

A Notable Book.*

"WRITTEN in Canada not for Canada; English in tone, published in England; and that ran so rapidly into a second edition that copies of the first were hard to get within six weeks of publication." Such was the introduction to "A Notable Book," handed to me *in propria persona* a couple of months ago.

With so excellent, and one may add so unusual, a recommendation of any piece of literary work produced in Canada, added to a very presentable and refined appearance, it was impossible to treat the newcomer with anything but the highest courtesy and for the sake, moreover, of the "mutual friend" in the case, not to examine into the worth and object of the individual thus promisingly brought to one's notice. And certainly the statement "written in Canada not for Canada" conveyed also a sort of challenge to one's attention rather beyond the ordinary. Why should a book written in Canada not be for Canada asked an answer if for no other reason than the satisfaction of a natural curiosity.

A close scrutiny of the twenty-three subjects brought before one in as many chapters, leads to the conclusion, however, that whether he intended it or not, the author has hit Canada in a good many places. For he is a satirist dealing with the age in which he lives. He is a humourist, too, not of the superficial sort to which we have been accustomed until we are hardened, but of that delicate and light quality that calls for a touch of refined sensibility and quickness of imagination in the reader, and a gentle willingness to be laughed at for one's good.

These are qualifications very few writers of the present day possess: the truth seems to be they are gone out of fashion. Yet how powerful they have been in moulding public opinion and morals let the student of the ancient scriptures and of the classics tell. Nor need we go back more than a century and a half when the Rambler and Spectator, the delight of our great grandfathers and grandmothers, laughed at the follies of the day, rebuked its vices, and warned of its dangers, at the same time reading to a captivated public some of the most beautiful homilies on the virtues that were ever penned.

But we must not become too serious or we shall get beyond the intention of the writer of our book, Colonel Hunter-Duvar, of Prince Edward Island, whose fine drama of "Roberval" most cultivated Canadian readers know. In this his new book which he entitles "Annals of the Court of Oberon," Col. Duvar deals with the follies more than the vices of the present age, veiling his characters under the disguise of fairies, spirits, gnomes, with a big human now and then thrown in as the story makes it necessary, or the event becomes impossible to Faerie alone.

An Englishman, of French extraction, and now, and for some years residing in Canada, Col. Hunter-Duvar throws into his style the French lightheartedness, the English common sense, and the Canadian perceptiveness, which, combined, render it very telling and attractive. At times one thinks of The Spectator, again the Ingoldsby Legends peep up; or Chevy Chase and the pretty old-time ballads ring in the memory. Thus matters of good taste, high morality, virtue and piety are all delightfully dealt with and strong lessons are driven driven hard home albeit with a delicately-gloved hand.

A few examples must, however, suffice in illustration of our author's style and matter.

"Your Excellency," said I, tremblingly, "I am unfit. A Government officer requires intelligence—"

"Quite the contrary," he replied sternly. "He gazed into my eyes. My senses became hypnotized and I had to follow him whithersoever he would. Arrived at headquarters a commission was issued, under the Great Seal of Faerie, and I became unpaid *attache* to the Court of Oberon."

"The Queen's Maries," Chapter IV, introduces the most prominent members of the court among whom we shall not fail to discover acquaintances.

Aa, a stately young fairy, observant of the proprieties; unfathomable eyes with a sad smile in them. Her favourite flower the white lily, or as Dryden calls it, the *agnus castus*.

* "Annals of the Court of Oberon: Extracted from the Records." By the Annalist John Hunter-Duvar. Author of "The Enamorado," and "Roberval" Dramas: "The Triumph of Enstancy; a Romance," "Immigration of the Fairies," etc. London: Digby, Long, & Co., Publishers, 18 Bonaventure St., Fleet St. E.C., and to be had of all Booksellers.

Ailie, a sweet little soul. Hair, flaxen; complexion, creamy; eyes, porcelain blue.

Amina. I always fought shy of Amina because she had a sarcastic tongue.

Sip, the very fay for one's money; full of fun and frolic, with mirth ever dancing in her brown eyes; quick at repartee, but with no nonsense about her. Taken with a snapshot kodak one day, but so hideously unlike her we all screamed when we saw it.

