

AMONG OUR BOOKS.



It is not a new book—as newness is reckoned in these days of literary fermentation. It is not even a book of a year; but one of five years; since it was published in 1890, and possibly at that time the tales that comprise the volume were collected from earlier magazine publications.

Yet because its contents are especially unique, because it contains a series of the sweetest, most tender, yet whimsical little sketches ever penned; perhaps,

also, because it seems to me a book of the springtime and Easter in the dainty freshness of its fancies, we shall chat about it at length this month, in the hope that by making it known the little volume will find its way into hands of thousands of pure-hearted Canadian women, to enrich their thought with its gold.

To those who have read "Fishin' Jimmie," that white pearl in angling literature, there is no need to say much beyond the fact that this volume, "The Seven Dreamers," holds that exquisite little sketch among the collection,—that "Fishin' Jimmie" is one, and the sweetest "dreamer" of them all.

But there are those who do not yet know and love this dear old man;—we almost envy them the pleasure that awaits them in first making his acquaintance;—and to these we must give reason for our enthusiasm.

"The Seven Dreamers" is a collection of seven sketches, each being a portraiture of a character common in New England villages in bygone years,—the man or woman with a "twist" in his or her brain. "Right about everything except one," as Aunt Charry explains. "Jest one little thing to make 'em different from other folks; get 'em on any other topic and you'd never notice anything queer about their talk."

These characters, with which we are all more or less familiar, have become rarer with the advent of steam and electricity. Like the songbird, the wild flower and other naturals, they push back from the glare of artificial life into secluded nooks. Only the quiet villages and country places know them. Only these indeed can take time to be gracious to them.

Yet, I think, in the rush and friction of city life, which so speedily brushes off originalities as well as rough edges, reducing human nature to a monotonous level, we lose more than we are aware in the disappearance of these innocent "dreamers" from among us.

In the introductory chapter of "The Seven Dreamers" the author gives the clue to the title of the book and its theme in the very pretty fancy which comes from the lips of Aunt Charry, as she dwells on one and another of the "dreamers" that have come within the range of her acquaintance.

Why, I haven't ever lived or been in a New England village myself where there wasn't one or more such folk. They have different names for 'em. They say they're "cracked"; they've "got a screw loose";

they're "a little off"; they "ain't all there"; and so on. But nothin' accounts for their notions so well to my mind as to say they're all jest dreamin'.

It's the way o' the world to laugh at 'em. But I tell you, they'd benissed out of the village—they're mostly country folks, you know—more'n some of the wide-awake ones. An' I'm glad,—I ain't ashamed to say it—that they never waked up this side o' heaven. And what's more, I believe, when they look back on those soothin', sleepy, comfortin' idees o' thurn, that somehow helped 'em along through all the pesterin' worry and frettin' trouble o' this world, I believe, I say, that they're glad too.

The opening or introductory chapter is in itself a delightful bit of quaint conceit that moulds our mood into a ready sympathy with the "dreams" that follow.

The scene of the sketches is "Franconia Valley," a peaceful little place among the New England hills; and the writer shows herself a passionate lover as well as a student of nature in her knowledge of wild flower, herb and shrub, bird, insect and worm. It is not told in technical words; but slips into each little story until every page breathes the freshness of the woods and water, of spring and mountain air.

"Fishin' Jimmie" is the sweetest tale in the collection, and possibly reaches the highest mark of literary excellence. The description of the old man whose life had been one long day's fishing, and who loved his art with a passion that subdued everything unto it, is charmingly told. We love him, even before in his gentle voice he tells the sweetest fishing story that surely was ever penned.

"I allers loved fishin', an' knowed 'twas the best thing in the hull aarth. I knowed it larnt ye more than books could tell ye. I knowed it made folks patienter an' common-senser an' weather-wiser an' cuter gen'ally; gin 'em more fac'ly than all the school larnin' in creation. I knowed it was more soothin' than ladnum, more rousin' than whiskey, more fillin' than vittles, I knowed all that, o' course—any fool knows it. But will ye b'leeve it? I was more'n twenty-one year old, a man growed, 'fore I foun' out why 'twas that way."

"A fishin' minister, a real one,—reely fished, I mean—ketched 'em," as Jimmie explains in gravely innocent way, came to preach in Franconia Village one summer Sunday.

"There wan't no sarm'n. There wan't no heads, no firstlys, nor sec'ndlys, nor fin'ly-brethrins, but fust thing we knowed we was hearin' a fishin' story. It was about Some One that was dressef foud o' fishin' and fishermen; Some One that sot everythin' by the water, an' useter go along by the lakes an' ponds, an' sail on 'em an' talk with the men that was fishin'."

