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# CANADIAN IDYLLS.

## THE QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY.

BY W. KIRBY,  
NIAGARA.

'Victoria!—may you rule us long,  
And leave us rulers of your blood  
As noble till the latest day!  
May children of our children say:  
"She wrought her people lasting good."  
TENNISON.

Reprinted from the Canadian Monthly for May, 1881.

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### PRELUDE.

A CALM of days had rested on the broad  
Unruffled waters of Ontario,  
Which in their bosom all night held the stars  
Now vanishing before the morning beams.  
Forerunners of the day, like Uhlan spears,  
Chasing the night's dark shadows far away.  
The sun was rising seaward of the point  
Of a low promontory thick with trees,  
Which, like the sacred bush by Moses seen  
Were all ablaze with unconsuming fire.

A smooth horizon cut with clear divide  
The sky above it from the sea below,  
Each touching other, save one spot of white  
Where stood a glistening sail caught by the sun  
And held becalmed upon the distant verge.  
Landward the orchards were in bloom, the peach  
In red and pink, the apples white and red,  
While every bush, after its kind, in flower,  
Wrought once again the miracle of spring  
And showed God's wisdom, love and power divine

A breezeless night had filled the trees and grass  
With heavy dew that sparkled in the sun,  
Like summer snow so thick and white it lay—  
A barefoot lad brushed through it singing blythe,  
Leaving a track behind him as he ran,  
And drove the lowing kine full uddered home,  
Where stood a rosy maid in shortened gown  
That showed a foot elastic as the fawn's—  
With dimpled arms across her milking pail—  
She called her favourite cows by soft pet names  
Which each one knew, and gently breathing came  
And round the maiden stood with great calm eyes,  
Waiting their turn to fill her snowy pail.

The glorious waters lay serene and blue—  
Some white winged gulls flapped lazily the air,  
Showing their under pinions as they wheeled  
In circuit round and round, keen eyed to see  
The luckless fish they seize and bear away—

While far and near, the kaweens clanging shrill  
 In spattering flocks cry out incessantly  
 Word of denial in Algonquin tongue,  
 The spirit taught them as the legends say ;  
 An Indian maid wooed by a chief unloved :  
 'No! no! indeed! *Ka-Ka-ween!*' cried in grief  
 Until she died, drowned in Ontario,  
 Where these wild birds caught her despairing cry,  
 And still repeat it as they swim or fly  
 In screaming thousands o'er her watery grave,  
 From sharp mid winter till return of spring—  
 And then fly screaming it to Arctic seas.  
 Upon the bushes, trees, and on the wing,  
 The maddening black birds formed a noisy choir—  
 While thrush and oriole and robin pipe  
 In softer strains their vernal roundelay  
 Heard in the pauses.

'Twas a morn to feel  
 The heavens unladen, and on earth poured down  
 The treasures of the inner world, where are  
 Things in their essences. The flood of life  
 That sometimes overflows its bounds, and fills  
 The earth with loveliness, supernal, rare ;  
 As sunrise fills with light the ambient air,  
 This morning seemed to make all things anew,  
 Restouched afresh, by the Creator's hand  
 With brightness as of Eden. He who made  
 The earth so beautiful and Heaven so near,  
 Each touching other with harmonic chords,  
 Like music in the night, by wind harps played,  
 Reveals at times, to pure of heart and eye,  
 Just for a moment of ecstatic vision,  
 A moment and no more—the abyss of light  
 Behind the veil ; gives us to feel the breath  
 Of angels on our face and airs that fan  
 The tree of life and flowers of Paradise.

Beneath the lake's steep banks of marl and clay,  
 Furrowed with winter frosts and summer rains.  
 With many a boulder fast embedded— stretched  
 Long beaches of grey sand, earth's ancient rocks—  
 The grinding of a thousand æons past.  
 God's mills are winds and waves, and heat and frost,  
 That change all things to other—old to new—  
 And new to newer, that are still the old ;  
 Returning on their circuits ever more,  
 Slow it may be as cycles of the stars,  
 But sure as God's great purposes, that work  
 Unceasingly all change for sake of man.

A group of fishers stood upon the beach,  
 Strong hardy men with neck and face and hands  
 Tanned to a brownness—else as fair of skin  
 As any born of purest English race.  
 Their shapely boat was laden with their neta  
 Ready to launch into the lake that swarmed  
 With shoals and myriads of the silvery fish  
 Migrating slowly round the sinuous shores.  
 The fishers' voices mingled with the morn  
 In cheerful talk or song, and by and by  
 Sent up a cheer—nay three—to greet the day  
 Which was Victoria's, and a holiday.

That royal name revered in every clime  
 The round world knows, is honoured to the height  
 Of chivalry beneath the clear blue skies  
 That cope the boundless plains of Canada—  
 The home of loyalty from days of old—  
 Fought for and kept!—a crowned Dominion fit  
 For freest men to live the noblest lives!

