

Charles Sangster, the "Canadian Wordworth," was born at Kingston, July 16, 1822, of U.E. Loyalist stock. Like many another youth of his day, his schooling was meagre and had to be supplemented by hard-earned self-education in early manhood. Poverty, too, was his lot and poor he remained all his days. He helped make the cartridges which battered the Prescott windmill in 1837. For some ten or twelve years, he filled an humble post in the Ordnance Office in Kingston, in 1849 went west to Amherstburg, where he edited the *Courier* for about a year. The death of the publisher of this paper left him no alternative but to return to Kingston, where he worked in the office of the *Whig* for another long period of ten or twelve years. In 1864 he joined the *Daily News*, and in 1868 was appointed to a position in the Civil Service in Ottawa. From this he retired in 1886, owing to ill health, and resided in Kingston until his death last autumn. His publications are two, viz.: *The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay and other Poems*, 1856, and *Hesperus and other Poems and Lyrics*, 1860. Both of these volumes were well received by the press and critics of the day. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jean Ingelow, Bayard Taylor and many others represent the outside critics, while all Canada was charmed by the work of its first poet. Thos. McQueen, a brother poet, Professor Daniel Wilson, (the late Sir Daniel Wilson), William Lyon Mackenzie and Dr. Dewar were among the many Canadians who welcomed, with generous praise, Sangster's contributions to our young literature.

Charles Sangster was an ardent lover of nature, a sympathizer with the lowly and simple in life, an intense patriot and of a deeply religious nature. Of his poems, those dealing with natural, *live* scenes in nature, appeal perhaps most strongly to his readers. Among the poems by Sangster, in the old School Readers, the one which used to charm us children most was "The Rapid," and I remember how the words instinctively came to my mind when years afterwards I went down the St. Lawrence.

All peacefully gliding,
The waters dividing,
The indolent batteau moved slowly along,
The rowers, light-hearted,
From sorrow long parted,
Beguiled the dull moments with laughter and song:
"Hurrah for the Rapid! that merrily, merrily,
Gambols and leaps on its tortuous way;
Soon we will enter it, cheerily, cheerily,
Pleased with its freshness, and wet with its spray."

The rest of this beautiful poem is doubtless known to every Canadian, and all will agree with me that it has the spontaneity of true poetry and shows, as well, a poet in thorough sympathy with his subject.

I have said that Sangster loved *live* nature or nature *astir*. A charming instance of this is the poem, "A Northern Rune,"

"the martial rune
Of the Norse-King-Harpist bold;"

With its very animated chorus.
* * * * *
O, hale and gay is that Norse king gray,
And his limbs are both stout and strong;
His eye is as keen as a falchion's sheen
When it sweeps to avenge a wrong.
The Aurora's dance is his merry glance,
As it speeds through the starry fields;
And his anger falls upon Odin's halls
Like the crash of a thousand shields.

Chorus.

Then hi! for the storm,
The wintry storm,

That maketh the stars grow dim:
Not a nerve shall I fail.
Not a heart shall quail,
When he rolls his grand old hymn.

A second water scene which is faithful to nature, though the opening stanza is somewhat weak, is "Evening Scene," from the banks of the Detroit river.

There lay the island with its sanded shore,
The snow-white lighthouse, like an Angel-friend,
Dressed in his fairest robes, and evermore
Guiding the mariner to some promised end.

And down behind the forest trees, the sun,
Arrayed in burning splendors, slowly rolled,
Like to some sacrificial urn, o'errun
With flaming hues of crimson, blue and gold.

And round about him, fold on fold, the clouds,
Steeped in some rainbow essence, lightly fell,
Draped in the living glory that enshrouds
His mighty entrance to his ocean shell.

The woods were flashing back his gorgeous light,
The waters glowed beneath the varied green,
Ev'n to the softened shadows all was bright,
Heaven's smile was blending with the view terrene.

* * * * *
On these the parting day poured down a stream
Of radiant, unimaginable light;
Like as in some celestial spirit dream
A thousand rainbows melt upon the sight,

Setting the calm horizon all ablaze
With splendors stolen from the crypts of heaven,
Dissolving with their magic heat the maze
Of clouds that nestle to the breast of even.

