND OTHER NATIONAL SONGS.

DID any one ever hear sung, or see published, anything at all in the shape of a Canadian ballad? We do not refer to the sweet sounding chants with which our hardy raftsmen are wont to beguile their toilsome hours, as they urge their acres of floating logs down the Ottawa and St. Lawrence to Quebec. We mean those well remembered ballads, heard by many of us in the far off past, in the islands across the Atlantic,—ballads in whose every word there was a memory that had been as a soul to them, and had kept them alive for hundreds of years. And in the winter nights, when the doors were shut, and the big fire in the chimney corner made every face radiant, how pleasant it was to sit and listen with hushed breath and throbbing heart to the words of the old melodies as, warm with the fire of passion and of poesy, they came floating from red and tuncful lips. And in whatsoever part of the world a man may be, these old songs, when he hears them, sweep, on the instant, the blood to his heart, and pour a flood of tenderness over his memory,—for they are the golden chains that, in spite of everything he has encountered, and in spite of everything he has forgotten, bind him, as with the cords of an angel to the land where the stars shone upon his nativity.

How beautifully now as we think of it, does Holy Writ express the same thing: "By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, sing us one of the songs of Zion."

And the well known fact of the Swiss bursting into tears, anywhere he hears the *Ranz des Vaches* of his native mountains, bears out the same idea. It were needless to multiply other instances.

I do not wish to be understood to say that Canada can boast of no songs; on the contrary, the recent publication of Rev. Mr. Dewitt of collections from Canadian poets shows that we possess some excellent native productions. We need only mention, for instance, Mrs. Leprohon. This gifted gentlewoman has published many lyrics of great beauty,—songs that are widely known and just as widely appreciated. What Mrs. Browning did for the scenery of Italy, Mrs. Leprohon has done for Canada. Her exquisite poem on the Saguenay would be sufficient alone to send down her name to posterity.

A glance at the relative positions of Canada and the British Islands may afford us a clue to the reasons why the former possesses no ballad poetry. The age of feudalism, and what may be called the great epoch of the British, Scottish, and Irish civil wars, were the parents of nearly all our ballad poetry. True, there was feudalism in Canada, but the Seigneurs, instead of quarrelling with one another,—and these disputes furnished rich subjects for the fruitful imaginations of the Minstrels,—were compelled to unite, even up to the period of the conquest, to keep off, first the incessant attacks of the Indians, and second, to preserve themselves against the less frequent but more deadly onslaughts of the English. And, as far as respects the conflict between the two great races who struggled for the supremacy of the continent, it is a matter of congratulation that no ballads—if any were written—have been handed down. For nothing that could be devised by human means, would so perpetuate hatred, and poison the fountainhead of national prosperity.

Let us glance at the British Islands, and see what a magnificent mine of ballad wealth is possessed by each of them. We pass by the wars of the Roses and the field of Bosworth, that placed the Tudors on the throne. Then we come to the woful field of Flodden, where the king of Scotland and most of his nobles, fighting with the hereditary bravery, preferred to fall rather than to surrender or take to flight. What a magnificent use of this battle Sir Walter Scott makes in what may be called the modern ballad of *Marmion*, when, in Elizabeth's time, we have the civil wars in Scotland, between Mary and her

subjects, and the civil wars in Ireland, where Hugh O'Neil, the gifted and gallant Prince of Ulster, raised the standard of the famous "Red Hand," and for many long years, with only a handful of men, held out against the whole forces of Elizabeth. The theme is one that has awakened the eloquence and pathos of fifty Irish bards. Next we have the wars of Roundhead and Cavalier, the doings of Claverlouse; later on the insurrection of the Duke of Monmouth, and the Bloody Assizes that followed; then the siege of Limerick, and the self-expatriation of its gallant defenders; the rebellion of the Earl of Mar in 1711, and the murderous battle of Culloden, where the last hope of the princely house of Stuart was extinguished in blood. The siege of Limerick and this battle have been bewailed by the Irish and Scottish muse with the lamentation of Rachel weeping over her children, and refusing to be comforted because they were not.

In addition to all these subjects, each grand enough for an epic, there were thousands of other themes—feuds of clans, carrying away of the heirs of noble houses, and assaults of castles. It may be laid down as a general rule, that the ballad poetry of England is inferior to that of Scotland and Ireland. But then the magnificent song of *Chevy Chase*, makes up for a thousand faults. The author was Richard Sheale, and he lived in the time of Henry the Sixth. The bard leaps into this subject as a war-horse dashes up a wall of bayonets. The ballad is composed of sixty-eight four line stanzas. The first is of six lines. We give it as a specimen, and by no means one of the best.

The Percy, out of Northumberland,
And a vow to God made he,
That he would hunt in the mountains
Of Cheviot within days three;
In the maner of doughty Douglas,
And all that with him be.