The sturdy fishers cheered with one accord,  
 Threw up their hats and swore with kindly oaths,  
 So full of frank good nature, that in sooth  
 None frowned who heard them, that her natal day  
 A holiday of holidays they'd keep  
 In honour of her Majesty.

Upspake

An old deep-chested carl, whose hands and arms  
 Corded with sinews, bare and brown, seemed fit  
 To drag Leviathan with hook ashore.  
 His ruddy face was honest, frank and bright  
 With shrewd intelligence, and eyes that straight  
 Beneath his shaggy brows looked deep in yours.

'Well spoken men!' said he, 'This is the day  
 The brightest in the royal month of May!  
 The flags are up! I hear the belfry ring  
 A joyous peal, and booming o'er the lake  
 Toronto's guns with glad salute awake  
 The loyal city to the festival.  
 We too will pass the day in gaiety  
 And, as our Queen would wish it, soberly—  
 With wives and children, friends and neighbours all.  
 Whatever differences may else befall,  
 We are as one for country and for her,  
 Whose crown imperial is our bond and pride.'

They greeted him with cheers. 'And now,' said he,  
 'The fish shall have a holiday and swim  
 Free as they will—only the tribute due  
 Our feast, claim we from them—one haul—no more!  
 And then will reel our nets, and don our best,  
 And go with baskets laden to the grove,  
 Beneath the old French thorns, or round the boles  
 Of spreading oaks just flushed in early leaf,  
 Sit down and hear the dancing music play—  
 Eat, drink, tell tales—I have a book full—till  
 The games of afternoon bring out the crowds,  
 Which seated on the slopes of old Fort George,  
 As on an amphitheatre survey  
 The athletes stripped to struggle on the plain,  
 Who drive the ball like lightening at Lacrosse,  
 Or run, or ride, or leap—and win or lose,  
 With grace and gaiety, cheered by the throng  
 Who make the green old common like a fair.'

So said, so done! And now the sun was up,  
 And shining on the grey square tower that stands\*  
 Above the place of landing nets—its walls  
 Thick as a feudal keep, with loopholes slashed  
 Contain the wreck and ruin of a town:

Fort Mississauga.

Fair Newark once, gay, rich and beautiful,  
 By ruthless foes, when flying in retreat,  
 Burnt down to blackened heaps of bricks and stones.  
 The fragments of its walls and hearths were built  
 Into that stern memorial of a deed  
 Unchivalrous, in days of war, gone by.

The fishers launched their boat, laden with nets,  
 Threw out their oars, and rounded in the lake  
 A mighty semicircle with their seine.  
 A hundred fathoms, and a hundred more,  
 Ran out behind them as they stoutly plied  
 Their ashen oars—then leap to land—'Haul in !'  
 Cries the old master—see the lines are taut  
 To point of breaking with the mighty draught  
 Of one good thousand white fish in the net !—  
 All leaping, struggling, flashing like a mass  
 Of quicksilver—and brighter, they will lie  
 Heaped on the sand a pile of life and death—  
 The treasure of the lakes ! The fisher's wealth !—  
 Enough of them, he cares for none beside !  
 The glittering silver ones ! rose-gilled, with mouths  
 Too small for aught but water dainties ! and  
 Themselves of all that swim the daintiest,  
 Most beautiful and best ! yea ! *Catius* missed \*  
 The choicest thing e'er lay in golden dish—  
 The Addikameng of Ontario !

There is a grove called Paradise—well named,  
 With leafy lanes, to love and musing dear ;  
 It overlooks the high and abrupt banks  
 Of cliffs and land slides, wooded at their base,  
 And filled with wild flowers, that, save by the bees,  
 Unrifed, bloom all summer.

Underneath

Like a great opening in the world, the broad  
 Majestic river sweeps above—below—  
 Its silent course, serene, and brimming full  
 Of captive seas it bears away, despite  
 Their Titan struggles in the whirlpool's depths,  
 And leads them forth, as on God's Appian way :  
 Two nations on its banks look on, and see  
 The grand triumphal march that never ends !  
 Whether in summer calm, twixt banks of green,  
 It smoothly flows, or rough in winter's gloom,  
 With formless ice-flakes filled from shore to shore,  
 It bears the burthen—nor a moment halts  
 In its sublime, resistless, onward flow—  
 Niagara the grand and world renowned !

That pleasant grove of intermingled glades  
 And shady walks, thick carpeted with leaves  
 Under the footstep yielding, gently draws  
 The loiterer on and on till to the brink  
 It leads him of a jutting precipice,  
 That overlooks the river's grandest sweep  
 Before it mingles with Ontario.  
 A clump of doddered oaks, with roots half-bared

\* Vide Horace, Lib. 2. Sat. 4.

In air, look down the cliff. A level plot  
Of greenest sward, behind it, holds to day  
A crowd of merry makers, seated round  
In careless ease, listening with eager ear,  
The master fisher from a manuscript  
Of faded ink and yellow paper, read  
An old Canadian Idyll of the past.

