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The Coming of the Princess and Other Poems

Kate Seymour MacLean

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**THE COMING OF THE PRINCESS; AND OTHER
POEMS.**

BY

KATE SEYMOUR MACLEAN, KINGSTON, ONTARIO.

**AN INTRODUCTION, BY THE EDITOR OF "THE CANADIAN
MONTHLY."**

INTRODUCTION.

BY G MERCER ADAM.

The request of the author that I should write a few words of preface to this collection of poems must be my excuse for obtruding myself upon the reader. Having frequently had the pleasure as editor of *The Canadian Monthly*, of introducing many of Mrs. MacLean's poems to lovers of verse in the Dominion it was thought not unfitting that I should act as foster father to the collection of them here made and to bespeak for the volume at the hands at least of all Canadians the appreciative and kindly reception due to a

Child of the first winds and suns of a nation.

Accepting the task assigned to me the more readily as I discern the high and sustained excellence of the collection as a whole let me ask that the volume be received with interest as a further and most meritorious contribution to the poetical literature of our young country (the least that can be said of the work), and with sympathy for the intellectual and moral aspirations that have called it into being.

There is truth, doubtless, in the remark, that we are enriched less by what we have than by what we hope to have. As the poetic art in Canada has had little of an appreciable past, it may therefore be thought that the songs that are to catch and retain the ear of the nation lie still in the future, and are as yet unsung. Doubtless the chords have yet to be struck that are to give to Canada the songs of her loftiest genius; but he would be an ill friend of the country's literature who would slight the achievements of the present in reaching solely after what, it is hoped, the coming time will bring.

But whatever of lyrical treasure the future may enshrine in Canadian literature, and however deserving may be the claims of the volumes of verse that have already appeared from the native press, I am bold to claim for these productions of Mrs. MacLean's muse a high place in the national collection and a warm corner in the national heart.

To discern the merit of a poem is proverbially easier than to say how and in what manner it is manifested. In a collection the task of

appraisal is not so difficult. Lord Houghton has said: "There is in truth no critic of poetry but the man who enjoys it, and the amount of gratification felt is the only just measure of criticism." By this test the present volume will, in the main, be judged. Still, there are characteristics of the author's work which I may be permitted to point out. In Mrs. MacLean's volume what quickly strikes one is not only the fact that the poems are all of a high order of merit, but that a large measure of art and instinct enters into the composition of each of them. As readily will it be recognized that they are the product of a cultivated intellect, a bright fancy, and a feeling heart. A rich spiritual life breathes throughout the work, and there are occasional manifestations of fervid impulse and ardent feeling. Yet there is no straining of expression in the poems nor is there any loose fluency of thought. Throughout there is sustained elevation and lofty purpose. Her least work, moreover, is worthy of her, because it is always honest work. With a quiet simplicity of style there is at the same time a fine command of language and an earnest beauty of thought. The grace and melody of the versification, indeed, few readers will fail to appreciate. Occasionally there are echoes of other poets—Jean Ingelow and Mrs. Barrett Browning, in the more subjective pieces, being oftenest suggested. But there is a voice as well as an echo—the voice of a poet in her own right. In an age so bustling and heedless as this, it were well sometimes to stop and listen to the voice. In its fine spiritualizations we shall at least be soothed and may be bettered.

But I need not dwell on the vocation of poetry or on the excellence of the poems here introduced. The one is well known to the reader, the other may soon be. Happily there is promise that Canada will ere long be rich in her poets. They stand in the vanguard of the country's benefactors, and so should be cherished and encouraged. Of late our serial literature has given us more than blossoms. The present volume enshrines some of the maturer fruit. May it be its mission to nourish the poetic sentiment among us. May it do more to nourish in some degree the "heart of the nation", and, in the range of its influence, that of humanity.

CANADIAN MONTHLY OFFICE,
Toronto, December, 1880

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ENVOI

A little bird woke singing in the night,
Dreaming of coming day,
And piped, for very fulness of delight,
His little roundelay.

Dreaming he heard the wood-lark's carol loud,
Down calling to his mate,
Like silver rain out of a golden cloud,
At morning's radiant gate.

And all for joy of his embowering woods,
And dewy leaves he sung, —
The summer sunshine, and the summer floods
By forest flowers o'erhung.