Sasa, a lazy slut who would do nothing if she could help it, but swing in a hammock of honeysuckle, and fan herself with a calycanthus leaf. Always wore a garland of red clover.

Trippet was the most obliging thing, and, therefore, a good deal put upon. Anyone had only to say, "Go, fetch me my handkerchief—ah—do now." And off she would go buzzing like a hummingbird.

Uta, a clinging dear; afraid of death's-head moths, and at sight of a devil's darning needle thought she should die.

Vivien was of the highest intellectual calibre of all the fays, and was distinguished for beauty. She had, besides, some experience in mundane society. (See Chapter XI of these Annals). Her place was next to the Queen.

"Yes, we had a delightful circle at court—feminine graces unsurpassed, polished manhood in all its varieties of occupation and character, yet all combined by the family tie; its easy bonds offered a marked contrast to the ponderous stiffness of petty German dukedoms, or let us say of the preposterous Court of Monaco."

The fairies had a dog—a mortal dog, Tycho Brahe by name, and his history as given in Chap. V proves that his progenitors and descendants have been many, his course of life is so very familiar.

"What Falstaff's men intended to do, he did; he found linen on every hedge. . . . Generally he attended all the picnics in the neighborhood, by lurking under bushes and bolting with pies. Another time he attempted to convey home a bottle which he seems to have broken on the road, and lapped its contents, for he arrived home in a state of intoxication. He never repeated this offence."

"Grateful for kindness, helpful and devoted to his patrons, thoroughly unselfish, brave, prompt and prudent, watchful of the interests confided to him, and reliable in all he undertook, he had all the exceptional virtues and none of the vices of man."

"The True Story of the Ugly Duckling" has the following, said duckling being at the date we quote, Midshipman Anatides Glubb:—

"To the eye of the intelligent foreigner nothing more pleasantly points out the glory—I mean the former glory—of England as mistress (formerly) of the seas, than her midshipmen. All of good family, fairly educated and trained, gentlemanly lads full of frolic, nicely clad, and armed with a preposterous reaping-hook that makes their mothers and sisters squeak when they draw it, but is incapable of other mischief; they are a brave little gang whom it always delights me to look upon. Possible heroes in miniature; pocket editions of the Marine Code of War.

"As our hero's digestion was as good as that of other midshipmen in the fleet, he was constitutionally brave. Take notice, contractors and commissaries! The gastric fluid with a steady adequate supply of sound beef and vegetables for it to work upon is the very basis of valour, and the essence from which mighty deeds spring. Our ugly duckling found increment in anything. Therefore he was as void of fear as a Nelson; and as his moral faculties were exceptionally fine he was a general favourite. But a good deal of his fine capabilities depended on his victuals."

"On one special afternoon," a select circle of fays, we are told in *Sesame and Lilies*, gathered in the dell. . . . The usual topics of the day having been winnowed in an intermittent way the young people called on the stately fay Vivien for a recitation.

"Certainly," replied she, rising with her eyes rolling, right arm stiffly extended and figure thrown back. Then casting loose her hair until it fell across her face and shoulders like a lurid cloud, she burst in a blood-curdling voice into the following incantation:—

Pierce anthropophagi!
Spectres! diaboli!
Hobgoblins! lemares!
Dreams of Antipodes!
Night-riding incubi
Troubling the fantasy—

"Oh, don't!" cried everybody, "you frighten us."

"I thought I should," remarked Vivien calmly as she sank back on a mossy seat. Then Lalalu proffers "darling lovely Robin Hood!"

"A ballad that the fairies and myself alike believe in,"—says our author:—

"In somer when the shawes be sheyne
And leaves be large and longe,
Hit is fulle mery in feyre foreste
To here the foulis' songe.
To see the dere drawe to the dale,
And leave the hilles hee,
And shadow hem in the leves grene,
Under the grenewode tree."

But this is too homely and familiar, so, like mortals in similar cases, the fays cry, "Thanks, Loulie, that will do."

In Chapter XI Vivien is chosen unanimously, her beauty and wisdom being superlative, to go among mortals