

CANADIAN VIEWPOINT

By WILSON MACDONALD.

The Ten Greatest Poems in the English Language.

There is no better way of rousing human interest than by making some unusual specific statement. The evasions of conservative literateurs may be interesting to the academic mind, but the public, which is intuitive, are not concerned over their meaningless array of words. In one number of the Atlantic monthly appeared a seven-page article, written by a man lichened with degrees, and the only art in the magnificent array of words was the avoidance of expressing any definite thought. From first to last the essay was a complete circumlocution of words and thus it made a tremendous impression in university circles where the prevailing idea is that literary excellence and cowardice of expression are synonymous. To-day evasion has reached the flower of its maturity.

Where the academy fosters one genius it harbours ten drones, and genius and dullness always fight their royal battles under academic auspices. Ten Oxford dullards were writing voluminous pile that was universally accepted while Matthew Arnold was singing the immortal "Scholar Gypsy," which was universally rejected. It is the same to-day as in the past: the dullards are hailed with salvos while the divine cup-bearers are given the lash of cultured verbiage.

One of the reasons of the present world-wide rejection of art is the complexity of its character and the obtuseness of its presentation. I believe we are approaching a day when the cultured evasion of our professors will be held to be as inartistic as the most vulgar offering of the jazz movement. The tremendous vogue of jazz is an honest rebellion against musical snobbery and against musical criticism of the pedantic kind. In the last century we have moved, in art, from simplicity to complexity and from straightforwardness to obscurity, and now we find our audience is more interested in banal things that are at least sincere than in artistic triumphs of utter insincerity.

A man can measure the sincerity of his love for literature by his attitude toward the writers of his day. His claim is surely a most diabolical one if he persistently refuses to read all contemporary verse while claiming an affection for the produce of the dead. No where do you find this ill-willed affection so arrogantly fostered as in academic circles, and I know of at least three professors of English literature in Canadian universities who vigorously assail Canadian verse and yet have scarcely touched the fringe of it in their reading.

The flash of genius does not cross once in a decade the pages of the Century, Harper's, Scribner's and other magazines that delight only in the phrased utterance of passionless maturity. The English magazines are better. They at least do not debar all contributions that make definite assertions in a straightforward manner.

A few years ago a magazine contained an article on the "Ten Greatest Books of all Time," and this one essay with its direct assertion caused more interest in books among the general public than anything that had been written in fifty years. A man, disdainful that pedantic etiquette which is the father of evasion, had dared to proclaim simply and sincerely his literary preferences.

There is magic in the word ten, and when I give what I consider the ten greatest short poems in the English language the magic of the number will, I know, arrest as much

interest as the list itself. Here then is my choice:

- "Elegy in a Country Churchyard"—Thomas Gray.
"Ode to a Grecian Urn"—John Keats.
"Ode to a Nightingale"—John Keats.
"Ode to a Skylark"—Shelley.
"Rabbi Ben Ezra"—Browning.
"Lines in Tintern Abbey"—Wordsworth.
"Lyricus"—Milton.
"Friends in Paradise"—Henry Vaughn.
"The Gypsy Scholar"—Matthew Arnold.
"Dejection"—Coleridge.

This list includes no poems with less than fifty lines, for a poem of sustained power is undoubtedly a greater triumph than a single flash of genius. I have made my selections with some misgivings for there are many poems that righteously clamor for admittance. Most insistent and authentic in their plea are:

- "Ode to a West Wind"—Shelley.
"Locksley Hall"—Tennyson.
"Sam"—Browning.
"Eugene Aram"—Hood.
"Nature and the Poet"—Wordsworth.
"Intimations on Immortality"—Wordsworth.
Poem XXVII, in "A Shropshire Lad"—Housman.
"The Blessed Damsel"—Rossetti.
"Rugby Chapel"—Arnold.
"Thamalosia"—Bryant.
"The Open Road"—Whitman.

If I had not used the qualification of the word "short," I would have included "The Ballade of Reading Gaol" by Wilde; "The Eve of St. Agnes," by Keats; "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," by Coleridge and "Adonais" by Shelley.

In the aesthetic circles of the United States poetry is measured by the cleverness of a rhyme or by the novelty of the vehicle. In that country the overtone, which is the spiritual life of a poem is an overlooked factor. Yet this overtone is that indescribable something that immortalizes. And I have made my choice of these ten poems with little thought of technique, brilliancy or poetic artifice but because they seem to possess a spiritual grandeur, a loftiness of utterance and an atmospheric completeness such as few other poems possess in so perfect a degree.

