



THE "BOOK OF WONDERS."

To some of our Eastern readers the "Book of Wonders" may be a not altogether unfamiliar title. A few of them, we doubt not, knew the author and loved him for more than his book, for more than the bright gifts of intellect and fancy to which it bears witness, for the genial, affectionate, wholesome nature, for the rare faculty of enduring friendship and the sympathy with all that is good and beautiful and true. But let his biographer tell the story of this life of high promise so mysteriously cut short:

In the village of Wolfville, on the 18th of April, 1871, Leslie L. Davison first saw the light of this world. Had he lived five more days he would have reached his eighteenth birthday, and lived eighteen years. These years were busy ones. His thoughts seemed always busy. Whatever he wanted done, he could do it, and do it well. He was a genius. He attempted printing, and in a very short time excelled. Spare hours he spent successively at wood-work, drawing, wood-engraving, studying and writing. He was always skilful with the plane and saw, and in wood-work he succeeded so that when he was very young he could make the carpenter's tools do wonders. Drawing and wood-engraving had great attractions for him, and several of his efforts in this line have appeared in the *Acadian*. Studying he liked better, seemingly, after he had left school than while attending. He continued studying Latin and became quite far advanced. When he was sixteen he wrote a journal in Latin and English. But chemistry he preferred to Latin, and after making wood-cuts and stereotypes, he was not satisfied till he had acquired the process of making electrotypes. Writing he always loved. Had he not, he never could have written what he had. In the articles that are to follow the contents of the "Book of Wonders" will be given.

I remember how he laughed as he showed me the book for the first time and I read the title. He always depreciated his literary talent, and this was the satirical appellation he gave his book of manuscripts. . . . One day not long before the spirit left the quiet sick-room and winged its way to fairer shores, "where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest," as I sat and conversed with him, he said: "You remember my 'Book of Wonders'? I wish, if you could in any way muster up the courage and patience, you would read it over again, and if there is anything in it that's worth preserving you would take care of it and burn the rest." I told him that I would and that I thought there was a good deal worth preserving.

Such is the pathetic origin of what we look upon as most interesting among Canadian volumes. It is vain for us to conjecture what Leslie Loring Davison might have accomplished had he lived on till the period of mature manhood. He did not live quite eighteen years, and precious to his friends and not unworthy of his aspirations are the "Stray Leaves" from his "Book," which form the bulk of this memorial collection of prose and poetry. On another page ("Red and Blue Pencils") we give a specimen of what Leslie Davison could do in either style of composition. We have to thank the Rev. Arthur J. Lockhart for kindly interceding with the publishers (Messrs. Davison Brothers, of Wolfville, N.S.) on our behalf. We have also to thank his fellow-editor and himself for making us acquainted with the life work of their friend.

FANCIES OF BOYHOOD.

There was not the same inevitable obligation to put in print the juvenile productions of Mr. Edward Blackadder that justified the publication of the "Book of Wonders." By a singular coincidence the same generous patron of letters has encouraged the living and done justice to the dead aspirant. Mr. Blackadder thanks Mr. H. Sidney Davison, of the Wolfville *Acadian*, for many kindly suggestions and instructive criticisms. It was on the staff of the *Acadian* that Leslie Loring Davison made that start in literature which was so full of promise—promise that would have had its fulfilment had not death so sadly shortened the young writer's career. Is it not Mr. Sidney Davison, in conjunction with "Pastor Felix," who has saved from oblivion the records of that brief but fruitful life? *Heu miserande puer, si quæ fata aspera rumpas, Tu Marcellus eris.*

Let us hope that Mr. Blackadder will have more than his tribute of lilies—though in the case of young Leslie Davison it certainly cannot be called *inane munus*.

As a rule, we do not approve of the publication of youthful poems, simply as such. If poems or any other literary compositions have any value, let the world by all means have the delight and profit of reading them. But if they are of such doubtful worth that it is necessary to remind the reader that they are the offspring of immaturity, then far better let them rest in the shade. In his preface, Mr. Blackadder informs us that all the productions in his book were written between his twelfth and nineteenth years—"which early age," he adds, "will account for some irregularities of metre and crudities of construction." Now, as he has survived long enough and sufficiently improved in knowledge and taste to be aware of these defects, would it not have been wiser for Mr. Blackadder to have revised his poems

before submitting them to the public? What does the poet say of those who devote their lives to the elevation of their kind?