'Read, Uncle Clifford!' cried a rosy maid,  
The same who waited with her milking-pail,  
In russet gown and kerchief; but who now,  
In style and stuff of fashion's newest mode,  
Was dressed like any lady of the land,  
As is the wont of our Canadian girls,  
Bearing themselves with native grace and ease,  
The old refinement of an epoch rare  
Of honour, loyalty and noble deeds,  
Which gifted them with beauty's heritage  
And all the charming ways of lady-hood.

Her hand lay on his shoulder, as she bent  
Her rich locks mingling with his steel grey hair,  
And overlooked the pages, turned and fixed  
One with her finger, which she begged him read.  
He smiled, looked up, and caught her eye. The maid  
Flushed quick, like summer lightning in a cloud  
It makes transparent; so her face betrayed  
Some latent warmth and longing of the heart,  
Such as a woman hides and yet reveals.

The old man spoke—'My darling May! be sure  
Of your own self before I read this tale!  
If rashness ever tempt—be wise, nor give  
Your love for asking—caught by fancy, face,  
Or fortune it may be, before you know  
His worthiness who asks your yes or no!'

'Nay Uncle!' answered she, with sunny smile,  
That brought a dimple to both cheek and chin,  
'Tis why I choose this tale' and then she laughed,  
Sweet as the chime of old St. Mark's that rang  
Most musical in honour of the day—  
For she had read the old book through and through,  
Wept, laughed, and dreamed of it, and often played  
Its heroines in fancy all day long—  
Giving her heart in lavish gift away  
To some fair prince of dreams, in woman's way.

'I would be wise in all things, and in that  
Which most becomes a girl like me to know,  
Wiseest of all,' said she, 'So Uncle read  
This old true story for the good of all—  
And my good in especial!' whispered she—  
Kissed his bluff old cheek and skipped away  
Beside her young companions, all aglow  
To hear the tale of love that's always new  
Making or marring lives forever. Then  
Sat down upon a broad flat boulder stone  
Mossed thick and soft, love's choice of many seats

In that fair grove, a stone of witness too—  
Of vows or kept or broken, smiles and tears,  
Kisses and curses—it remembers all—  
That silent witness of the former years !

'First tell us of the book' continued she—  
'And him who wrote it—and who in it poured  
His very soul, which wrought into his lines  
Left him alive in them—even when he died !  
Pray tell us of him.'

'Well ! 'tis briefly told  
What I know of his story'—answered he—  
'He came among us from the mother land  
In search of health, for he was thin and pale,  
From overstudy or some deeper cause—  
A youth, yet grave enough to be a man,  
Than most men wiser—pensive, somewhat shy,  
A gentleman with hands unused to toil,  
A student, poet, painter and what not—  
That makes a man of mark in woman's eyes,  
As he had been in yours, my pretty May !  
Who love the thrice-told tale that tells of him—  
Had you lived then, who knows what might have been ?'

May blushed, 'Who knows indeed what might have been ?  
A poet, pensive, sick and needing sore  
A woman's sympathy akin to love  
To ease his life or smooth his way to death !  
Had I lived then, who knows what might have been !'

'Yea, he had won you in full measure, May !  
All loved who knew him, for his kindliness,  
While some admired his looks, and some his lore.  
He came in summer with the swallows—Why ?  
None learned, I think, but one—a secret told  
Your mother, May ! my sweetest sister, she !  
As like to you in face and fancy too  
As rose to rose that grow upon one tree—  
Then in her freshest youth—a girl to see !  
And none alive is like her, only you !'

The girl looked up and laughed to hide a sigh—  
'Thanks Uncle !' said she, 'for your flattery,  
But I delight in mother's praise from you—  
I know when young as I, she pitied him,  
And might have loved at last, had he not died.'

'Well so it chanced,' replied he, 'that the youth  
Though not uncheerful, oft was melancholy  
Enough to draw a woman to his side—  
And soon drew one who pitied him indeed !  
To her he told his story—showed the grief  
That preyed upon him—he had loved and lost,  
His hope in life had broken like a reed—  
By frost or frailty—said she not, but shook  
Her head and wondered that such things could be ;  
As lack of love for one so debonaire  
So worthy of a woman's life and care.



'What more she learned I know not, for she kept  
 His secret safe, but did herself grow sad,  
 Silent and pale as one who over much  
 Broods on unspoken thoughts—as still he led  
 His solitary life. In woods and lanes  
 He used to wander—or upon the shore  
 Of the loud lake when waves came rolling in,  
 Or watched the cold stars as they rose at night  
 Above the east horizon, wet with dew ;  
 As if he waited one, that bore for him  
 Some message from the under world.

Then home—

And in his room he wrote and read till dawn,  
 For he was sleepless and refused to drink  
 The syrups which we made for him, of balm  
 And poppies mixed with honey, good for sleep  
 Unless the heart be wakeful. Then in vain  
 Our simple medicines ; and so with him.

