

## The Reviewer.

"Irresponsible, indolent——"—TENNYSON.

TIME was when in regard to Mr. Bliss Carman's poetry, I was little better than one of the Philistines. Lately I have undergone a change of heart, and I embrace this opportunity of making a public recantation of my former errors and heresy. In extenuation, however, I can plead the valid excuse of ignorance. When I was numbered with the scoffers and sat in the chair of the scornful, I knew only *Marjory Darrow* and one or two privately printed poems, in which, to my poor judgment, the rhyme ran away with the reason. Had I first learned to know Mr. Carman through his *carmina felicissima* "Low Tide on Grand Pré," I could never have fallen. But his first volume had not then been given to the world. Apart altogether from the necessity of this little abjuration of mine, it behooves a Canadian reviewer to note the portent of a Canadian poet reaching a second edition, within a few months of the first, especially when that second edition is such a jewel of the bookmaker's craft, as Messrs. Stone and Kimball have produced. A finer setting for poems of price is hard to imagine. If many of its fly-leaves do not tender inscriptions of "—— to ——," it will be because our modern lovers have forgotten the good old customs of the 'forties and 'fifties, when the appearance of Mr. Tennyson's slim green volumes dated literary epochs.

In these days when the artist tries to plead sincerity as an excuse for faulty workmanship, it is a pleasure to note Mr. Carman's exquisite technique. With one possible exception, "At the Voice of the Bird," a verse-form limited to four rhymes throughout, which might tax even Mr. Swinburne's ingenuity, the verse as verse is simply satisfying. No one ever denied that Mr. Carman was a musician in words. "Marjory Darrow" was a genuine song; what it lacked was certainty of sound. Now the singer has not only kept his sure touch, his sensitive ear, his own peculiar tune, but he lets us hear distinctly the words of his song. A distinct line should be drawn between poems and puzzles. That difference was not observed in Mr. Carman's first published work; this volume shows that he can write verse as "clear of the mote" as the court lady's diamonds.

There are echoes of other poets here and there. The stanza of "In Memoriam" is used twice; "Whither" suggests a well-known poem of Browning's; "A Sea Child" recalls the opening of "Les Noyades," and "Seven Things" is thoroughly Swinburnian in its mystical balance. But Mr. Carman's manner is distinctly his own. Nor can one complain of monotony in a poet who has mastered such diverse movements as these:—

"Was it a year or lives ago  
We took the grasses in our hands,  
And caught the summer flying low  
Over the waning meadow lands,  
And held it there between our hands?"

"And all her heart  
Is a woven part  
Of the flurry and drift  
Of whirling snow;

For the sake of two  
Sad eyes and true  
And the old, old love  
So long ago."

"Still the Guelder roses bloom,  
And the sunlight fills the room,

Where love's shadow at the door  
Falls upon the dusty floor."

"For man's walk the earth with mourning  
Down to death, and leaves no trace,  
With the dust upon his forehead  
And the shadow in his face."

These all are undenied successes; but without doubt, the strongest form is the simple ballad quatrain, which Heine found the best. The true lyrist does not follow after eccentricity. He takes the tune consecrated by ages of use, the verse-form that comes easiest to the lips of the common people. To both he gives new meaning, new contents; and that is not an easy thing. For instance, such a verse as

"She knows the morning ways whereon  
The windflower and the wind confer;  
Behold there is not any fear  
Upon the farthest trail with her!"

apart from the suggestion it brings of the joy of morning, is like a charm to croon over to oneself, for pure delight in the lightly-tripping procession of well-mated words. The best poems in the book are in this metre. They answer to the final and supreme test of the lyric; they will not out of the memory. To read them once is to be henceforth haunted with shapes of grace and echoes of ringing sweetness.

The opening poem, which gives the book its name, is one of love and loss. The mistress is absent and the lover regrets. That is all; but one is not forbidden to interpret further. In a lover's ear, the confession may have deeper meaning. It is pervaded with the hush of sunset, apt symbol of that reticence of grief, which half conceals the mood it has preserved in precious balms of language. The next poem, "Why," repeats the thought of the epitaph in the Lucy-cycle "No motion has she now, nor force." But by easy transitions, the personal note, at no time insistent or plaintive, is merged in deeper, fuller strains. These may be called hymns to that

"—Presence which disturbs us with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts——"

Isis, Mother Nature. The relation between

"—The great Mother of us all,  
Whose moulded dust and dew we are  
With the blown flower by the wall."

and her poet-son is one of perfect understanding, of grave tenderness without a shadow of gloom. There is nothing new in finding Nature the consoler, but the poet treats this well-worn theme with an air of distinction, wholly his own.

"Still the old secret shifts and waits.  
The last interpreter."

The latest interpreter is worthy of his great charge; he has found new meaning in the old text.

"And all the world is but a scheme  
Of busy children in the street,  
A play they follow and forget  
On summer evenings, pale with heat.

\* \* \* \*

But waiting in the fields for them  
I see the ancient Mother stand,  
With the old courage of her smile,  
The patience of her sunbrowned hand.

They heed her not until there comes  
A breath of sleep upon their eyes,  
A drift of dust upon their face;  
Then in the closing dusk they rise,

And turn them to the empty doors."

The contrast between our feverish, futile lives and the calm, significant majesty of this world's beauty is plain in these few words. It has rarely been better drawn.

*Pulvis et Umbra* shows how the poet holds himself akin to everything that lives.

"There is dust upon my fingers,  
Pale gray dust of beaten wings  
Where a great moth came and settled  
From the night's blown winnowings."

This is enough to set him musing, who or what the visitant can be:

"Or is my mute guest whose coming  
So unheralded befell  
From the border wilds of dreamland  
Only whimsy Ariel,  
Gleaning with the wind, in furrows  
Lonelier than dawn to reap,  
Dust and shadow and forgetting,  
Frost and reverie and sleep?"

Man that is crushed before the moth, whose life is a vapour that appeareth for a little, cannot vaunt himself as higher, only different.

"Pillared dust and fleeing shadow  
As the roadside wind goes by,  
And the fourscore years that vanish  
In the twinkling of an eye."

Man also is of "the dust and shadow kindred." He