

ALLAN AARON EDSON, R.C.A.

"Heaven gives its favourites early death."

—BYRON.

The late eminent Canadian landscape painter, and one of the founders of the Royal Canadian Academy, was a native of Stanbridge, Que., where he first saw the light of day on the 18th of December, 1846. He was of American parentage, his father and mother having come from New Hampshire, and were early settlers of the above-named place. Allan was early sent to school, and was considered a very bright and intelligent boy. These first happy days were spent under the careful tuition of Mr. Hobart Butler, M.A., who was the principal of the Stanbridge Academy, and who has ever since evinced great interest in his distinguished pupil. In 1858 Edson left this academy and studied three years at Vercheres College, graduating with a good commercial education. Among some of his early schoolmates, who have since made their mark in this province, we may mention the Hon. W. W. Lynch, formerly Commissioner of Crown Lands of the Provincial Government, and now a leading Queen's counsel of this city, who, in reply to our request for a few words in connection with the subject of this sketch, very kindly writes: "I knew the late Allan Edson well when I was a lad. I entered Stanbridge Academy in 1858, where he was a student. Edson was an intelligent, bright and interesting boy. He early displayed a taste for drawing, and the school books of all his chums contain specimens of his work. He was an apt scholar, but did not care to go through a university course, although his teacher was anxious that he should do so."

Mr. Hobart Butler, M.A., principal of the Stanbridge Academy, in reply to a note sent him, says:—

"Edson began school with me at the Stanbridge Academy in September, 1857. He continued with me some four or five years, in which time he became advanced in the higher mathematics; very well versed in Latin (he read Virgil and Sallust with me). He was a very good French scholar, and also made considerable advance in Greek. It was the intention to prepare his education for the Arts Department. On his father's removal to Montreal, his thoughts became directed into another channel—painting. His school days, at my academy, were contemporaneous with those of the Hon. W. W. Lynch, the Rexfords, Meigses, Chandlers, Blinns, &c. He stood well as a scholar, and was very highly esteemed for his amiable qualities."

The late Mr. John C. Baker, of Stanbridge, a gentleman of means, and who was a great lover of art, and particularly of landscape painting, soon discovered the existence of latent artistic talent in the young man, and financially encouraged him to devote his energies to its development. "In common with the host of Edson's admirers in Canada, I feel that in his death Canadian art has lost one of its best, if not its best, landscape painter." These are good, kind words.

Mr. A. A. Ayer, the wholesale produce merchant, of this city, was another of his early school fellows.

About 1861 the family took up their permanent residence in this city, where we first find Allan cashier in the employ of the late Mr. James Morrison, a dry goods merchant on Notre Dame street. Not liking the retail trade, he left to engage with the late Mr. James B. Stevenson, on St. Helen street. It was while in this latter situation that he showed a strong predilection for art, continually sketching or drawing some little thing on the paper wrappers of nearly every parcel sent out by the firm. About this time it seemed to dawn upon him and his family that his future life was not to be of a commercial cast, but as a disciple of art; and the thought seized him he must save his "bawbees" to visit Europe with a view of studying.

His leisure hours in the evening were spent in an old attic, drawing and painting and in every way practising his favourite future calling. The income being limited, induced him to make another

move and engage with an exchange broker, who soon after ran away. After his flight it was discovered he left Allan a small box of farthings. These, exchanged with some other accumulated savings, enabled him to take his long wished for first trip across the Atlantic to the old world.

Shortly after his arrival we find him hard at work, as the following copy from a printed card will show:—

NATIONAL GALLERY, London.

Admit Mr. Allan Edson to study in the gallery, from 10 till 5 o'clock on Thursdays and Fridays, at Trafalgar square, and on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays at South Kensington.

R. K. WORKMAN,

Keeper and Secretary.

No. 4020.

He was about eighteen when he first visited the old world, and after a stay of two years returned home. His second visit was of about twelve months' duration, all this time making rapid progress, and on this occasion bringing back, for the first time, a number of pictures, which, from their careful manner of execution, found a ready sale. Thus encouraged and anxious, it was not long before he made a third visit, spending his time principally in England and Scotland. An independent and wealthy gentleman—a true lover of art—of this city, in giving Edson a note of introduction to a celebrated *confrère* in London, on his last visit abroad, wrote: "In faithfully representing our Canadian forest scenery, either in its summer or its winter aspect, it is acknowledged he surpasses all native artists." He had resided five years in France, there passing the most of his latter days, part of which time he was a scholar of the celebrated Leon J. Pelouse, at Cerny-la-ville, with whom he was on the most intimate terms of friendship, this famous landscape artist considering Edson his favourite pupil, and saying the day was not far distant when he (Edson) would no doubt be made a Chevalier d'Honneur.

We believe we are justified in stating he had no superior as a truthful landscape painter. Edson was a man who never said much about his own work; he was always anxious for fair, honest and intelligent criticism, and would generally say afterward, "I wish I could do it a hundred times better." An honest opinion, which must be highly valued, is that of Mr. Wm. Scott, the fine art connoisseur, of this city, who says: "I regard Allan Edson as the best landscape artist that Canada has yet produced. His keen insight into nature and his great power of handling and depicting the same as he saw it, with his knowledge and play of colour, were of the highest order. It is the opinion of good judges, had he lived and further cultivated his inherent genius, he would have taken rank among the leading artists of the world."

