

## NAMES AND WORDS.

It is with the greatest reluctance that a black fellow will mention his own name. They have a peculiar horror of mentioning the name of a dead person, and even the name of a person absent from the tribe is carefully avoided. Accurately speaking, the blacks never arrive at the thinking stage; they are animals with no higher stimulus than that of hunger, revenge, and fear. Hence, I am not surprised to find that they were incapable of inventing names for the most common objects. It therefore followed that when the name of a deceased member of the tribe was also the name of an animal, to avoid mentioning the same the name of the animal had to be changed. As they could not invent, they added one or two other names to the original one, thus giving rise to dialects only understood by the particular tribe in which the change took place. The natives along the Murray River believe that the sun is simply a great fire, and that at one time it burned both day and night until a certain song was sung, but that since the utterance of the following mystic words, it has gone out at night only to be rekindled in the morning. The Rev. Mr. Bulmer furnishes the translation:—

YHUKO, <i>Sun.</i>	WARRY, <i>You.</i>	YHUKO WARRY, <i>Sun You.</i>
YARRA, <i>Wood.</i>	YARROMA, <i>Wood of yours.</i>	WARREDILYEE, <i>Burn.</i>
YUNTHO, <i>Bowels.</i>	YUNTHOMA, <i>Bowels of yours.</i>	WARREDILYE, <i>Burn.</i>
TULE, <i>Go down!</i>	TULE, <i>Go down!</i>	

Every new moon is said to be young and weak, and is therefore shaded and shielded by the clouds from its foes until it gains strength sufficient to defend itself.

## GENERAL REMARKS.

The natives are unanimous in the opinion that there was a time when they did not possess fire, and although they are at present able to produce one by rubbing a pointed stick in a groove, the labour is very exhausting, and when travelling from one point to another they invariably depute one of the lubras to carry a burning brand. In judging of this remarkable race it must constantly be borne in mind that they are the very lowest savages in the scale ever discovered; that they are incapable of abstract ideas and that, after years of careful training, they can form no conception of such things as are implied in goodness, faith, immortality, etc. They never built a house or even a hut of a permanent character; they did not possess sufficient intelligence to adapt their clothing to the change of climate; they were strangers to the art of cooking; they never provided for a meal in advance. They belong to the genus man, and yet they are but slightly superior to the higher branches of the Anthropoid family. Testimony is united that they are incapable of being civilized or of existing under the changed conditions imposed by civilization. The fiat has gone forth, and their extinction is only the matter of a few brief years.

THAD. W. H. LEAVITT.

## CORRESPONDENCE.

## CANADIAN LITERATURE AND THE ALLEGED PREPONDERANCE OF VERSE.

To the Editor of THE WEEK:

SIR,—I observe in your last issue that a contributor, who evidently fears that Canada intellectually is becoming a nest of singing-birds, calls upon our native writers to give more attention to prose composition. In the literary out-pur of the Dominion he seems to think there is a preponderance of poetry; and he forms this opinion, he tells us, after perusing the bibliographical notes appended to Mr. Lighthall's recent collection of native verse, and in view, no doubt, of the appearance of the volume itself, with its singularly good examples of Canadian achievement in this department of literary effort. Pray, may I ask space in your columns for a few comments on the interesting topic which your contributor has raised? I ask this in no spirit of contention, but with the desire to get at facts. I may say, however, that I am not a little impressed by the idea that your contributor has been carried away by his speculative interest in figures, which it seems to me has somewhat misled him, and that he has overlooked the mass of prose writers, whose work is not so obtrusive as that of our poets, and, moreover, has not had the honour to be collected into a prose anthology, or by whatever name it may be proper to call a representative volume of Canadian prose. Here is what your contributor says:—

But a thought strikes us as we read the "Notes Bibliographical and Biographical" appended to Mr. Lighthall's collection of the "Songs of the Great Dominion". How is it that Canada seems to have produced and to be producing such a preponderance of poetry over prose? In the list of sixty-seven poets represented, seventeen only, or twenty-five per cent., are described as having written prose also; and we are told that the number of those who have "at various times produced really good poetry might be roughly placed at three hundred," so that if we suppose the average of these latter to be the same as that of the former, we shall have only seventy-five producers of combined prose and poetry.