Thou shalt not hear those wild and sylvan notes
When morn's full chorus pours
Rejoicing from a thousand feathered throats,
And the lark sings and soars,

Oh poet of our glorious land so fair,
Whose foot is at the door;
Even so my song shall melt into the air,
And die and be no more.

But thou shalt live, part of the nation's life;
The world shall hear thy voice
Singing above the noise of war and strife,
And therefore I rejoice!

THE COMING OF THE PRINCESS

I.

Break dull November skies, and make
Sunshine over wood and lake,
And fill your cells of frosty air
With thousand, thousand welcomes to the Princely pair!
The land and the sea are alight for them;
The wrinkled face of old Winter is bright for them;
The honour and pride of a race
Secure in their dwelling place,
Steadfast and stern as the rocks that guard her,
Tremble and thrill and leap in their veins,
As the blood of one man through the beacon-lit border!
Like a fire, like a flame,
At the sound of her name,
As the smoky-throated cannon mutter it,
As the smiling lips of a nation utter it,
And a hundred rock-lights write it in fire!
Daughter of Empires, the Lady of Lome,
Back through the mists of dim centuries borne,
None nobler, none gentler that brave name have worn;
Shrilled by storm-bugles, and rolled by the seas,
 Louise!
Our Princess, our Empress, our Lady of Lorne!

II.

And the wild, white horses with flying manes
Wind-tost, the riderless steeds of the sea.
Neigh to her, call to her, dreadless and free,
"Fear not to follow us; these thy domains;
Welcome, welcome, our Lady and Queen!
O Princess, oh daughter of kingliest sire!
Under its frost girdle throbbing and keen,

A new realm awaits thee, loyal and true!"
And the round-cheeked Tritons, with fillets of blue
Binding their sea-green and scintillant hair,
Blow thee a welcome; their brawny arms bear
Thy keel through the waves like a bird through the air.

II.

Shoreward the shoal of mighty shoulders lean
Through the long swell of waves,
Reaching beyond the sunset and the hollow caves,
And the ice-girdled peaks that hold serene
Each its own star, far out at sea to mark
Thy westward way, O Princess, through the dark.
The rose-red sunset dies into the dusk,
The silver dusk of the long twilight hour,
And opal lights come out, and fiery gleams
Of flame-red beacons, like the ash-gray husk
Torn from some tropic blossom bursting into flower,
Making the sea bloom red with ruddy beams.

IV

Still nearer and nearer it comes, the swift sharp prow
Of the ship above and the shadow ship below,
With the mighty arms of the Titans under,
All bowed one way like a field of wind-blown ears,
Still nearer and nearer, and now
Touches the strand, and, lo,
With the length of her bright hair backward flowing
Round her head like an aureole,
Like a candle flame in the wind's breath blowing,
Stands she fair and still as a disembodied soul,
With hands outstretched, and eyes that shine through tears
And tremulous smiles

When the trumpets, and the guns, and the great drums roll,
And the long fiords and the forelands shake with the thunder
Of the shout of welcome to the daughter of the Isles.

V

Bring her, O people, on the shoulders of her vassals
Throned like a queen to her palace on the height,
Up the rocky steeps where the fir tree tassels
Nod to her, and touch her with a subtle, vague delight,
Like a whisper of home, like a greeting and a smile
From the fir-tree walks and gardens, the wood-embowered castles
In the north among the clansmen of Argyle.
Now the sullen plunge of waves for many a mile
Along the roaring Ottawa is heard,
And the cry of some wood bird,
Wild and sudden and sweet,
Scared from its perch by the rush and trample of feet,
And the red glare of the torches in the night.
And now the long facade gay with many a twinkling light
Reaches hands of welcome, and the bells peal, and the guns,
And the hoarse blare of the trumpets, and the throbbing
of the drums
Fill the air like shaken music, and the very waves rejoice
In the gladness, and the greeting, and the triumph of
their voice.

VI.