'Our help thus failed him, but he used to smile  
 As if to cheer us, and with thanks and words  
 That sounded like farewells, we saw with pain  
 His cheek grow thinner, with a fever flush  
 That came and stayed. His brilliant eyes enlarged  
 As if they caught a glimpse of death not far,  
 That solemn glimpse we all get ere we die !  
 That warning once or twice which strikes us mute  
 With premonition like a second sight  
 Of that last hour of life, when on our couch  
 With feeble hands we reach, to grasp the staff  
 That through the valley of the shades of death,  
 Will lead our doubtful steps to shores unknown.  
 As darkness from within beclouds our eyes,  
 The lights grow dimmer till they vanish quite ;  
 Appeals of love sound fainter on the ear,  
 Unheard, unheeded on the silent bourne  
 Of life and death—love's kiss without response,  
 The clasp of some dear hand, the last thing left  
 Ere comes the wrench, and the unconscious soul  
 Sinks helpless in the everlasting arms  
 Outstretched beneath it, as a mother lifts  
 Her drowning child from waves that overwhelm !

'Thus sickened the pale student, until came  
 The swallows back, bringing new summer in—  
 New life to many, but new death to him.  
 The cycle of his time on earth was run.  
 He died amid the sunshine and the flowers,  
 And prayed it might be thus. The summer seemed  
 More like the land he longed for, and he left  
 This faded memory of a poet's life,  
 This book then freshly writ, now old and sear,  
 Its leaves like those of Autumn dropped and dry—  
 Tear stained and thumbbed by readers like my May.

'A troop of friends who loved him, bore him to  
 The old Churchyard, that in the spring runs wild  
 With strawberries and violets, just where,  
 Upon the greenest spot, St. Mark's grey tower  
 Points like a dial at the hour of eve.

The tall trees rustled round him, full of leaves,  
 While aromatic shrubs, acacias,  
 And flowering currants loved by humming birds,  
 Which haunt them all day long, their perfume shed  
 Across the fair God's acre, where at rest  
 Lies many a brave old patriarch of the land,  
 And many a loyal soldier's honoured grave.  
 We buried him beneath a nameless stone,  
 Which those who loved him know, and oft a wreath  
 Of freshest flowers is found at eve or morn,  
 Where bluest violets grow, and strawberries  
 Most thickly overrun the poet's grave.'

The old man's story ended mid soft tears  
 That dimmed his listeners' eyes ; fair May's the most.  
 She came and sat beside him on the grass,  
 Holding his strong brown hand in hers, and turned  
 For him the pages of the faded book.  
 He read as not unlettered— clear his tones,  
 Not harsh but facile, and his accent pure,  
 As our Canadians speak their mother tongue,  
 In its refinement over-passing all  
 The wide world round who claim it as their own,  
 And thus he read this tale of other years.

## SPINA CHRISTI.

## PART I.

There is a thorn—it looks so old  
 In truth you'd find it hard to say—  
 How it could ever have been young—  
 It looks so old and grey.

—WORDSWORTH.

The city walls of Avignon are built of stone, and high  
 The houses stand with balconies above the streets that lie  
 Around the old cathedral, whose sweet bells were ringing clear  
 A merry tune, one day in June  
 Of seventeen hundred year,  
 And half a hundred years beside, while crowding far and near,  
 Beneath the flags and tapestries, the people loudly cheer—  
 The regiment of Rousillon is ordered to the war,  
 A thousand strong, the pick among  
 The mountaineers of Var.

The great Church portals open wide, the crowd goes surging in,  
 The soldiers tramp with measured tread—the services begin,  
 A blessing is invoked upon the King's Canadian war—  
 Beyond the seas there is no ease,  
 And all things are ajar—  
 The English in America do boldly break and mar  
 The peace they made ; but we will keep the treaties as they are !  
 And now the Royal Rousillon take up the route with joy,  
 And march away while bugles play—  
 Mid shouts of 'Vive le Roy !'

There lives a lady beautiful as any Provence rose,  
 The chatelaine of Bois le Grand who weepeth as she goes—  
 For sleep has left her eyelids on the banks of rapid Rhone—  
 'But three months wed ! alas !' she said,  
 'To live my life alone !'

Pining for my dear husband in his old chateau of stone,  
 While he goes with his regiment, and I am left to moan,  
 That his dear head so often laid at rest upon my knee,  
 No pillow kind, but stones, shall find—  
 No shelter but a tree !

'Weep not dear wife !' replied the count, and took her in his arms,  
 And kissed her lovingly and smiled to quiet her alarms—  
 They stood beneath the holy thorn of the old Celestine,  
 Pope Clement brought with blessing fraught  
 And planted it between  
 The wall and wall beside the cross, where he was daily seen  
 To kneel before it reverently. It came from Palestine,  
 A plant from that which cruelly the crown of thorns supplied,  
 Christ wore for me, when mocked was He  
 And scourged, and crucified.