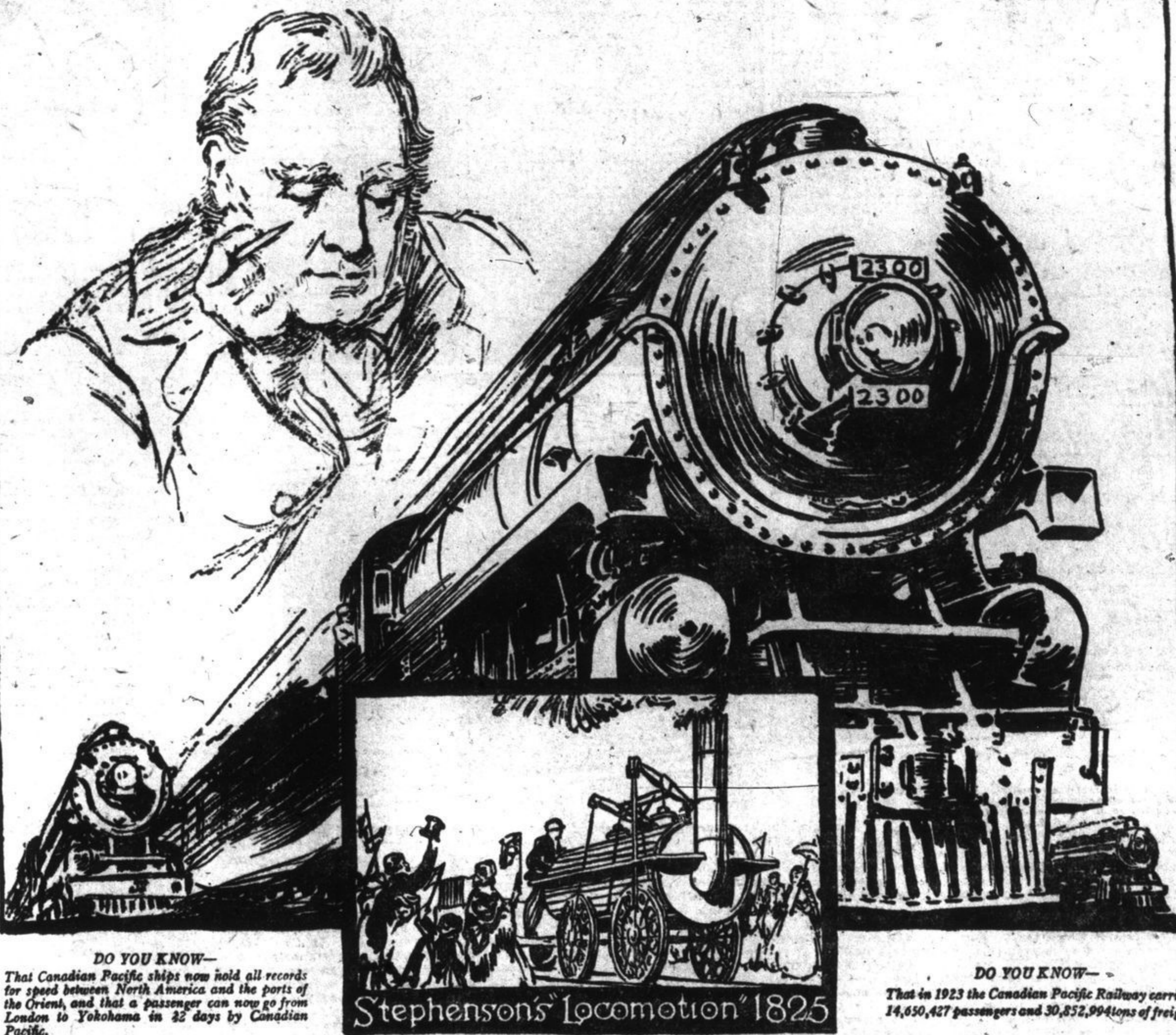
The immortal "Elegy" is the essence of English philosophy in the presence of death. It is atmospheric, in tone, movement and thought and no disturbance of literary law or phenomenon of change can lessen its eternal value. "Lyricus" is the wedding of an unsurpassed "grandness of manner" with an unmeasurable grief and the overtone thunders in beauty not unlike the voice of those waters that were wrapped about the beloved object of the song. "The Scholar Gypsy" is the nobler yearning of the academic spirit. It is the rich sunlight of a mind that loved life, and in the poem this love wrestles with the spirit of the cloister and the sunlight conquers and a grave Tyrant trade:

"Saw the merry Grecian coasted come,
Freighted with amber grapes and
Chean wine,
Green bursting figs, and tummies
steeped in brine."

I make no apology for including Vaughn's "Friends in Paradise." The poem has a richness of philosophy and a magic of movement that grow as we companion with the verses which end with a philosophy

THE BUILDING OF THE DOMINION

Karl Gudwin



DO YOU KNOW— That Canadian Pacific ships now hold all records for speed between North America and the ports of the Orient, and that a passenger can now go from London to Yokohama in 22 days by Canadian Pacific.