The whole poem was put into Latin by the gifted Dr. Maginn, the "Morgan O'Doherty" of the *Noctes Ambrosiane*, and was completed in the June number of *Blackwood's Magazine*, 1820. We subjoin his rendering of the first verso:

Persens ex Northumbria,
Vovebat, quia iratus,
Venare inter Dies tres,
In montibus Cheviotis,
Contentus forti Douglaso
Et omnibus cognatis.

Would a modern bard begin in this bold way? We think not. First of all he would commence by telling us *why* the Percy made the vow, and would go on through many a weary page to analyse the feelings that actuated him, such as aversion, hereditary feud, etc., until the reader would fling down the book in deep disgust. Truly, ballad writing would seem to be one of the lost arts.

In the early days of Canadian history,—in the times when the settler, as he cut down trees on the spot which is now the Upper Town of Quebec, looked round, every blow he gave, to see if any of the dreaded Iroquois were stealing upon him, as a panther steals upon its prey,—in the adventures of the bold men from Brittany and Normandy, who, to procure furs for "Messieurs de la Compagnie," risked life, day and night, explored vast rivers, and penetrated where even their guides confessed that Indians hardly ever set foot, there was ample material for ballad poetry. But a certain degree of civilization was requisite for such attempts, and then civilization there was none; Canada was, in the language of one of the Jesuit Fathers, "Nothing but an infinite wilderness." These indomitable men did, however, a noble work, and the poetic history they left behind them may be read to-day in a thousand smiling villages, and in untold acres of golden grain bowed to the earth with the glorious treasures that make men happy, make women smile, and children lift up their infant hands to heaven in prayer and thanksgiving.

In a work issued recently by that most patriotic of publishers, Mr. John Lovell, of Montreal, entitled, "1812; the War and its Moral: a Canadian Chronicle, by William F. Coffin," an eloquent and able book—one which should be in the hands of all our readers,—the struggles of that eventful period are so well told, that we could at most afford to dispense with ballads narrating these momentous events Mr. Coffin so graphically de-

scribes. Still we would rather have them, because they are the strongest link to bind us to the past, and are the very essence and epitome of a nation's infancy.

I think the time has now come when we should expect the national feeling that is afloat should find expression in national songs. I am well aware that such productions can not be extemporised. They must be the utterances of the heart, and not written to order. The Americans, during their late civil war, advertised for a National Hymn, and offered the sum of \$500 for a meritorious production. Hundreds of copies of verses poured in, were carefully examined, and the very best was found to be very poor indeed, so the reward was withdrawn.

I am sure there is talent enough in Canada to accomplish the task of which I have spoken. He who is successful will receive all that any poet may expect, all that any true bard desires, and that is immortality. The value of such songs is incalculable. They speak to the heart of the patriot as does the trumpet to the heart of the soldier; and as the Marseillaise Hymn spoke to the soul of France when she rose in arms to fight for national existence against embattled Europe. To the stormy majesty of this hymn, emperors and kings bowed down, and it fought for the beleaguered land with the force of a million of bayonets. The position of France at that time may be ours in time to come. Then, let us have national songs, and, if the day of peril should ever come, they will be found to be strong auxiliaries to strong hearts, and as inspiring as the country's banner seen streaming upon the breeze of battle.

G. J. W.

LITERARY GOSSIP.

NEW CANADIAN NOVEL.

A NOVEL is afloat to the effect that the MSS. of a new work of fiction, entitled *The Advocate*, has been purchased by a Montreal publisher from Mr. Charles Heavyside, the author of *Saul*, *Jephtha's Daughter*, &c., and that it will appear in readable shape in a few weeks. We hope this is true. Mr. Heavyside, as a poet, has earned a highly creditable reputation, not only in Canada but in Great Britain and the United States. We are not a little curious, and we feel assured that a large portion of the reading community share our curiosity,—to see how he will "come out" as a writer of prose.

CHRISTIE'S LOWER CANADA.

CHRISTIE'S History of Lower Canada in six volumes, neatly got up and substantially bound in cloth, will form a very desirable addition to the literature of the province. We believe that Mr. Worthington has secured all the remaining copies of the edition of the first three volumes, of this work, and is engaged in reproducing the fourth, fifth and sixth volumes formerly published by Mr. Lovell, but now out of print, which, when completed, will form a most valuable history of the province. A copy of the first volume is before us, and we may remark that the style in which it is got up is creditable to the publisher. We will, on a future occasion, review the book in detail.

Mr. S. P. Day is preparing for the press a work called "Woman and Civilization."

The author of "Gay Livingston," "Sword and Gown," &c., has arranged to contribute to *Once a Week* a serial tale, which will appear forthwith. It is to be entitled "Sans Merci, or Kestrels and Falcons."

The continuation of M. Renan's "Life of Jesus" is in the press. It is to appear in two volumes, one of which will be entitled "Les Apôtres" and the other "St. Paul." It is said that this work is much less calculated to provoke criticism than its predecessor, the opinion expressed in it being more in conformity with the generally received views on the subject.

M. Berryer is said to be employed in revising his speeches for publication. From the same source, we also learn that he is likewise occupied in superintending the erection of his own tomb, which is next to those of his father, mother, wife,