Jimmie's revelation comes to him there; and he begins a new life within the old. He has got a "fishin' religin'."

"I tell ye them four books that gin His story is chock full o' things that go right to the heart o' fishermen; nets an' hooks an' boats, an' the shores an' the sea an' the mountings; Peter's fishin' coat, lilies an' sparrers an' grass o' the fields, an' all about the evenin' sky bein' red or lowerin', an' fair an' foul weather. It's an outdoors, woodsy, country story, sides bein' the heavniest one that was ever telled."

Jimmie's desire to be a "fisher of men," and its fulfilment, closes the little sketch, which even Ian Maclaren could not surpass in ideal beauty of form and sentiment.

Next to "Fishin' Jimmie" comes "Aunt Randy," whose "dream" is almost grotesque, were it not for the pity of it. Yet, I think if Aunt Randy's "dream" could be told in all the pulpits on Easter Sunday, there would be no need of a sermon.

Aunt Randy lost faith in both God and man when her little son Jacob died and her good-for-nothing husband left her. She lived a solitary, misanthropic life until she found a caterpillar that she fancied resembled her boy.

She carried the insect home, fed and cared for it, named it "Jacob," and found an outlet for her affection in this strange way.

A day came when the caterpillar dug down into the earth in the window box and dis-

appeared. Aunt Randy believed it dead and cried her old heart out over him, because she "hadn't anything left in all the world but two little graves." The caterpillar's resurrection, "big an' beautiful, brown an' buff an' pink an' with wings," brought back her faith and hope for her boy's future rising.

"I can't put inter words how I felt when I see Jacob come out o' his very grave an' spread his wings an' fly round my room, nor how I cried out loud as I see it."

"Why not my boy, too? O Lord, you can do that jest's easy's this!"

The unwelcome return of Aunt Randy's husband, and her work and faith for him, provokes a smile that holds more of tenderness than mirth.

"I've seen wuss caterpillars nor him turn inter real sightly flyin' things; not the best nor han'somest, mebbe, but suthin' with wings, 'tennerate, an' that's a good deal. . . . I tell ye, there's wings in us all if we could see 'em. An' when Mr. Gates gits off his caterpillar skin, an' comes up an' shakes the dirt all off, I ain't goin' to be a mite ashamed on him 's long as he's got wings."

"Botany Bay" dreams that he has a double.

"God got the stuff doubled, you see, an' when He went to cut me out—or him, whichever 'twas He meant to make—He made two on us. I guess He didn't find it out till it was too late, or He wouldn't ha' let it go."

Botany Bay's trouble is that there is only one "place" in heaven, that only one of the "doubles" can be saved, and brooding over it in his cloudy brain at length he gives up his life—"stops bein'," as he phrased it, for the sake of "t'other."

"Butterneggs" is a quaint little conceit concerning heredity, that may be intended half as a quiet satire, while "A Speakin' Ghost" is a touching little "dream" of a hungry, lonely mother-heart, emptied because of the young sons who found each a sailor's grave. A little ghost boy comes to her every twilight, whom she trains in the Christian doctrines, and sends back to "his people" on Christmas Eve.

The remaining "Dreams" are equally pretty in conception.

The underlying tenderness, the purity and the human longing that gives rise to each dream is not all the charm, for much lies in the manner of telling and the atmosphere of word and field which environs this delightful, pure breathing little volume.

"The Seven Dreamers," by Mrs. Slosson. Harper Bros., New York. Briggs Pub. Co., Toronto.

Marshall Saunders, our young Halifax writer, who captured the humane reading world with the story of "Beautiful Joe," has published a story for the little ones entitled "Charles and His Lamb."

In this little volume Miss Saunders has presented scenes from the life of a real baby boy, whose passionate love for animals is prettily shown.

"Charles and His Lamb" is a glimpse of child life in its setting of love, but the author has made the mistake of interleaving the simple narrative wit' adult philosophies. The child's relations to his dumb friends are viewed and discussed from an adult standpoint. The little story is not permitted to "tell itself" or point its own lesson; while, again, much of the language is entirely above childish comprehension.

Many paragraphs and one or two chapters should be eliminated if "Charles and His Lamb" is intended, as the author asserts, "for little folks," else the story must be broken in bits, crumbled into softness for baby lips,—all of which somewhat mars the pretty baby story.

"Charles and His Lamb," by Marshall Saunders. Baines, New York. Briggs Pub. Co., Toronto.

REVIEWER.