

Laura Secord

— or —

HOW CANADA WAS SAVED



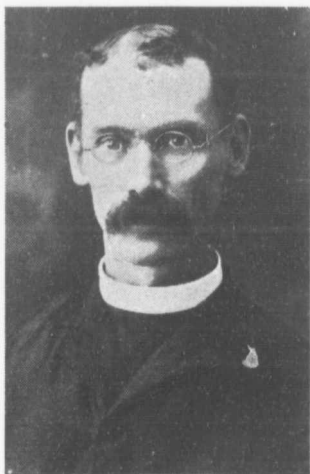
By Rev. J. R. Newell

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By J. R. NEWELL

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'T WAS years ago, ere toil and age
Had beautified our heritage,
When free in trackless forests ran
The beast of prey and savage man,
Whose haunts have long since been transformed
To cities, hamlets, farms; and o'er
The broad domain, where wild fowl swarmed,
The huntsman hastened to explore
Each nook and covert, near and far,
And waged betimes the mimic war—
'Twas long ago the Briton came,
In deference to the British name,
Came from the young Republic, where
Against his King he needs must swear,
Or fly the country of his birth,
And be a wanderer on earth:
Preferring loyalty to ease,
He went with resolution forth;
Left home and all that most could please,
And dared the dangers of the north,
Endured the hardships of the road,
Sought in the wilderness abode
For wife and children; and at length
In faith and trust and manly strength,
Established there his forest home,
And hoped for better days to come.

And others followed him, and found
A resting-place on British ground;
Though wild, the air of freedom swept,
Where man endured, and woman wept.
Year after year the numbers grew
Of those who from coercion flew,
Till shimmering lake, and stately woods,
And mountain streams, and dashing floods,
Were dominated by a race,
Tireless alike in toil or chase.

In time the forest disappears
Before the hardy pioneers;
And many an ample field is seen
At springtide clothed in waving green,
Where later on the golden grain
Shall tell that labor was not vain;
But that when will and strength unite
In energy to wage the fight
Against untoward circumstance,
The cause still cherished must advance,
And triumph surely crown at last
The strenuous efforts of the past.

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Where once in forest glades was heard
The howl of wolf and song of bird,
There farms and homesteads, won by toil,
Like gardens of rich promise smile;
And woman's happy songs arise
Like holy offerings to the skies,
And childhood's merry shout and cheer
Like benedictions reach the ear.
Scenes primitive and pure like these
Had power to reconcile and please;
However much the great world felt,
Home still was home where loved ones dwelt;
For hut and mansion are the same
If home be the beloved name
Distinguishing the blest retreat,
Where all domestic virtues meet.

Alas that war, accurst and rude,
Should on such holy scenes intrude,
And start a tremor of distress
Where all was hope and happiness!
But man's cupidity will reach
For lawless gain, though Heaven may teach
In thunder tones the better plan
Of honesty 'twixt man and man.
Man is the unit of the state,
And what he does the state may do,
When greed and glory palliate
Lust of the many or the few;
Till man with man in conflict joined,
To mercy deaf, to reason blind,
Sheathes not the sword till carnage spread
The ground with dying and with dead.

'Twere tedious here in words to name
The cause why many a hostile horde
In haste and envy northward came,
To devastate with fire and sword;
Oh! 'twas a time of dire distress
Where late had reigned such happiness,
When height and hill with ramparts frowned,
And sentries paced their ceaseless round;
When lake and river, white with craft,
Freighted with war's munitions, swept
Still shoreward—loud the invaders laughed,
It mattered not that others wept,
And others came, as far and wide
Marauders ranged the country-side
With fire and faggot where they went,
On plunder and destruction bent.

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The cries of women filled the air,
The wails of children in despair
Swelled vast to heaven, as near at hand
And far away throughout the land,
The flames of burning hamlets lent
A fierceness to the firmament,
Which like a furnace glowed at night,
And filled the helpless with affright.

But what of the defenders, when
Our shores were thronged with hostile men?
Did craven cowardice prevail,
And spirits once intrepid quail?
Go, read the record of the fights—
Of dauntless Brock at Queenston Heights,
Of Stoney Creek and Lake Champlain,
Of Chrysler's Farm and Lundy's Lane,
And of the other contests waged,
Where brave defenders were engaged;
Then read of HER, whose dauntless soul
Braved fire and flood, brooked no control,
Until FitzGibbon was apprised
Of what the foemen had devised;
And she, by her heroic course,
Saved country from defeat and worse.