They give the people of their best,
The worst they keep, the best they give.

That is the true principle, and less than what it implies we cannot expect to be acceptable. While, however, we deem it our duty to deprecate any ostentatious emphasizing of precocity as conferring a charm on what, if it were the product of a mature mind, would attract little, if any, attention, and to express our conviction that poetry, like everything else, should be judged solely on its merits, we are glad to recognize in much of Mr. Blackadder's work the undoubted signs of inspiration, and if his development be consonant with these beginnings there is good reason to hope great things of him. It gives us pleasure to read his tribute to the memory of L. L. Davison. In spite of roughnesses, some of his translations are by no means bad. But they could be amended. Some of the patriotic poems show promise—even more than promise. But one fault pervades the book. The author is unfair to himself in leaving so much that might have done him credit in an unfinished state. Moreover, why should he publish fragments? Some of them have good thoughts, indeed. For instance:

He who would fain attain to greatness must
Attempt great things—not wish to be among
The glorious stars and grovel in the dust.

But we do not look for fragments from young writers. When great men have passed away, we gather up the fragments, so that nothing which bore the impress of their genius may be lost. Again, why perpetrate such a rhyme as "plaything—dayspring?" Mr. Blackadder's own ear must have tingled with pain at such a discord. His metre is also (as he acknowledges) frequently at fault. In his preface he justifies publication, on the ground that for the humbler singer there is a place as well as for the more tuneful. But the humbler owes it to his admirers to sing his best. If, as we fear, Mr. Blackadder has avoided revision in order to let us see what his muse was like in her gushing and thoughtless teens, he has committed a folly. He has certainly shown that there is good stuff in him, but for that very reason he ought to cultivate his gift to better advantage. Its development is of more importance than the precocious exercise of it. We hope to hear from Mr. Blackadder again and to have the best thought and imagination of his manhood, as well as the revised fancies of his boyhood. (Halifax, Nova Scotia, Printing Company.)

THE FEAST OF SAINT ANNE.

It is a good sign when the public gives a book an encore. We can well recall when "The Feast of Saint Anne" first made its appearance, just as Lord Dufferin (to whom it is dedicated) took his leave of the Dominion. With the name and many-sided ability of the author, Mr. Pierce Stevens Hamilton, we have long been acquainted. A native of Truro, after completing his education at Acadia College, he entered on the study of law and was admitted to the Bar. He has served in some important public positions and has written largely on a variety of subjects, many connected with the interests of the Maritime Provinces. He took a lead in the Confederation movement, and is a sturdy Imperialist. Poetry has been the solace of his leisure hours. Several of the poems in this volume appeared in Provincial journals on various occasions. One of them—"Jhansi," the most spirited of the shorter compositions—is based on a tragic incident of the Indian mutiny, which was so fruitful in heroism as well as in atrocity. The plan of the principal poem has been successfully employed by many poets, both of the past and the present. It is that of a gathering which furnish a succession of narrators of tales or episodes. The occasion for bringing the company together in this instance is a ceremony long of annual recurrence among the Indians of Nova Scotia. St. Anne, on whose festival it takes place, is the patroness of the Micmac or Souriquois tribes. The festival is or was not long since commemorated at Chapel Island, in the most southern arm of Bras d'Or Lake, about seven miles from St. Peter's, Cape Breton. The island in question, with a tract of land on the opposite mainland, was one of the principal Indian reserves in Nova Scotia. The sports observed at the anniversary are generally kept up for a week or ten days, and are witnessed by large numbers of the white dwellers in neighbouring settlements. The scene is thus described:

In swarms of arrowy canoes they came—
Flotillas dancing o'er the wide Bras d'Or,
And barks more ponderous, with sail and oar,
Equipped and managed by the white man's skill—
From many an Indian village near and far,

The favoured of their frequent shifting homes,
With names most musical in their soft tongue,
Though oft distorted into sounds uncouth
In false refinement's blundering utterance,
Or changed for nomenclature meaningless.

The homes of the gathered host are duly enumerated:—

From Malagatchkit's mazy shores they came

And many another dell and stream and shore
To these dark natives of the soil most dear
In this last stronghold of their fading race.