Now the fallacy (no doubt unintentional) underlying these remarks is this, that it limits the native writers of prose to those who have written verse; and the error is far from being corrected by the citation of only five names—not, it will be conceded, the most eminent that might have been selected—afterwards referred to in the article as representing the Canadian writers of prose. Your contributor, it is true, may reply that in the calculation made in the above extract he is merely estimating, among the

in which a member of another tribe, in consideration of his prowess, was made the chief ruler. Their most complicated tribal usages related to marriage. The Rev. Mr. Ridley and other careful observers hold that no man could marry a woman of the same totum as himself, while in some districts a man could not marry a woman of the same name as his sister, though belonging to another totum; hence great care was taken to give each female child a different name. The lubras (women) were sold by their nearest relations, but the consent of the king had also to be obtained, lest he should covet the woman. In some instances the man was compelled to give his sister in exchange for his wife, and should the latter prove unsatisfactory, he possessed the privilege of returning her and demanding the restoration of his sister. Marriage by capture also existed, and even in cases where the bargain had been struck a semblance of capture was always practised, in which the lubra made a show of resistance, but finally consented to be led away to the gunyah, where she lighted a fire and by so doing sealed the contract. Women are regarded as man's inferior and treated as beasts of burden. It is by no means uncommon to meet a lubra, with an infant on her back, carrying in addition all the moveable property of the family, while the lord of the household marches along swinging a war club and looking down with supreme contempt upon his *best* half. The lubras are in no sense destitute of the maternal instinct, but in times of excessive hardship, when the struggle for existence becomes excessively keen, female infanticide is generally practised. Female infants are undoubtedly chosen as the victims because they are regarded as of less value to the tribe than males. Macalister gives the following in reference to the capturing of wives: "The young man who desires to procure a wife (usually there are several young men banded together for wife-capturing) reconnoitres the position of a neighbouring tribe, and ascertains the position in the camp of the beauty whom he is desirous of securing. Armed with his nulla-nulla and spear, he steals on some dark night, perfectly nude to the side of the object of his search, and then places the point of his spear against her throat. Being thus disturbed in her dreams and fully understanding what is meant, she in most instances, rises quietly and follows her captor; should she make any resistance a blow from the nulla-nulla silences her on the spot." Amid this prosaic tale of barter and sale as well as captures it is satisfactory to find a tinge of sentiment. Even the Aborigines, on rare occasions indulged in love marriages and elopements. The game was a dangerous one, much more so than a trip to Greta Green.

When the elopement becomes known there is no "mounting in hot haste the stud;" on the contrary the relations who have been robbed, together with the allotted husband, who has also been spoiled of his treasure (nearly all girls are allotted at an early age), set out in pursuit of the fugitives, and invariably succeed in coming up with them. Then the young man has to fight, not only for his wife, but also for his life. The mode is that the abductor should stand in a certain position and at a given distance, and receive from each of his pursuers a shot from either a spear or a boomerang, defending himself with a shield. If he escapes death he is permitted one shot at one of his assailants whom he is permitted to select. It is unnecessary to state that he invariably chooses the man to whom the bride was affianced. The young couple are then free to set up house-keeping under the nearest gum tree; but from this date all intercourse with the parents of his lubra must cease; they must not go near him—nor must he look upon them—in particular he must abstain from seeing his mother-in-law, though he must furnish food for her support when required. Should he fail in the last particular she is privileged to come at night and make herself heard, if not seen.

Polygamy is universally practised where there are sufficient lubras. It is significant that in each tribe certain ceremonies, which inflicted severe suffering, were practised upon the young men before they were admitted to the council meetings; that is, they were made men by an initiatory service as civilized communities make Masons.

## EVIL SPIRITS.

The aborigines are beyond doubt the greatest cowards in the world after the sun sets. They huddle around their camp fires, and are in constant dread of being seized and carried off by an evil spirit, which they suppose to wander about the bush at night in great numbers. A strange idea obtains that should they lose some relic of themselves, and it should fall into the hands of an enemy, then their fate is sealed. Not only will the possessor of the relic be able to work them every species of bodily harm, but he may at pleasure terminate their existence. It is a universal belief that death is always occasioned by witchcraft. Illustrating their belief in magic, I cull the following from the *South Australian Advertiser*:—"Chunkey, a well-to-do black fellow, and his mate made an incursion upon the Bimbowrie tribe of aborigines, and carried off three women for wives. . . . One of the Bimbowrie men, in trying to rescue the women, was put under a spell by Chunkey, by means of a human bone pointed at one end of a ball of fat and ochre rolled together. The blacks believe that when this is pointed at any member of a tribe no power on earth can save the victim from death; and their fears so play upon their imagination that their spirits sink, they lose their appetites, waste away and die. . . . For nearly two years Chunkey was pursued, . . . and when a favourable opportunity occurred he was murdered. Among the tribes further north they will pursue for five hundred miles any member of a tribe who has pointed the ochred greasy bone at another black fellow."

