

### Two Contributions to Canadian Poetry

"The Wood Carver's Wife and Later Poems," by the Late Marjorie L. C. Pickthall, and "Fires of Driftwood," by Isabel Ecclestone Mackay, were the Work of Intimate Friends Who Spent Much Time Together During Recent Years.

By Prof. W. T. Allison.

Within a few days of each other, two new books of Canadian verse have been issued by the Toronto publishing house of McClelland and Stewart. For several reasons these volumes are of extraordinary interest. In the first place, "The Wood Carver's Wife and Later Poems," by Marjorie L. C. Pickthall, and "Fires of Driftwood," by Isabel Ecclestone Mackay, are works of art as far as format is concerned. In binding, title-pages, cover design, and printing they are a delight to the eye. In the Pickthall volume we have the best portrait of the author that I have yet seen. The design of both books and the decorative work have been done by J. E. Macdonald, A.R.C.A., and he is to be congratulated on his excellent taste; with the cooperation of the printer, the engraver and the book-binder, Mr. Macdonald has produced two of the most attractive volumes of poetry ever published in this country.

And these books are noteworthy for another reason. In "The Wood Carver's Wife and Later Poems" we have a volume of melancholy interest. Owing to the death of Miss Pickthall last March, it is, so to speak, her last will and testament, her final message to all of us of the wonder and bloom of the world. When we consider that this talented singer, whose shaping spirit of imagination nearly approached that of genius, was called by death, and that right suddenly, when to herself and her friends it must have seemed as if not half her days were spent, we are in a mind to receive almost with reverence these her last visions of beauty.

And how interesting and how fitting it is that the book of poetry which walks out into the world with this precious posthumous volume should be the latest child of the invention of Isabel Ecclestone Mackay, Marjorie Pickthall's fellow-worker, constant companion, and intimate friend. If those who have passed on into the mysterious world are able to take note of what is occurring in the earth-life, surely nothing could bring a greater sense of satisfaction to the late poetess than to know that the introduction to her last book of verse was written by her own familiar friend, and that it should be accompanied in publication by the same friend's own "Fires of Driftwood," many of which poems were composed almost in her presence on the shores of Boundary Bay.

Who Read Her Poems by the Sound-ing Sea.

In her all too brief introduction to Miss Pickthall's last volume Mrs. Mackay gives us some reminiscence of those vanished summer days when she and her friend lived by the Pacific shore. "It was in June," she writes, "and amid the wild loveliness of sea and forest that the writer first saw the manuscript of this book. The author of it sat where great rocks wedged a fallen log—fallen so long that its dead, gray bark had changed to the many greens of velvet mosses. Below lay the Pacific and above and far back

the mountains rose. The forest sounds, secret and musical, accompanied the rise and fall of the poet's voice as she turned the pages, reading here and there. When she had finished little was said—silence and the dim loveliness of the place seemed the most fitting comment; beauty had melted into beauty, making each more beautiful." Speaking of Miss Pickthall's personal characteristics, Mrs. Mackay proceeds, "In this poet, at least, there was a wealth of happy interest which linked her most companionably with the life of everyday. To her, a sense of humor was always the saving grace, the balance-holder which never confused the great things with the small, nor let the sublime slip into the ridiculous. Tears were for secret places, but laughter shared with a friend was a bond which made a closer bond more possible. The last poem written, in her own hand, is "The Vision," and however we may interpret it, it rings most gladly confident. There is no hint here of work unfinished, or promise unfulfilled; but a sure knowledge and content that

"Life and death are one." Haunted by the Passion of the Past. Tennyson once said that he was "haunted by the passion of the past." Although Miss Pickthall had a sense of humor, as Mrs. Mackay assures us, "A Mother in Egypt," and "The Wood Carver's Wife," to say nothing of scores of other lyrics which resound for us the joys and sorrows of those who lived in Bible days, in the middle ages, or in the times of the old regime on the banks of the St. Lawrence, had a feeling for the past, even deeper than that of the great Victorian poet. In the short poem of dedication which prefaces this collection, Miss Pickthall shows this inclination of her mind to the days of old, Lord, on this paper white My soul would write Tales that were heard of old Of perilous things and bold; Kings as young lions for pride; Lost cities where they died Last in the gate; the cry That told some eastern throng A prophet was gone by; The song of swords; the song Of beautiful, fierce lords Gone down among the swords; The traffick and the breath Of nations spilled in death; The glory and the gleam Of a whole age Shared in a golden page, Such is my dream.

And in spite of her mastery of pathos, and of the tender, graceful note resurgent in her verse, Miss Pickthall had a love for adventurous days. One of the liveliest little poems in this book is entitled "Riding," and gives expression to a wish which few would have suspected in one who was habitually shy and retiring: If I should live again, O God, let me be young, Quick of eye and vein, With the honeycomb on my tongue, Death met a maiden on the brae,

All in a moment flung With the dawn on a flowing plain, Riding, riding, riding riding Between the sun and the rain. If I, having been, must be, O God, let it be so Swift and supple and free With a long journey to go, And the clink of the curb and the blow Of hooves, and the wind at my knee, Riding, riding, riding riding Between the hills and the sea.