'Twas when on Queenston Heights appeared
A foreign flag by foemen reared;
And Wadsworth, with defiant mien,
Looked down on the surrounding scene
With ill-dissembled scorn, which spoke
How slight, how brief would be the stroke
To break the stay of Britain's trust,
And lay defenders in the dust—
'Twas then, when Brock the hero led
His few brave men against the foe
And fell, as up the Heights they sped
At his command, whose dying head
Found stony pillow far below—
'Twas then a woman's eye beheld
The attack, repulse, the shock which quelled
A moment the intrepid few,
Who feared no odds, but dared to do;
She sped, not heeding for her life,
She ran in thickest of the strife,
Found whom she sought—her husband—laid
Where fast the hissing bullets played,
And o'er him bent in tenderness,
Which spoke far more than words express.
Only a few short moments passed,

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When three unmanly ruffians cast
Their glances on the wounded man,
And to dispatch him thither ran,
With musket butts high raised in air,
To brain him as he languished there;
But o'er him bent the faithful wife,
The friend in peace, the shield in strife,
And parried all their murderous blows,
Nor from her prostrated husband rose,
Till some of their companions came,
Who hated such a deed of shame,
And seized the cowards, took them hence;
And then, in kindly deference,
Assigned such guard as should become
Such heroine, and to her home
The wounded soldier was conveyed,
And all his present wants allayed.

Now, in that home of loyalty—
Were billeted the enemy—
Chief officers—who freely spoke
Of plans, and projects, and the stroke
Which should subdue the haughty race,
And Britain's flaunting flag displace,
And Laura Secord (for 'twas she
Who heard the boastful enemy)
With eagerness attention gave,
And felt, though woman, to be brave
And bear the tactics of the foe
To those in danger who should know,
Were worthy of the bravest heart,
Which e'er had dared a hero's part.

At her own door a sentry stood
To challenge all who came and went;
And farther on none might elude
The pickets, watchful and intent;
And yet FitzGibbon must be told
The secrets, which she could unfold,
Respecting what the foe would do—
But who should go? There were but two;
And one was helpless as he lay,
Since he had fallen in the fray:
It must be so—there's not to choose—
'Tis she must go and bear the news!

Ere morn had flecked the eastern sky,
And while the noon of night was high,
Alone, unheeded, as she crept

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From those oblivions as they slept,
She stole beyond the sentry's beat,
And heard the tramp of wary feet;
Then choosing not the well-known road
Where many a watchful sentry strode,
She turned her to the right, proceeding
Through tangled woods as if unheeding
The dangers which beset her way,
Which were most hazardous by day.
Afar she heard the wolf's deep cry,
And nearer still the pack reply;
But more than these she feared the mood
Of savage tribes athirst for blood,
Yes, these she feared more than the snake,
Which hissed and rattled in the brake.
The way she chose was soft morass,
With here and there a tuft of grass
Whereon she stept, as best she could,
Lest she should mire in slimy mud.
Mile after mile, and hour by hour,
She hastened on with waning power;
And now a swollen stream athwart
Her pathway flowed; but with brave heart
She crept upon a fallen tree,
Poising herself on hand and knee,
To find, when she the stream had crossed,
Alas! that she her way had lost.
Then clambering up the banks, her blood
Was chilled with terror where she stood;
For with a horrid yell there rose
A band of Indians from repose,
Who, seizing tomahawk and knife,
Were eager and prepared for strife.
But happily those braves were true
To British rule; and when they knew
Our heroine was what she was,
There needed not another cause
To make them friendly, and they lent
Their efforts to her one intent
To reach the British lines, and tell
The words which from the invaders fell.

She told Fitz-Gibbon all she knew
Of plans and projects not a few;
Of how the foe, by feints and shams,
Would win the fight at Beaver Dams;
And that point gained, the invaders felt
Then should the fatal blow be dealt;
And Canada, to Britain lost,
Would well repay the trivial cost.