Under triumphal arches, blazoned with banners and scrolls,
And the sound of a People's exulting, still gathering as it rolls,
Enter the gates of the city, and take the waiting throne,
And make the heart of a Nation, O Royal Pair, your own.
Sons of the old race, we, and heirs of the old and the new;
Our hands are bold and strong, and our hearts are faithful and

true;

Saxon and Norman and Celt one race of the mingled blood
Who fought built cities and ships and stemmed the unknown flood
In the grand historic days that made our England great
When Britain's sons were steadfast to meet or to conquer fate
Our sires were the minster builders who wrought themselves un-
known

The thought divine within them till it blossomed into stone
Forgers of swords and of ploughshares reapers of men and of
grain,

Their bones and their names forgotten on many a battle plain
For faith and love and loyalty were living and sacred things
When our sires were those who wrought and yours were the lead-
ers

and kings.

VII

For since the deeds that live in Arthur's rhyme
Who left the stainless flower of knighthood for all time
Down to our Blameless Prince wise gentle just
Whom the world mourns not by your English dust
More precious held more sacredly enshrined
Than in each loyal breast of all mankind,
Men bare the head in homage to the good,
And she who wears the crown of womanhood,
August, not less than that of Empress, reigns
The crowned Victoria of the world's domains
North, South, East, West, O Princess fair, behold
In this new world, the daughter of the old,
Where ribs of iron bar the Atlantic's breast,
Where sunset mountains slope into the west,
Unfathomed wildernesses, valleys sweet,
And tawny stubble lands of corn and wheat,
And all the hills and lakes and forests dun,
Between the rising and the setting sun;

Where rolling rivers run with sands of gold,
And the locked treasures of the mine unfold
Undreamed of riches, and the hearts of men,
Held close to nature, have grown pure again.
Like that exalted Pair, beloved, revered,
By princely grace, and truth and love endeared,
Here fix your empire in the growing West,
And build your throne in each Canadian breast,
Till West and East strike hands across the main,
Knit by a stronger, more enduring chain,
And our vast Empire become one again.

BIRD SONG.

Art thou not sweet,
Oh world, and glad to the inmost heart of thee!
All creatures rejoice
With one rapturous voice.
As I, with the passionate beat
Of my over-full heart feel thee sweet,
And all things that live, and are part of thee!

Light, light as a cloud
Swimming, and trailing its shadow under me
I float in the deep
As a bird-dream in sleep,
And hear the wind murmuring loud,
Far down, where the tree-tops are bowed, —
And I see where the secret place of the thunders be

Oh! the sky free and wide,
With all the cloud-banners flung out in it
Its singing wind blows
As a grand river flows,

And I swim down its rhythmical tide,
And still the horizon spreads wide,
With the birds' and the poets' songs like a shout in it!

Oh life, thou art sweet
Sweet—sweet to the inmost heart of thee!
I drink with my eyes
Thy limitless skies,
And I feel with the rapturous beat
Of my wings thou art sweet—
And I,—I am alive, and a part of thee!

AN IDYL OF THE MAY.

In the beautiful May weather,
Lapsing soon into June;
On a golden, golden day
Of the green and golden May,
When our hearts were beating tune
To the coming feet of June,
Walked we in the woods together.

Silver fine
Gleamed the ash buds through the darkness
of the pine,
And the waters of the stream
Glance and gleam,
Like a silver-footed dream—
Beckoning, calling,
Flashing, falling,
Into shadows dun and brown
Slipping down,
Calling still—Oh hear! Oh follow!
Follow—follow!

Down through glen and ferny hollow,
Lit with patches of the sky,
Shining through the trees so high,
Hand in hand we went together,
In the golden, golden weather
 Of the May;
While the fleet wing of the swallow
Flashing by, called – follow – follow!
 And we followed through the day:
 Speaking low –
Speaking often not at all
To the brooklet's crystal call,
 With our lingering feet and slow –
Slow, and pausing here and there
 For a flower, or a fern,
For the lovely maiden-hair;
Hearing voices in the air,
 Calling faintly down the burn.

Still the streamlet slid away,
 Singing, smiling, dimpling down
 To a mossy nook and brown,
Under bending boughs of May;
Where the nodding wind-flower grows,
 And the coolwort's lovely pink,
 Brooding o'er the brooklet's brink
Dips and blushes like a rose.

And the faint smell of the mould.
 Sweeter than the musky scent
Of the garden's manifold
 Perfumes into perfect blent.
Lights and sounds and odours stole,
 In the golden, golden weather –
Heart and thought, and life and soul,
 Stole away,
 In that merry, merry May,
Wandering down the burn together.