

## BURNS—A SONNET.

Like some North Star, thou Bard of Caledon,  
Uprising through the lab'ring Lowland mist,  
By thee, unkindly Fortune, high upthrown  
O'er burn and brae, and ben and Highland, tryst!

From Cheviot's earthy wave to Pentland's blue  
Thy sparkling rays make cheerier peaty fires,  
And notes of pibroch—wet with mountain dew—  
Old midnight solace of the shepherd sires.

The Trossach pine in giant majesty,  
The heather-bedded hare-bell in her dreams,  
Have caught new music, while the minstrelsy  
Of Love's sweet music quivers down thy beams.

Thy rays a myriad silvery silken strings  
Uncurtaining deepest soul-imaginings.

B. W. G.

## THE LAST SACRIFICE.

[There is a legend of Niagara that before the displacement of the Indians an annual tribute of a young maiden was imposed by the spirit of the Falls upon the neighboring tribe.]



WHEN Canada was first settled, the country enclosed by the Great Lakes was held by the Hurons, a nation of agricultural rather than of warlike habits. They had a settlement on the Niagara frontier, a few miles from the Falls, and it was from this settlement that the Cataract God demanded his sacrifice. The victim had to be a maiden in her eighteenth

year, and was chosen by the will of the god through the will of Murom, the medicine-man at the time of our story, but the will of the god, as a rule, corresponded with that of the chief.

The chief's tyranny had made him odious to his followers, and they were gradually becoming estranged from him, and looked to Walhallon, a young warrior, as their hope in the crisis they felt drawing near. The chief became aware of this dissatisfaction and of the growing popularity of Walhallon, and sought to devise some means to injure the latter. Now, Walhallon had fallen in love with Montela, a popular maiden of his tribe, and the chief, in his schemings, believed that he could strike him most effectually by depriving him of his betrothed, who happened to be in her eighteenth year, and hence a suitable victim to the god. A short interview with Murom settled the matter entirely to the chief's satisfaction.

Walhallon suspected some evil design, and upon seeing him and Murom together, and hearing a chance word or two, he became aware of the wrong that was to be done. He immediately set about to save her. He planned to meet her to make arrangements for her escape and for the flight of both to the other side of the river, and through the forest to the nearest settlement of the Iroquois, which was distant three or four days' journey to the east. But the chief had anticipated any such design by sending Walhallon on a hunting expedition to lay in stores for the winter which was approaching, and when he returned no difficulty at all was found in keeping the two separate for the few days that were yet to come. Any violence at all on Walhallon's part would now frustrate his aim, if not bring about the premature death of both, and consequently he was forced to wait until the day of sacrifice, when he hoped that some opportunity might present itself, and his plan of escape yet be carried out.

All the tribe felt that these sacrifices were drawing to an end. The restlessness of the young warriors as a consequence of the arrival of the French in Canada, a general feeling of the approach of a new era in Indian life, and perhaps the influence of the seeds that Father Hennepin had scattered in his transitory stay a few years before, all

tended to give birth to and to foster this growing aversion to their superstitious offering. But the god of the cataract was remorseless and the chief and his medicine-man decreed that it must be made, for they dared not interfere with the traditions of their fathers.

The day finally came. It was one of the most beautiful of Indian Summer, the last few hours of the expiring harvest-time when all nature calms, as though silently awaiting the end of the year, the forests crowned with garlands of variegated splendor as a tribute to her prodigality in bestowing her plenteous fruits on man. Birds of bright hues flying southward lingered a few more days to drink in the departing grandeur, and even the scattered clouds took on new tints from the setting sun as their offering to the rich profusion of color. Gentle breezes whispering through the leaves added harmony of motion to harmony of color; the flitting birds did not intrude upon nature's impressive stillness with their songs, and the clouds above moved slowly onwards unwilling to leave the scene of calmness spread below.

In the midst of such majesty was chosen the place for their most solemn religious rites. The space for the selection of the offering was a semi-circular clearing on the edge of the bluff overlooking the Falls. The ceaseless roaring of the god in honor of whom the sacrifice was to be made was to-day louder than ever, a fact interpreted by them as the impatience of the spirit for his victim, now known to us as the precursor of the storms shortly to follow. As evening approached the Indians began to assemble, the oldest warriors lining the edge of the forest, in front of them their squaws took their position, and again in front of these the youngest of the tribe—the unmarried—all solemnly awaiting the chief and Murom.

About two hours before sunset their arrival was announced by the beating of drums, and, silent as they all were before, there now fell upon them a deeper silence, that of the solemnity of death. Both the new-comers went to the edge of the clearing overlooking the cataract, the chief remaining some paces behind, while Murom made an invocation to the spirit of the Falls to enter his body that he might be guided in making an acceptable selection. Then walking back to the midst of the clearing he fell on his face with his head towards the opening, when all the maidens fulfilling the conditions demanded by the god, slowly arose and formed a new circle around him, remaining a short distance apart from one another. There were nearly a score of these, and the circle formed was about thirty feet in diameter. When all the preparations had been made the drums again commenced beating, whereupon Murom arose and started a mystic dance, slowly at first, but soon increasing in speed, gradually widening his circle until it was almost equal to that of the maidens around him. And now faster and faster was he urged on by the Spirit, the sound of the drums ever increasing, and the beating growing more and more rapid, while his excitement turned first to fury and then to frenzy, finally overflowing and spreading to the assembled tribe, whose bodies waved in shorter circles as the dancer sped on in his. The strength of the religious emotion gradually drove out all feeling and pity for the victim, and left the multitude insensible to all but zeal for making the offering. Walhallon alone remained unaffected, his hatred overpowering the superstitious part of his nature; he calmly awaited the opportunity to carry out his plans.

All now could see that Murom had reached the height of his excitement, and that he was commencing to grow weaker. Feeling this, himself, he made one final dash around the circle when the Spirit hurled him at the feet of Montela. Her shriek as she fainted, and the violent emotion of Walhallon were unnoticed in the terrific din of the drums which continued until the rest of the maidens, overcome by the severity of the ordeal through which they had passed, had rushed back to their companions, forgetting to keep their wonted composure. Then Walhallon, smothering his passion, asked the chief as a special favour to be allowed to accompany him and Murom to the final scene.