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Most timely was the message brought,
With wondrous news and menace fraught,
But she, who did the news repeat,
Swooned helpless at Fitz-Gibbon's feet:
The twenty miles her feet had trode
On such a dangerous, arduous road
Had overtaxed her woman's strength,
And overcome her powers at length;
But not before she had made known
Her country's danger, and her own;—
And thus did she defeat and mar,
And turn the dubious tide of war.

At Beaver Dams the combat fought
Was but a farce without a plot;
For all the foe's most secret schemes
Proved but so many idle dreams;
Their tactics, all beforehand known,
Predestined them to be undone;
And every issue, subsequent
Which marked the war, was an event
Propitious to the arms which stood
For Canada and Nationhood,
And showed how this devoted wife
And heroine had turned the strife
In favour of her chosen land,
And paralysed the invader's hand;
Till harassed by incessant force
In east and west, defeat and worse
Awaited them where'er they turned,
And all their hopes to ashes burned.
At last defeated everywhere,
They fled the country in despair—
Humiliation well deserved,—
And thus was Canada preserved.

Honour, praise, and thanks to her,
Fearless, faithful messenger,
Whose devoted loyalty
Checked the threatening enemy,
Saved her country from disgrace,
Won on valour's scroll a place,
Left to after times a name
Glorious in undying fame!

Bards have sung of battles won—
Salamis and Marathon—
Sung of heroes whose acclaim

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Lives in every breath of fame;
But the march by night through woods,
O'er morass and swollen floods,
By the prowling monsters tracked—
When was sung a braver act?

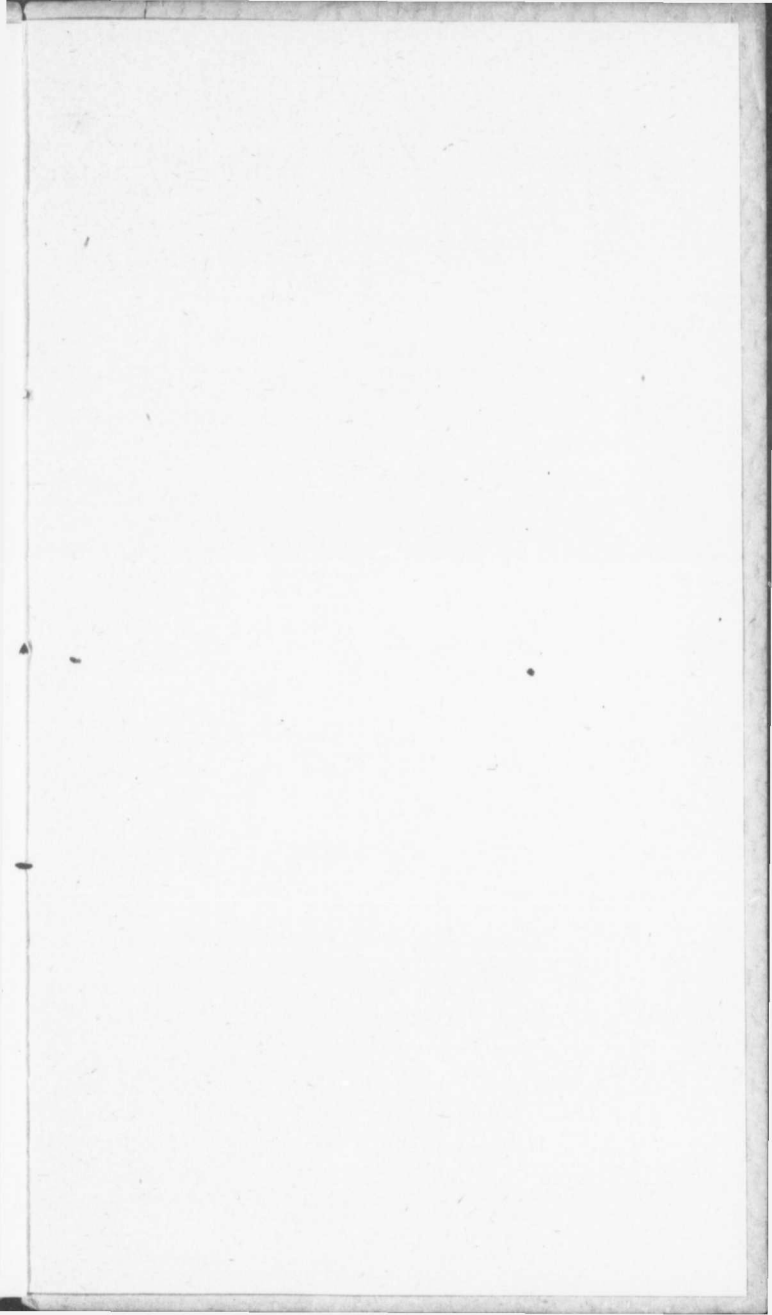
Wounded husband, children left,
Of her needed care bereft,
Left with enemies, the while
She was speeding many a mile
Through such dangers as would start
Tremor in the bravest heart—
Who that reads, that thinks can see
Nothing in her loyalty?