'I'll take a branch of it,' he said, 'across the stormy sea  
 That roars between New France and Old, and plant it solemnly  
 In that far country where I go campaigning for the King.  
 It will remind and teach mankind  
 Of pains that blessing bring.'  
 Above his head he plucked a spray acute with many a sting,  
 And placed it on his plumed chapeau, in token of the thing  
 Alone can turn the sinful man—the piercing of the thorn—  
 The healing smart—the contrite heart—  
 Of penitence new-born.

Despairingly she kissed his lips : 'O welcome sharpest pain,  
 That cuts the heart to bleeding and bids hope revive again !  
*O Spina Christi !* to my heart I press thee wet with tears—  
 If love outlast as in the past  
 Each parting that endears !  
 Our sky has been so bright and filled with music of the spheres,  
 So gloomy now in sad eclipse it suddenly appears !  
 For joy dies out in silence like sweet singing that is done,  
 If men forget their sacred debt  
 To women they have won.

'But I will have no fear,' she said, 'although in our New France  
 They say the fairest women live, and eyes the brightest glance.  
 In all the King's dominions else, are no such sunny smiles,  
 From beauty's lips, such honey drips  
 In sweetness that beguiles—  
 There's no escape forever from the witchery of their wiles—  
 They win all hearts and keep them from Quebec through all the isles,  
 And rivers, lakes and forests, to the setting of the sun—  
 And he is blest above the rest,  
 Whose heart is soonest won !

My husband dear ! last night I stood alone by Laura's tomb,  
 Where Petrarch laid the laurel wreath that crowned his head in Rome,  
 The polished marble sweated cold in token of some ill,  
 Befalling me, befalling thee,  
 As I do fear it will ;  
 For out of it arose a mist that struck me with a chill ;  
 I could not move—I dared not speak—but prayed in silence, till  
 I heard a feeble voice within, that disembodied said :  
 "His love was tried and magnified  
 While living—mine, when dead !"

' O, Laura never knew nor felt the might of love,' said he—  
 ' And Petrarch sang away his life in vain—so cold was she.  
 Perfect in all proprieties of virtuous disguise,  
 The poet's need—the poet's greed  
 For woman's love, to rise  
 On wings of immortality that bear him to the skies ;  
 She never knew the joy of it with him to sympathize ;  
 And all his glorious raptures did but minister to pride  
 When he had done—'twas all he won—  
 A smile—and nought beside.

' O, care not for such omens, love ! for Laura's words were naught  
 But echoes to the ear of what was fancy in thy thought—  
 A soldier serves the King with life or death, without rebate,  
 And gaily goes to fight the foes  
 That dare assail the state,  
 And yet will melt when women crowd about the city gate,  
 With faces pale and wet with tears, embracing each her mate,  
 And kissing him as if for death—nor cares who sees or knows,  
 While far away the bugles play ;  
 " Farewell, my Provence rose ! "

Adieu ! my wife and chatelaine ; keep safe my house and land,  
 Should God so will that I return no more to Bois le Grand.  
 My heart is thine forever, and so pierce this holy thorn,  
 And stab it through, if e'er untrue,  
 I leave my wife forlorn—  
 New France may boast the fairest and the sweetest women born,  
 And the chateau of St. Louis laugh the continent to scorn—  
 I would not give these eyes of thine, and tresses falling down  
 Upon my breast—to be possessed  
 Of sceptre and of crown.'

Then beat the drums a gay rappel—the fifes and bugles ring—  
 As rank on rank the mountaineers march out with martial swing—  
 They pass the city gate and walls of old Avignon.  
 Mid parting cheers and women's tears  
 The Royal Rousillon,  
 Commanded by brave Bois le Grand upon his prancing roan,  
 Are fairly on the march towards Bordeaux on the Garonne—  
 Where ships are waiting to transport them far from kith and kin,  
 Beyond the seas, where victories  
 Are ripening to win.

From fair Bordeaux they sailed, and soon with crowds upon the deck  
 Cast anchor in St. Lawrence 'neath the walls of old Quebec.  
 To welcome their debarking all the city seemed alive,  
 And thronged the quays as thick as bees,  
 When swarming from their hive.  
 With waving hats and handkerchiefs, both men and women strive  
 To greet the gallant Rousillon becomingly—while drive  
 The Governor and Intendant along in royal state  
 With halberdiers and musqueteers,  
 And those who on them wait.

## SPINA CHRISTI.

## PART II.

Atlantic gales come winged with clouds and voices of the sea,  
 The misty Capes uncap to hear the ocean melody—  
 In broad St. Lawrence rise and fall the everlasting tides,  
 Which come and go with ebb and flow—  
 While every ship that rides  
 At anchor swings, and east or west the passing flood divides,  
 Or westward ho ! mid seamen's shouts still onward gently glides,  
 Tasting the waters sweet from lakes, of boundless solitude  
 Where thousand isles break into smiles  
 Of nature's gladdest mood.