DO YOU KNOW— That in 1923 the Canadian Pacific Railway carried 14,650,427 passengers and 30,852,994 tons of freight

Centennial of the Steam Railway

1925 marks two important anniversaries—the hundredth of the steam railway—the 40th of the Canadian Pacific. Just one hundred years ago, according to the scribe on the spot, a "great concourse" of people witnessed the first trial of the steam railway. The locomotive (inset above) and thirty-eight "waggons" made the run from Brusselton to Stockton.

To quote the local Chronicler: "Such was its velocity that in some parts the speed was frequently twelve miles an hour."

George Stephenson, the engineering genius back of this epoch-making enterprise, ventured this prophecy: "You will live to see the day, though I may not live so long, when railways

will come to supersede almost all other methods of conveyance in this country—when mail coaches will go by railway, and railroads will become the great High Way for the King and his subjects. The time is coming when it will be cheaper for a working man to travel by railway than to walk on foot."

It was not until 1885—when the last spike was driven in the Canadian Pacific—that "the Great High Way for the King and his subjects" became a transcontinental reality in Canada. Not only were Canada's scattered provinces united into one great nation—but the most difficult and most important link created in what was to become the World's Greatest Highway!

CANADIAN PACIFIC It Spans the World

Advertisement for Bayer Aspirin, featuring a portrait of a man and the Bayer logo. Text includes 'FOR Colds', 'BAYER', 'ASPIRIN', and 'Safe'.

that both believer and agnostic must accept:

"And yet as angels in some brighter climes Call to the soul in hours of sleep So, some strange thoughts transcend our wotted themes And into glory peep."

(Note.—I would be glad to receive from my readers their idea of the ten greatest poems in English. Address me, care British Whig.)

THE TOWN WATCHMAN

It cannot be said that with the advent of the United Church of Canada another sect comes into being. There will be nothing new or strange in its doctrines or government.

The Scotch church on Princess street did as the Watchman expected—voted largely against union. "A Presbyterian I was born and a Presbyterian I will die," declared one of its members, paraphrasing a famous Canadian statesman.

Little sympathy need be felt for Canadians who renounce their British citizenship to give their services to foreign countries and then decide to come back and demand instant naturalization.

It should not be necessary to draw the attention of township councils to burying grounds within their boundaries which have been neglected to such an extent that the graves of "the fathers" are buried in weeds. Municipalities that have any pride will see that their cemeteries are kept clean and neat. They are holy

places, and succeeding generations have a duty to perform in showing respect to the places where their forefathers lie.

If other fathers would apply to the police magistrate for aid in getting shiftless sons to work it would be better. No able-bodied young man should be idle if he can secure work.

By all means let us have "Leo the Royal Cadet" again. This Cameron-Talman musical comedy made big hits in Kingston and district years ago. The late Col. Frank Strange and ex-Aid. Nick O'Connor are remembered as two of the stars in the companies that gave the production in the old opera house. Kingston had good amateur comedians and comedienne in those days and it will take the present young people going

to equal the older set.

How things have changed! Just forty years ago the Salvation Army was not a welcome guest at the Anglican cathedral here. Some of the older folks there will remember. But here we read this week that the Salvation Army band and its adjutant were royally entertained by the cathedral Anglican Young People's Society in St. George's hall. There is church friendship for you!

It did one good the other day to read in the Whig about a runaway horse on King street. The horse has been so eclipsed by the automobile that we hear very rarely of an old-fashioned runaway and smash-up on a Kingston thoroughfare. It is all motor car smashes that we read about. But this horse reminded us that the days of Dobbin are not yet

passed. Mr. Horse also managed to create a discussion in the city council last week on the quality of a fire department team, and it was made

clear that we cannot run our fire brigade with motors alone any more than we cannot live by bread alone. The horse has still a place to fill.

Advertisement for RAZ-MAH capsules, treating asthma and bronchial colds. Text includes 'ASTHMA HEAD and BRONCHIAL COLDS' and 'RAZ-MAH GUARANTEED RELIEF'.

Advertisement for Freedom from Pain Rheumatism Neuritis, featuring TRC's capsules. Text includes 'Freedom from Pain Rheumatism Neuritis' and 'TRC's TEMPLETON'S RHEUMATIC CAPSULES'.

Advertisement for Beecham's Pills, featuring a woman's face and text 'Watch your Skin! It's up to you to look your best'. Text includes 'Beecham's Pills' and 'They purify the blood, clear the skin, make you happy, bright and attractive. Sold Everywhere in Canada.'

Advertisement for FINDLAY SPECIAL TORTOISE COOK, featuring a tortoise and text 'FINDLAY SPECIAL TORTOISE COOK'. Text includes 'Six Cooking Holes, Special Fire Box for Wood. Another masterpiece in Tortoise Cook construction. Large and roomy Fire Box for burning wood, and still retaining the advantages of round firepot for coal.' and 'Come in and see this excellent Range. Stevenson & Hunter TINSMITHS and PLUMBERS 55-57 PRINCESS ST.'