number of writers of verse, the proportion of those who have done something in the other branch of literary composition. This rejoinder would be valid did your contributor not go on to urge the necessity for more prose writers, essayists, novelists, and contributors to our magazines and newspapers "of articles on domestic, moral, social, religious and educational matters," without regard, seemingly, to what has been and what currently is being written, and, above all, without indicating how these additional writers are to find in Canada either the field or an adequate remuneration for their work. Without knowing precisely the writer's object in estimating, after his own fashion, the relative number of Canadian authors who use prose and verse, it is obviously difficult to deal with his contribution. How far, I am inclined to ask, does his knowledge extend of native authors who use either? Is his acquaintance with Canadian literature wide enough to make him familiar with all our contemporary writers of prose? And among these does he reckon, not only the writers whose contributions appear in such native periodicals as are open to them, but those who currently write for English and American reviews and magazines, and who do literary work which is published outside of the Dominion? Does he count in the list the more notable men who write for our newspaper press; the editors of and contributors to our legal, medical, educational and religious journals, and the authors of text-books, treatises and works of practice in the various professions? The list of those even who have written and are writing books in Canada is now an extensive one; while the contributors to our periodical press, including those engaged in one or other of the professions, who, were it made worth their while, are capable of writing excellent prose, may be said to be legion. Is it this extensive list of native prose writers your contributor desires to augment, or does he wish simply that, of our writers of verse, there were more who turned their attention to prose? If the former, it would be a kindness first to show how these additional writers are to be employed and remunerated, before disengaging them from their present presumably profitable occupations. If the latter, the same obligation exists and applies, coupled with the expediency of showing cause for diverting from the higher work of verse to the lower work of prose some of the best creative and imaginative minds in the country. Poetic speech must be golden; not necessarily so should be that of prose—should we be doing well, therefore, by debasing the coinage, even if we preserved the equilibrium in the demand between the higher and the lower metals? The singing is of more value than the talking voice; would our people be gainers, it may be asked, by making parrots of the larks? The question, presumably, is not between a good prose writer and an indifferent poet. Were that the issue the case would be different. But, as I read your contributor, he has no quarrel with the quality of the work of our poets, unless he believes the foolish dictum which he cites, that "poetry is much easier to write than prose."

Your contributor concludes his brief paper by re-iterating the counsel that "we have need of prose." If by that he means a sounder, a more strenuous and inspiring—in short, a higher character and quality of prose, I readily agree with him. If in the writing of the time, there seems to him to have come a lull in its force and efficacy, and that there is need of a quickening spirit to breathe anew both upon the nation's conscience and upon its intellect, I still more readily agree with him. If what he seeks is an increase in quality rather than an increase in quantity, and if his desire is that our writers shall not only acquire and disseminate a contagious passion for a loftier patriotism and a higher tone in our public life, but shall grow in power for the utterance of the greatest good that is in them, then again, and heartily, I am with him. These are desires and aspirations, however, for poet and prose writer alike; and through both poet and prose writer, if accepted and acted upon, the nation will gain by the exercise of the higher motives and impulse. In labouring for these worthy and patriotic ends each can do his part, and having done it, each will share in the increased benefit to the country and the enhanced honour to the country's literature.

Toronto, July 1.

G. MERCER ADAM.

## "MORE PROSE WANTED."

To the Editor of THE WEEK:

SIR,—The remarks of your contributor, Erol Gervase, in your last issue, under the heading, "More Prose Wanted," are worthy every consideration, since they indicate an outline for a literary future in Canada, both timely in its appearance and correct in its aim.

I am not sure, however, that Canada could not make a splendid showing of achievements already wrought, as well in the matter of essay, philosophy, and history, as in poetry. Taking it for granted that she has not done so, I think it necessary to challenge the extraordinary reason given, as quoted by Erol Gervase, that "it is so much easier to write poetry." He says that one of our poets recently said so, and in common with myself I am sure a good many of our poets are ready to exclaim "Name?" Does your contributor gravely believe that Heavyside found "Saul" easy to write? Or that William Kirby gave us his "Idylls" easily? Or that Roberts wrote his splendid poem "Orion" because it was so much easier to paint his thought in poetry than prose? To the poet, poetic expression comes naturally, but it is no product of that indolent ease which the remark quoted would imply.

Taken as a remark the statement really means nothing,