Where trees and waters clap their hands as sang the Hebrew King,  
 God's voices in them thundering, that to the spirit bring  
 Deep thoughts—far deeper than the thoughts that seem, and are not so  
 Of men most wise in their own eyes,  
 Who vainly toil to know  
 The meaning of this universe—life's pamoply—a *No!*  
 To pride of godless intellect—a *Yes!* to those that go  
 With lamp alit—the Word revealed—and see amid the gloom  
 And labyrinths—the mighty plinths  
 Of temples, grandly loom.

A hundred leagues and many more towards the glowing west—  
 Amid the forests' silences, Ontario lay at rest—  
 Keel rarely ploughed, or paddle dipped its wilderness of blue ;  
 Where day by day life passed away  
 In peace that irksome grew.  
 In old Niagara fort, a cross stood loftily in view \*  
 And *Regnat. Vincit. Imperat. Christus* the words did shew  
 Carved on it, when the Rousillon came up in early spring  
 To close the port—and guard the fort,  
 And keep it for the King.

O ! fair in summer time it is, Niagara plain to see,  
 Half belted round with oaken woods and green as grass can be !  
 Its levels broad in sunshine lie, with flowerets gemmed and set,  
 With daisy stars, and red as Mars  
 The tiny sanguinet,  
 The trefoil with its drops of gold—white clover heads, and yet,  
 The sweet grass commonest of all God's goodnesses we get !  
 The dent de lion's downy globes a puff will blow away,  
 Which children pluck to try good luck,  
 Or tell the time of day.

Count Bois le Grand sought out a spot of loveliness, was full  
 Of sandworts silvered leaf and stem—with down of fairy wool,  
 Hard by the sheltering grove of oak he set the holy thorn  
 Where still it grows and ever shows  
 How sharp the crown of scorn  
 Christ wore for man, reminding him what pain for sin was borne,  
 And warning him he must repent before his sheaf is shorn,  
 When comes the reaper, Death, and his last hour of life is scored,  
 Of all bereft, and only left  
 The mercy of the Lord.

\* In the centre of the fort stood a cross eighteen feet high with the inscription ; *Regn. Vinc. Imp. Chrs.* The interpretation of which admits of as much ambiguity as a Delphic oracle.

The thorn was planted, leafed and bloomed as if its sap were blood  
 That stained its berries crimson which fell dropping where it stood,  
 And seeded others like it, as on Golgotha befell,  
 An awful sight, if seen aright,  
 The trees that root in hell ! \*  
 Contorted, twisted, writhing, as with human pain to tell  
 Of cruel spines and agonies that God alone can quell.  
 A cluster like thém Dante saw, and never after smiled,  
 A grove of doom, amid whose gloom  
 Were wicked souls exiled.

' Abandon hope all you who enter here ! ' in words of dread  
 Glared luridly above the door that opened to the dead ;  
 The dead in trespasses and sins—the dead who chose the broad ]  
 And beaten way, that leads astray,  
 And not the narrow road—  
 The rugged solitary path, beset with thorns that goad  
 The weary spirit as it bears the world's oppressive load  
 Up Calvary—to lay it down upon the rock, and wait  
 In hope and trust—for God is just  
 And pities our estate.

Niagara fort was bravely built with bulwarks strong and high  
 A tower of stone and palisades with ditches deep and dry,  
 And best of all behind them lay Guienne and Rousillon †  
 La Sarre and Bearn, 'neath Pouchot stern—  
 A wall of men like stone—  
 De Villiers and Bois le Grand of old Avignon,  
 And over all the flag of France waved proudly in the sur.  
 Prepared for it—they met the war with gaiety and zest—  
 And every day barred up the way  
 That opened to the west.

'Discord was rampant now and hate, and peace lay like a yoke  
 That galled the necks of both of them, and French and English broke,  
 With mutual wrath and rivalry, the treaty they had made ;  
 Too proud to live and each one give  
 Sunshine as well as shade.  
 From Louisburg to Illinois, they stood as foes arrayed,  
 And east and west war's thunder rolled—the soldier's polished blade  
 Flashed 'mid the savage tomahawks that struck and never spared,  
 While fort and field alternate yield  
 The bloody laurels shared.

The clouds of war rolled redder from the north, and English pride  
 Was stung to desperation at the turning of the tide,  
 When Montcalm the heroic, wise in council—struck the blow  
 Won Chouaguen, and conquered then  
 At Carillon the foe.  
 But with his very victories his armies melted slow.  
 No help from France obtained he—and his heart sank very low,  
 He knew that England's courage flames the fiercest in defeat,  
 And in the day she stands at bay  
 Most dangerous to meet.

\* A number of these thorns—old and weird of aspect are still standing on the plains of Niagara near the Grove of Paradise—they were formerly called the ' French thorns '—a designation now nearly forgotten.

† Portions of the regiments of Rousillon, La Sarre, Bearn and Guienne—formed the garrison of Niagara during the memorable siege of 1759.