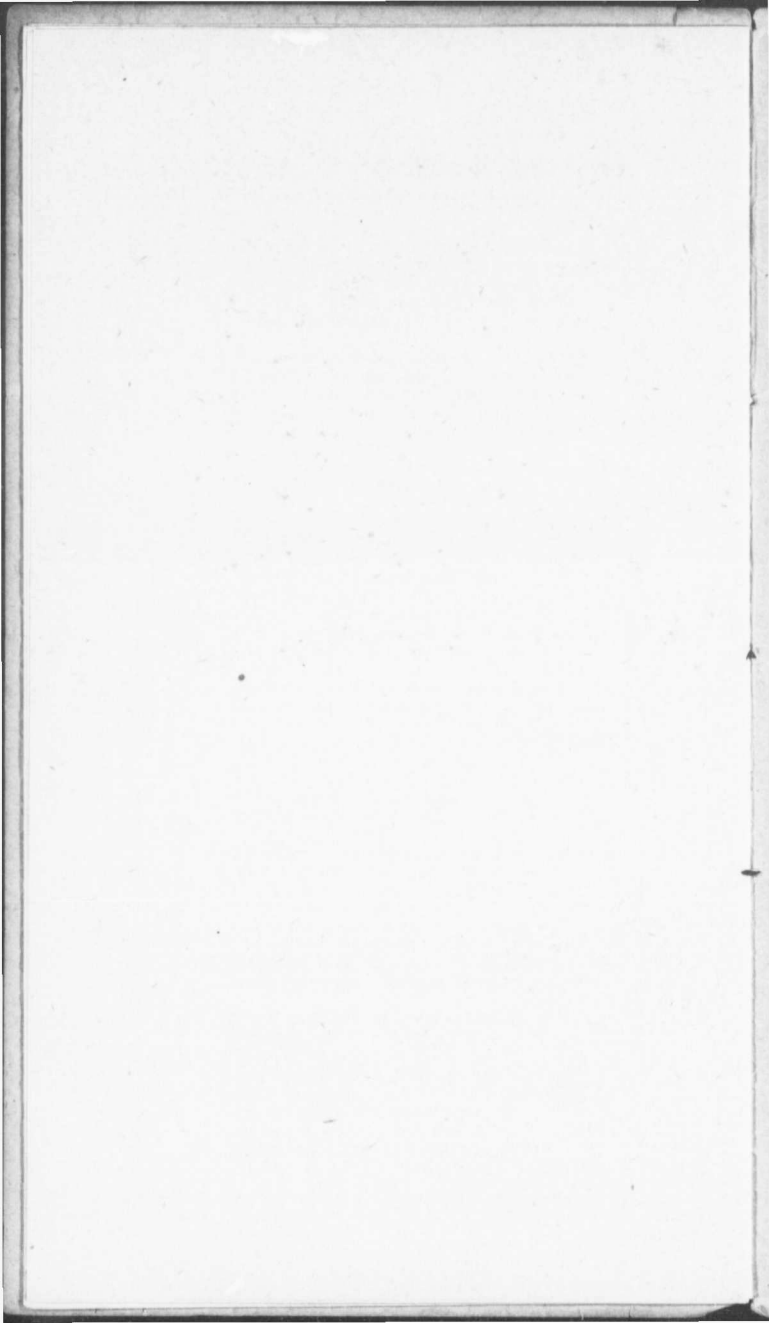
Perish selfishness which lives
On the bounty freedom gives,
Yet withholds the tribute due
Her who was so brave and true,
Her who saved from foreign yoke
Her adopted land, and spoke
Words which she alone could speak,
Giving guidance to the weak;