One Star Differs from Another. When one turns from Marjorie Pickthall's sad but beautiful domestic drama of new France, "The Wood Carver's Wife," and from her other shorter poems to Mrs. Mackay's "Fires of Driftwood," one is conscious at once of a change in style. That of Miss Pickthall is the more delicate, but that of Mrs. Mackay is easy and close-woven and full of the color of real life. As one star differs from another in glory, so with these sisters of the heavenly muse. Mrs. Mackay has made an enviable reputation as a novelist, as a writer of children's verse, and as a playwright, but with the appearance of this volume she becomes one of the leading poets of Canada. In a flash of phrase, in command of melody, and in the application of ideas to life, Mrs. Mackay has made in the hundred or more short lyrics in this collection a notable contribution to our literature. In reading the average volume of verse, I always run across many poems which are merely pretty. That is the best you can say for them, and often you feel that the writer would have been well-advised if he or she had omitted them because they were so slight in thought content. Now it is altogether probable that Isabel Ecclestone Mackay, in spite of the enormous strength of her name, writes some flub-dub poems, some airy-fairy, cypress lawn stuff, but if so, she has exercised a rigid censorship over herself and has refused to include trivia in this volume. I think her book is remarkable in this respect. And as I have hinted, she is closely in touch with human life. This is abundantly evident in almost every poem. I am glad to see that she likes to write sometimes on exclusively Canadian subjects. She lives in Vancouver, the city of roses and rain, and she writes a little poem in praise of wet weather, another on "The Sleeping Beauty," a formation of mountain peaks above Vancouver Harbor, a fine poem on the romantic suggestions of the docks, and many other poems which smell of the sea. But she is partial to other scenes and other cities in Canada. She was brought up in old Ontario, and we get eastern color in some of her poems. I mention such titles as "Lake Louise," "The Bridge Builder," "Calgary Station," "The Prairie School," "The Homesteader" and "The Gatekeeper," a poem which unrolls the glories of old Quebec.

An Original Poem About Death. A poem which illustrates Mrs. Mackay's original turn of thought and her intense interest in spiritual things is the following: Laureate. Death met a little child who cried For a bright star which earth denied And Death, so sympathetic, kissed it, saying: "With me All bright things be!" And only the child's mother missed it.

Some critical persons have contended that this publicity work is commercializing things of the spirit. They go even further than this and say that the Canadian Authors' Association is helping publishers and booksellers to palm off on the public literary wares of inferior quality. Such criticisms as these are ill-founded. The officers of the Authors' Association would be the last people in the world to encourage poor work on the part of any of the members of the organization. They would wish for the future welfare of Canadian literature that publishers should set a high standard and that the public should exercise discrimination and not select a book because it has a highly colored jacket. But if books, written by Canadians of yesterday and to-day express high ideals and show good workmanship, then they believe that the people of this country should have their attention called to such volumes and should be urged to add them to their private libraries.

A laudable resolve for Canadians to make during Book Week would be to start a special shelf for Canadians. School teachers might induce their classes to lay the foundation for a library of Canadian authors. There might well be in every school room, from Grade VII upwards, a little circulating library of books written about Canada by Canadians. The telling of fairy tales to children has been strictly forbidden by the Soviet minister of public instruction. This is going beyond the beyond in radicalism. Probably nursery rhymes will be the next victims. An American librarian states that the books which are most frequently permanently appropriated by his customers are cowboy stories and novels of the Oppenheim and Williamson type. "If Winter Comes" has never been stolen. Its readers are evidently infected by Mark Sabre's virtue. An amusing incident is cited in Lord Ernest Hamilton's "Forty Years On." The proverbially absent-minded professor seems to have been outdoors by Lord Strathairn. The latter was fond of entertainment, and was very vain of his

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Her eyes held dreams life would be tray, And gallant Death was greatly taken—"Leave," whispered he, "Your dream with me And I will see you never waken." Death met an old man in a laney; So gnarled was he and full of pain That kindly Death was struck with pity—"Come you with me Old man," said he, "I'll set you down in a fair city." So, kingly Death along the way Scatters rare gifts and asks no pay— Yet who to Death will write a sonnet? If any dare, Let him take care No foolish tear be spilled upon it!

With Some the War is Not Yet Over. One of the most vivid poems in this volume describes some immigrants seen in the Calgary station. I am sorry that it is too long for me to quote. The poem which made the deepest appeal to me and which impressed me as being the most original of all is entitled "Perhaps." It is written in free verse. So is this powerful reminder of the tragic memories of the war:

The Returned Man. They thought that he would come back Quieter, Less boyish, But still a hero with tales to tell. So, when there were no tales, Only blank silences— When he lay for hours Staring through leafing branches And forgot them Utterly— They tried to arouse him, saying: "The war is over," But when he turned on them His shadowed eyes, They stammered— Knowing that they lied: —W. T. ALLISON.

Literary Notes. It has been decreed by the Canadian Authors' Association that the annual festival known as Book Week this year be between Oct. 28th and Nov. 4th. The local branches of the association are making even greater efforts than last year in arranging various publicity features in the press and on the platform to call the attention of the Canadian people to our national literature.

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Doctors and Speed Limit. Ottawa, Oct. 20.—That a doctor in a hurry to get to a patient should be allowed to exceed the speed limit in his car, was the argument advanced by two doctors in the Police Court yesterday, charged with speeding. Magistrate Askwith pointed out that although it might do the law no harm to have a special clause for doctors, there was none at present, and he would have to treat them the same as other people and fine them \$10 and costs.

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