Help us O France ! to save thy fair dominion in the west  
 Which for thy sake we planted and have carved thy royal crest,  
 Of golden lilies on the rocks beside the streams that flow  
 From mountain rills and past the hills  
 Of far off Ohio.  
 Then down leagues by the hundred where bayous meander slow  
 Though orange groves and sugar canes, and flowers that ever blow,  
 In fair Louisiana. We will take and hold the land  
 For Francia's crown of old renown,  
 If she will by us stand.'

So spake Montcalm, and message sent—' My armies melt away  
 With victories—my beaten foes grow stronger every day—  
 In vain Monongahela and Carillon piled with slain,  
 If France forget to pay the debt  
 Of honour without stain,  
 She owes her sons who willingly are bleeding every vein  
 For sake of her white flag and crown, on fortress and on plain.  
 If we can keep Niagara safe that guards the western door,  
 Then in the east Quebec may feast  
 In quiet, evermore.'

Vain were Moncalm's appeals for aid, Voltaire's cold spirit ruled  
 The Court—while noisy doctrinaires a gallant nation schooled  
 In selfishness, and unbelief, and cowardice—and ease,  
 Which manhood daunt, while women flaunt  
 Their idle hours to please.  
 Degenerately they drank the wine of life mixed with the lees,  
 The Spartan virtues that make nations free and famous—these  
 Were mocked—derided, set at nought, while fatuous statesmen stand,  
 Whose feeble will potent for ill  
 Yields where it should command.

## SPINA CHRISTI.

## PART III.

Remote amid the trackless woods and waters of the west,  
 No enemy had broken yet Niagara's quiet rest.  
 The fifth year of the war came in—a change was nigh at hand ;  
 The order ran to raise the ban  
 And make a final stand.  
 Prideaux and Johnson honoured were with new and high command,  
 From Albany a hundred leagues to march across the land,  
 While Wolfe besieged Quebec, and its defences battered in ;  
 So they elate took bond of fate,  
 Niagara to win.

But not before June's leafy days, when all the woods are green,  
 And skies are warm and waters clear, the English scouts were seen.  
 A lull before the tempest fell with weeks of steady calm,  
 Of golden hours when blooming flowers  
 Filled all the air with balm.  
 The garrison were now prepared to struggle for the palm  
 To win the wreath of victory or die without a qualm ;  
 So passed their time in jollity and ease, as if the day  
 Of bloody strife with life for life  
 Was continents away.

A fleet of swift canoes came up, all vocal with the song  
 Of voyageurs, whose cadences kept even time among  
 The dipping paddles, as they flashed along Ontario's shore,  
 Past headlands high and coasts that lie  
 In mistiness—and bore  
 A bevy of fair wives who loved their husbands more and more,  
 Who could not bear their absence, and defiant of the roar  
 Of forests and of waters, came to comfort and caress,  
 As women may—and only they—  
 Man's solitariness.

In those Capuan days they basked in pleasure's sunny beams,  
 The Provence home of Bois le Grand was rarer in his dreams,  
 The Chatelaine of his chateau fast by the rapid Rhone,  
 A memory dim became to him—  
 Nor loved he her alone.  
 A dame of charms most radiant—the cynosure that shone  
 Amid the constellations of Quebec's magnetic zone,  
 Drew him with force and held him fast, a captive with her eyes,  
 Which dark and bright as tropic night,  
 Loved him without disguise ;

And he remembered not the thorn he planted by the grove  
 Of Paradise, where he forgot in his forbidden love,  
 The Chatelaine of Bois le Grand, the purest wife and best.  
 Of womankind he left behind,  
 And ventured, like the rest,  
 To sport with woman's loveliness—as for a passing jest.  
 His heart was very lonely, too, while all beside were blest  
 Like Samson in Delilah's lap, his lock of strength was shorn.  
 He loved again despite the pain  
 And stinging of the thorn.

One day when he a-hunting went in the Norman Marsh \* and she  
 The dame he loved rode with him as Diana fair to see  
 In green and silver habited—and silken bandoleer,  
 With dainty gun—by it undone !  
 And bugle horn so clear.  
 While riding gaily up and down to turn the timid deer  
 And meet the joyance of his glance, when she should re-appear,  
 She vanished in the thicket, where a pretty stag had flown—  
 Saw something stir—alas ! for her !  
 She shot her lover down !

Bleeding he fell—' O, Madelaine ! ' his cry turned her to stone,  
 ' What have you done unwittingly ? ' he uttered with a groan,  
 As she knelt over him with shrieks sky-rending, such as rise  
 From women's lips on sinking ships,  
 With death before their eyes.  
 She beat her breast despairingly ; her hair dishevelled flies ;  
 She kissed him madly, and in vain to stanch the blood she tries,  
 Till falling by him in a swoon they both lay as the dead—  
 A piteous sight ! love's saddest plight !  
 With garments dabbled red.

Their servants ran and hunters pale, and raised them from the ground  
 Restored the dame to consciousness, and searched his fatal wound.  
 They pitched for him a spacious tent the river bank above

The ' *Marais Normand* ' so called during the French occupation of Niagara. It is now covered with farms ; but is still called the swamp.



