



A LITERARY PIONEER



A MONG women writers connected with the literature of Canada in the early part of last century was one of the gifted Strickland sisters, Mrs. Susanna Moodie, who lived near the town of Peterborough, in Ontario, and may be considered as the chronicler of pioneer days in that part of the country. Her book, 'Roughing it in the Bush,' presents the Canada of seventy years ago as it appeared to an English lady, unfitted by traditions and training for the toilsome life of the pioneer, but trying to make the best of the circumstances.

Major and Mrs. Moodie landed at Quebec, immigrants from England, in August, 1832, the dreadful year of the cholera epidemic. The first part of their journey 'up country' was made by coach, along the banks of the St. Lawrence, where 'the neat farmhouses looked homes of beauty and happiness,' and the apple trees were loaded with ripening fruit which must be avoided for fear of the dreaded cholera. From Prescott to Cobourg the immigrants proceeded by the steamer 'William IV.', and soon after arriving, Major Moodie purchased a farm some little distance inland. When the family arrived at their temporary home, which they had not taken the precaution to examine, the prospect was dreary enough.

'Without, pouring rain; within, a fireless hearth; a room with but one window, and that containing only one whole pane of glass; not an article of furniture to be seen, save an old painted pine-wood cradle, which had been left there by some freak of fortune.' No wonder that Mrs. Moodie gave way to tears of homesickness. Later she wrote, 'Now, when not only reconciled to Canada, but loving it, and feeling a deep interest in its present welfare, and the fair prospect of its future greatness, I often look back and laugh at the feelings with which I then regarded this noble country.'

The Moodies seem to have been unfortunate in their first choice of a location. Their few neighbors not only borrowed them out of house and home, but were disobliging and unsympathetic.

There is a simple but graphic account of a night alone in the little home in the bush, in nervous terror of the wolves howling in the swamp behind the house, of possible tramps, and of imaginary disasters to Major Moodie, who had not arrived home the evening before, as expected. 'Burning the fallow' is another graphic piece of description. Business had called Major Moodie to Toronto, and while he was absent, John, a surly, obstinate young man, proceeded to set fire to the huge piles of brush and trunks of trees in the fallow, in every direction.

Major Moodie having no practical knowledge of farming, and but an indifferent capacity for doing business in a new country, met with discouraging losses. He decided to sell the farm and move to the backwoods, beyond Peterborough, where he took up a government grant of land on the Upper Kutchikanook Lake. Here Mrs. Moodie was happier than she had been before. Beautiful flowers and stately trees were all around, with fantastic rocks, and fairy isles in the lake upon which she and her husband spent many of their leisure hours in a light cedar canoe. She made friends among the Indians and squaws, and an interesting chapter is that on 'the wilderness, and our Indian friends.'

At this day, when the relations between Canada and the Mother Country are so intimate and cordial, it is rather curious to read the frank criticism of an Englishwoman who writes of the Canadian people with as much detachment and impersonality as if they were the natives of some strange foreign country. But, it must be remembered that this was more than half a century ago. In

'Life in the Clearings,' published in 1852, Mrs. Moodie says: 'The dress of the higher class is not only cut in the newest French fashion, imported from New York, but is generally composed of rich and expensive materials. The Canadian lady dresses well and tastefully, and carries herself easily and gracefully. She is not unconscious of the advantages of a pretty face and figure; but her knowledge of the fact is not exhibited in an affected or disagreeable manner. The lower class are not a whit behind their wealthier neighbors in outward adornments. And the poor emigrant, who only a few months previously had landed in rags, is now dressed neatly and respectably.' The authoress would probably write this paragraph over again if she were living to-day, but she would find in the outdoor-loving Canadian girls a contrast to the 'delicate' maidens of society in 1850, when she wrote:

Wife of the Minister of Public Works



Mrs. Pugsley, wife of the Hon. Wm. Pugsley, Minister of Public Works, was, before her marriage, Miss Fanny Parks, daughter of the late Thomas Parks, of St. John, N.B. The marriage took place on Jan. 6, 1876.

'It is quite fashionable to be delicate, but horribly vulgar to be considered capable of enjoying such a useless blessing as good health.'

Anecdotes make up a rather too large proportion of Mrs. Moodie's books, and there are pages of 'reflections,' after the fashion of authoresses of her day. But the descriptions—of lumbering, the spring floods, the agricultural show, woodland scenes, etc.—and accounts of neighborhood and domestic happenings are given in refreshingly simple narrative style. 'Roughing it in the Bush' is worthy of being brought forth by the present generation from its retirement at the back of the bookshelves. Mrs. Moodie published several novels, also a volume of poems, some of which are lyrics full of beauty and color.



INDIAN SUMMER.

By the purple haze that lies
On the distant rocky height,
By the deep blue of the skies,
By the smoky amber light,
Through the forest arches streaming,
Where Nature on her throne sits dreaming,

And the sun is scarcely gleaming,

Through the cloudlet's snowy white,
Winter's lovely herald greets us,
Ere the ice-crown'd tyrant meets us.

A mellow softness fills the air—

No breeze on wanton wing steals by,
To break the holy quiet there,

Or make the waters fret and sigh,
Or the golden alders shiver,
That bend to kiss the placid river,
Flowing on and on for ever;

But the little waves seem sleeping,
O'er the pebbles slowly creeping,
That last night were flashing, leaping,
Driven by the restless breeze,
In lines of foam beneath yon trees.

Dress'd in robes of gorgeous hue—

Brown and gold with crimson blent
The forest to the waters blue

Its own enchanting tints has lent.
In their dark depths, life-like glowing,
We see a second forest growing,
Each pictur'd leaf and branch bestowing
A fairy grace on that twin wood,
Mirror'd within the crystal flood.

'Tis pleasant now in forest shades;—

The Indian hunter strings his bow
To track, through dark entangled glades,
The antler'd deer and bounding doe;
Or launch at night his birch canoe,
To spear the finny tribes that dwell
On sandy bank, in weedy cell,

Or pool the fisher knows right well,—
Seen by the red and livid glow
Of pine-torch at his vessel's bow.

This dreamy Indian-summer day

Attunes the soul to tender sadness:
We love, but joy not in the ray,—

It is not summer's fervid gladness,
But a melancholy glory

Hov'ring brightly round decay,
Like swan that sings her own sad story,
Ere she floats in death away.

The day declines.—What splendid dyes,

In flicker'd waves of crimson driven,
Float o'er the saffron sea, that lies
Glowing within the western heaven!

Ah, it is a peerless even!
See, the broad red sun has set,
But his rays are quivering yet
Through Nature's veil of violet,
Streaming bright o'er lake and hill;
But earth and forest lie so still—
We start, and check the rising tear,
'Tis beauty sleeping on her bier.

—Susanna Moodie.

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