His pictures are held in high esteem all over the globe. The late Judge Robert Mackay, President of the Montreal Art Association, was one of those who early encouraged him to persevere, and was always a warm personal friend. He was honoured by the Princess Louise, who bought two of his works—for the Queen—which are now in Windsor Castle. Mr. R. B. Angus, President of our Art Association, an exceedingly liberal patron of the fine arts; Sir D. A. Smith, Mr. Andrew Allan, Sir G. Stephen, Messrs. J. Hickson, J. R. Wilson, W. C. Van Horne, G. A. Drummond, W. H. Davis, Miss Duncan, S. Coulson, and some others of this city, whom we cannot call to mind, own some of his best works.

His water colours were always eagerly sought for, and were generally noted for their cheery, warm tone, rich in our truly typical, grand, Canadian golden sunsets.

It is sad to think he was not spared to leave on canvas some of the glories of our great Northwest and wild Rocky Mountain scenery.

The following are a few of his works: "A Study of a Canadian Landscape," Salon, Paris, 1882; "Bolton Forest," Salon, Paris, 1882; "A Grey Day," Salon, Paris, 1883; "In February," Salon, Paris, 1883; "A Foggy Day, Cernay," Salon, Paris, 1883; "Un Petit Coin aux Vaux, pres Cernay," Salon, Paris, 1884; "Habitants Crossing the St. Lawrence," Royal Academy, London, 1886; "Settlers' Huts," Institute of Water Colours,

London, 1886; "On the Line," Centennial Exhibition, 1876; and many others we might enumerate.

He had been a constant exhibitor at the Versailles gallery during the last few years.

The Royal Canadian Academy exhibitions, held every year, found him well represented.

The Ontario Society of Arts at Toronto annually saw him display some of his best works.

He loved the art atmosphere of France, for the hearty greeting and warm welcome from its true art students and devotees; but he loved his own "Canada First." His friends at all times found him a most unassuming, genial, warm-hearted companion, and simple in manners.

In appearance he was of medium height, though rather thick-set; clean-shaved, ruddy complexion, regular features, fair hair, with mild blue eyes. Phrenologically speaking, he had a large, round, full head.

The recent sale of his last works, in oil and water colours, numbering 100, showed a very kindly appreciation of his last efforts, realizing, as it did, over \$5,000, and, if we mistake not, the highest figures ever obtained at one afternoon's sale of works painted by a Canadian artist.

The subject of this sketch died at Glen Sutton, Que., on the 1st of May of the present year, of pneumonia, after an illness of only a few weeks' duration. He was first taken ill in February last, and was recovering his strength, when, in opposition to the wishes of his doctor, he ventured from his home and finished his last work, "The Frozen Cascade," now owned by Mr. W. H. Davis. From this exposure he suffered a relapse, from which he never rallied, recalling the early fate of H. Kirk White,

"Nursing the pinion that impelled the steel."

Mr. Edson was married in this city in 1871 to Miss Mary Stewart, who survives him with a family of four sons, the oldest being 16 and the youngest 9 years of age. He died at the early age of 42, deeply lamented by his brother artists and by a large circle of acquaintances in Europe, the United States and Canada.

"Iacledé," or Mr. John Talon-Lesperance, suggested to us shortly after his death, an excellent idea—the gathering of his best works obtainable, in some of the leading towns in the Eastern Townships—say, Sherbrooke.

Montreal, July, 1888.

JOHN HORN.



The rumour that Sarah Bernhardt contemplates playing Romeo is true.

Bartley Campbell, one of the few successful American playwrights, has just died in Connecticut.

Johann Strauss has given up writing waltzes and will hereafter devote himself to composing grand operas.

A blind guitarist named Moujon, from Spain, is creating a stir in the musical world by his exceptional performances.

Frederick C. Phillips, author of "As in a Looking Glass," has been by turns cavalry-man, barrister, theatre manager, and newspaper man.

Edmund Burke once told Garrick that all bitter things were hot. "Indeed," said Garrick, "what do you think, Mr. Burke, of bitter cold weather?"

A Stradivarius violin of 1716, made for the Marchese Pamparati, has passed from the hands of an Italian player, Bertuzzi, into the possession of a London gentleman for \$4,000.

Another musical prodigy is a girl 10 years old, who plays the violin and interprets works of the greatest musicians in a way that arouses the wildest enthusiasm in Italy. Giuletta Dionesi, the girl in question, comes from a musical family of Leghorn.

Los Angeles, Cal., will have one of the finest theatres in the country. It is decorated in Oriental style, has twenty East India pagoda boxes, a conservatory filled with exotics and flowering shrubs and fountains, and an immense foyer. There are twenty one separate exits and twenty handsomely furnished dressing rooms. It is lighted throughout by electricity.