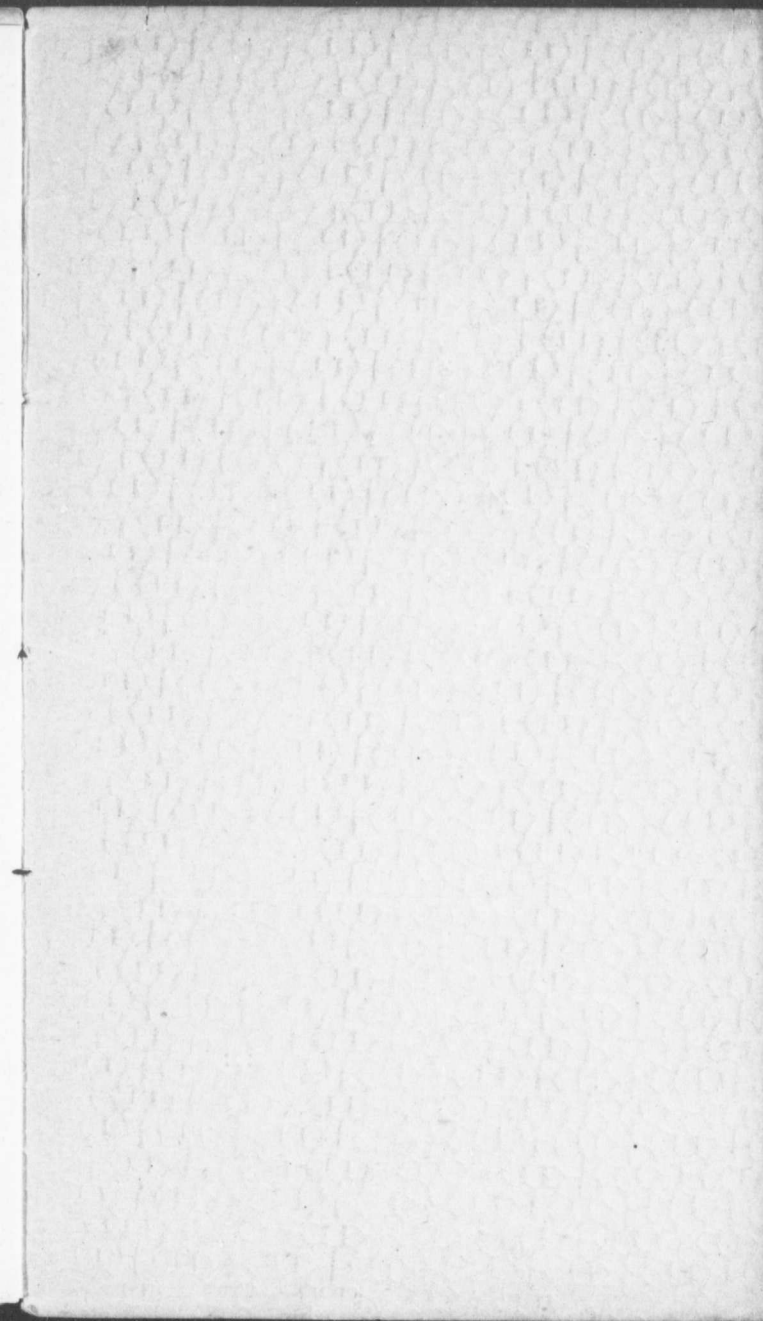
Giving needful counsel, where
Otherwise was blank despair,
While she did by deeds inspire
Hands with strength and hearts with fire,
Like a herald's from on high,
Her appearing met the eye,
When there fell from her pale lips
Words like an apocalypse.

Raise to her the storied stone,
And, though tardy, yet atone
For the long neglect, which hid
All beneath the coffin lid;
Carve the scroll, and say she saved
From the fate of the enslaved
Home and country, and received
Nothing for the work achieved!

O my country! she whose name
Intertwines with thine in fame
Was thy saviour when she trode
For thy sake the dangerous road;
Honour, praise, and thanks to her,
Fearless, faithful messenger;
What she did for thee was done—
Carve the scroll, and rear the stone!







MARKDALE, ONT.:
The Standard Book and Job Printing Office
1903.