* * * * *
And down on tiptoe came the gradual Night,
A gentle twilight first, with silver wings,
And still from out the darkening infinite
Came shadowy forms, like deep imaginings.

There was no light in all the brooding air,
There was no darkness yet to blind the eyes,
But through the space interminable, there
Nature and Silence passed in solemn guise.

With this poem is linked another on a similar subject, viz.: "Night in the Thousand Isles."

And now 'tis night. A myriad stars have come
To cheer the earth and sentinel the skies.
The full-orbed moon irradiates the gloom,
And fills the air with light. Each islet lies
Immersed in shadow, soft as thy dark eyes;
Swift through the sinuous path our vessel glides,
Now hidden by the massive promontories,
Anon the bubbling silver from its sides
Spurning, like a wildbird whose home is on the tides.
Here nature holds her Carnival of Isles.

* * * * *
The poet who sings so lovingly of these beautiful scenes was born a poet. But not alone does he sing of his country's beautiful scenery, but her heroes claim his allegiance. Of his patriotic poems perhaps the "Brock," is the best. It was written for the inauguration of the new monument to Brock on Queenston Heights.

* * * * *
Raise high the monumental stone!
A nation's fealty is theirs,
And we are the rejoicing heirs,
The honoured sons of sires whose cares
We take upon us unawares,
As freely as our own:

We boast not of the victory,
But render homage, deep and just,

To his—to their—immortal dust,
Who proved so worthy of their trust.
No lofty pile nor sculptured bust
Can herald their degree.

Generally speaking, however, Sangster was far less successful in his patriotic pieces than in his descriptions of nature.

Jean Ingelow singled out two poems as especially pleasing to her, "The Wren" and "Young Again." Here is the first:

THE WREN.

Early each spring the little wren
Came scolding to his nest of moss;
We knew him by his peevish cry,
He always sung so very cross.
His quiet little mate would lay
Her eggs in peace and think all day.

He was a sturdy little wren.
And when he came in spring, we knew,
Or seemed to know, the flowers would grow
To please him, where they always grew,
Among the rushes cheerfully;
But not a rush so straight as he!

All summer long that little wren
Would chatter like a saucy thing;
And in the bush attack the thrush
That on the hawthorn perched to sing;
Like many noisy little men,
Lived, bragged and fought that little wren.

Another beautiful little poem is the entitled "The Little Shoes." The following is the second stanza which shows that the author was a lover of children:

I see a face so fair, and trace
The dark-blue eye that flashed so clearly;
The rosebud lips, the finger tips
She learned to kiss—O, far too dearly!
The pearly hands turned up to mine,
The tiny arms my neck caressing;
Her smile, that made our life divine,
Her silvery laugh—her kiss a blessing.

And the third verse is just as charming

Her winning ways, that made the days
Elysian in their grace so tender,
Through which Love's child our souls beguiled
For seeming ages starred with splendor:
No wonder that the angel-heirs
Did win our darling's life's-joy from us,
For she was theirs—not all our prayers
Could keep her from the Land of Promise.

I have said that Sangster's was a deeply religious nature. Indeed it would almost seem at times that he strained a point to bring in a religious idea. One poem, however, has the spontaneity which comes from a religious, poetic heart, and of this I give the opening and closing stanzas.

THE STARS.

The stars are heaven's ministers;
Right royally they teach
God's glory and omnipotence,
In wondrous lowly speech.
All eloquent with music, as
The tremblings of a lyre,
To him that hath an ear to hear
They speak in words of fire.

* * * * *
O heaven-cradled mysteries,
What sacred paths ye've trod—
Bright jewelled scintillations from
The chariot-wheels of God.
When in the Spirit He rode forth,
With vast creative aim,
These were His footprints left behind,
To magnify His name!

There are so many beauties in Sangster's poems and so much evidence in them of the true inspired poet that it would seem almost ungenerous to call attention to defects. Through the circumstances of his early life he laboured under great disadvantages, which revealed themselves in many a halt and limping line. The adjectives are not always just as appropriate as they might be,