Various motives have inspired the throng—religion, trade, recreation,

When games and revels and barbaric glee
Untiringly from morn till latest eve
Shall banish silence from their wooded shores,
And not Indians only;
Far other crowds

by curious impulse led,
mingle among the descendants of the old lords of the soil,
And there amid majestic even flow
Of Micmac converse, softly musical,
Rang forth the gay, sonorous *Langué d'Oil*
As heard in France a century ago,
With lusty Gaelic gutturals—the tongue
Which loves the name of Scotia, Old and New,
While English, mingling through the whole was heard
Like drone of bagpipe with the chanter's air.

The various pastimes are described—the canoe races, the war-dance, the Highland-fling, tossing the caber, and "other feats of nimbleness or strength." Then followed high mass, a *feu de joie*, a banquet and renewed revelry, and the "far-fetched company" determined to devote a portion of the time to story-telling. Fitly remembering that

"This, our country's history, though young,
Does many a high heroic deed embalm,"

they selected their themes from the eventful annals of Canada. Among the tales embodied in "The Festival of Saint Anne" are the "Rendezvous of D'Anville," "The Heroine of St. John," "A Legend of Port Royal" and "The Last Witch of Shubenacadie." Thus introduced, our readers may, we believe be safely left to Mr. Hamilton's powers of entertaining. Carefully prepared notes shed light on the history, folk-lore and antiquities of the scenes depicted. (Montreal: John Lovell & Son.)

Canada to the Fore.

It is a comforting thing to possess the best of anything,—to possess a much better than the very best is not often vouchsafed to earthly cities, and yet Montreal is in this happy position. The San Francisco Palace Hotel is the best hotel in the world, its manager says so, and has the fact "written large" in newspapers, and in newspapers they never admit anything but the truth; and yet, though the Palace is the best hotel in the world, Montreal has a very much better one in every single respect, except size, and surely the Windsor is large enough for any reasonable being.

The Palace Hotel at San Francisco is very large—three hundred and something feet long by two hundred and something feet wide, and stories and stories high. Its rooms are fairly large, and it has a particularly fine courtyard in the centre with a glass roof (which courtyard, it must not be forgotten, tots up the superficial area occupied by the hotel handsomely). It has, it is said, accommodation for 1,400 guests, and, until the erection of the magnificent *Chronicle* building, was the highest in San Francisco. But height is hardly an advantage in a building with so much wood about it and such scanty precautions against fire in a city dried up with sun and wind like the capital of California. People cannot go to sleep there up on the fifth floor with the same feeling of security as they can in the solidly built Windsor. Nor have they a delightful, cosily carpeted corridor with its suite of drawing-rooms to step out into from the dining-room when they have risen from a luxurious dinner, and feel disposed to linger about and chat. Nor have they a luxurious dinner to rise from, unless they have abandoned "the American Plan" for the European at exorbitant prices per dish. The table on the American side at the Palace is not to be compared with the Windsor's for liberality or variety, and the attendance at the former is execrable. People accustomed to the discipline and politeness and attentiveness of the Windsor waiters can hardly believe their eyes when they get to San Francisco, for the waiter there saunters up to them with the jaunty assurance of a New York policeman, flings a napkin at them, whips the tumblers off the table, takes a ten minutes' stroll to fill them with iced water, brings the wrong dishes with intolerable delays, and answers them as if they were importunate beggars. Nor at the Windsor do they have to ring a quarter of an hour before they require an answer. Two minutes suffice. And, oh! what a change from the pleasant-mannered Canadian chambermaid to the duennas of the San Francisco hotel!

Not that there are not first-class hotels at San Francisco. For instance, every one who goes to the Occidental comes away full of its praises as a liberally managed, thoroughly comfortable hotel. But certainly our experience after travelling twenty thousand miles during the past year is that, all things considered,—the position on the finest site in the city with the open flower-filled square in front, and the St. Lawrence in full view beyond; the gigantic and luxuriously fitted house with its palatial dining-room and unique corridor, its grand rotunda hall and its safety from fire; the unusually good food and attendance; the combination of home-independence with hotel luxury;—all things considered, I say, I think the Canadian hotel the very best we have ever stayed in. One is never humiliated by interfering servants; there are plenty of them when they are wanted, and they never thrust themselves forward when they are not. Liquors are moderate in price and first-class in quality; the hotel laundry is not turned into an engine for pillaging the guests. In brief, I should be disposed to back Montreal's hotel for as many virtues and as few vices as any in the world. *Credo experto.*

DOUGLAS SLADEN.