With boundless care for ease and air  
 And tenderness of love.  
 She waited on him night and day ; plucked off her silken glove  
 With self-accusing grief and tears—lamenting as a dove  
 Bemoans her wounded mate—so she—and in her bosom wore  
 A spike of thorn which every morn  
 She gathered—nothing more.

She cast her jewels off and dressed in robe of blackest hue,  
 Her face was pale as look the dead, and paler ever grew.  
 Smiles lit no more her rosy lips where sunbeams used to dance ;  
 A withering blight that kills outright  
 Fell on her like a trance ;  
 For Bois le Grand was dying, and it pierced her like a lance  
 To hear him vainly calling on his Chatelaine in France ;  
 And not for her who knelt by him, and lived but in his breath—  
 Remorse and grief without relief  
 Were hastening her death.

Far, far away in Avignon, beneath the holy thorn,  
 The Chatelaine of Bois le Grand knelt down at eve and morn ;  
 And prayed for him in hope and trust long witless of his fate ;  
 But never knew he was untrue  
 And had repented late.  
 As caught between two seas his bark was in a rocky strait  
 And with his life went down the lives of those two women. Fate  
 Redrugged the love, betrayed them both—and one by Laura's shrine  
 Took her last rest—the other best,  
 Drank death with him like wine.

Niagara's doom long threatened came—the roll of English drums  
 Was heard deep in the forest as Frideaux's stout army comes.  
 They sap and trench from day to day, the cannon fiercer roar,  
 The hot attack when beaten back  
 Again comes to the fore.  
 The pallisades are red with fire, the ramparts red with gore,  
 Its brave defenders on the walls die thickly more and more,  
 Mid rack and ruin overwhelmed—no help above—below,  
 The few remain—not of the slain—  
 Surrender to the foe.

But not before all hope had fled, when gathered far and wide  
 From prairie, forest, fort and field—with every tribe allied  
 To France, throughout the west they came, the fatal siege to raise,  
 And marched along, a mingled throng,  
 Amid the forest maze.  
 They halted in the meadows where they stood like stags at gaze,  
 The English and the Iróquois confronting them for days,  
 Till Brant and Butler wary chiefs, with stratagem of war  
 Broke up their host, and captured most,  
 While fled the rest afar.

The last day came, and Bois le Grand beheld with misty eyes  
 The flag of France run down the staff, and that of England rise  
 It was the sharpest thorn of all that 'neath his pillow lay—  
 'O, Madelaine !' he cried 'my men !  
 My Rousillon so gay !  
 Fill graves of honour, while I live to see this fatal day !  
 But not another ! No !' he cried, and turned as cold as clay.  
 She kissed his mouth the last long kiss the dying get alone—  
 'O, Spina !' cried—fell by his side  
 And both lay dead as stone.

## L'ENVOI.

The old man ceased his reading, and there fell  
 Over his shoulder on the faded page,  
 A heavy tear drop, full of sympathy  
 And warm with passion, from the eye of May,  
 Who overlooked him—flushed and tremulous  
 As eager for the crisis of the tale,  
 Which struck her like an arrow—now it came.  
 ‘Good Uncle Clifford!’ said she, winding close  
 Her dress as she sat by him, ‘I have read  
 That story many times; but only now  
 In your recital do I seem to feel  
 Its meaning to the full—as one who sleeps  
 On some perplexity, and waking finds,  
 With morning light, its disentanglement.  
 The sequel of the story—tell me pray!’

He glanced at her with understanding eyes  
 That read her thoughts; but nothing said. He saw  
 A gentle turbulence of maiden dreams  
 And fancies in a heart, no fowler yet  
 Had taken like a bird of woodnotes free,  
 And taught to sing one strain of love for him.  
 ‘I know no sequel to it—lovely May!  
 But in my youth have heard, there was a grave  
 Made wide enough for two, beneath the thorn,  
 The oldest and the inmost of the group  
 With memories of evil sore accurst,  
 That stand so weirdly there, outlawed, apart  
 From other trees in ragged age forlorn.  
 It long was visible; and even now,  
 An eye that searches may find out the spot,  
 With crimson sanguinets like drops of blood  
 Much dotted on the grass that greener grows—  
 Kind nature’s covering for all of us,  
 When our life’s work is done, and we lie down,  
 And sleep our last on earth, to wake in Heaven,  
 At sunrise of our new creation’s morn!’

And so, dear May! keep well your heart in trust  
 For love that shames not, when your turn shall come  
 To be sought out and won with all delight  
 Of purity and true affection’s gift.  
 But those who haply sleep beneath the thorns;  
 Search not the mystery of their fatal love,  
 Whose final issues none may judge aright;  
 But leave them to the mercy of the Lord,  
 Who pardons much where love is much; for more  
 Than man’s compassion is the grace of God,  
 And his forgiveness greater than the world’s,  
 By law not love, which judges and condemns.’

NIAGARA, January 1, 1881.