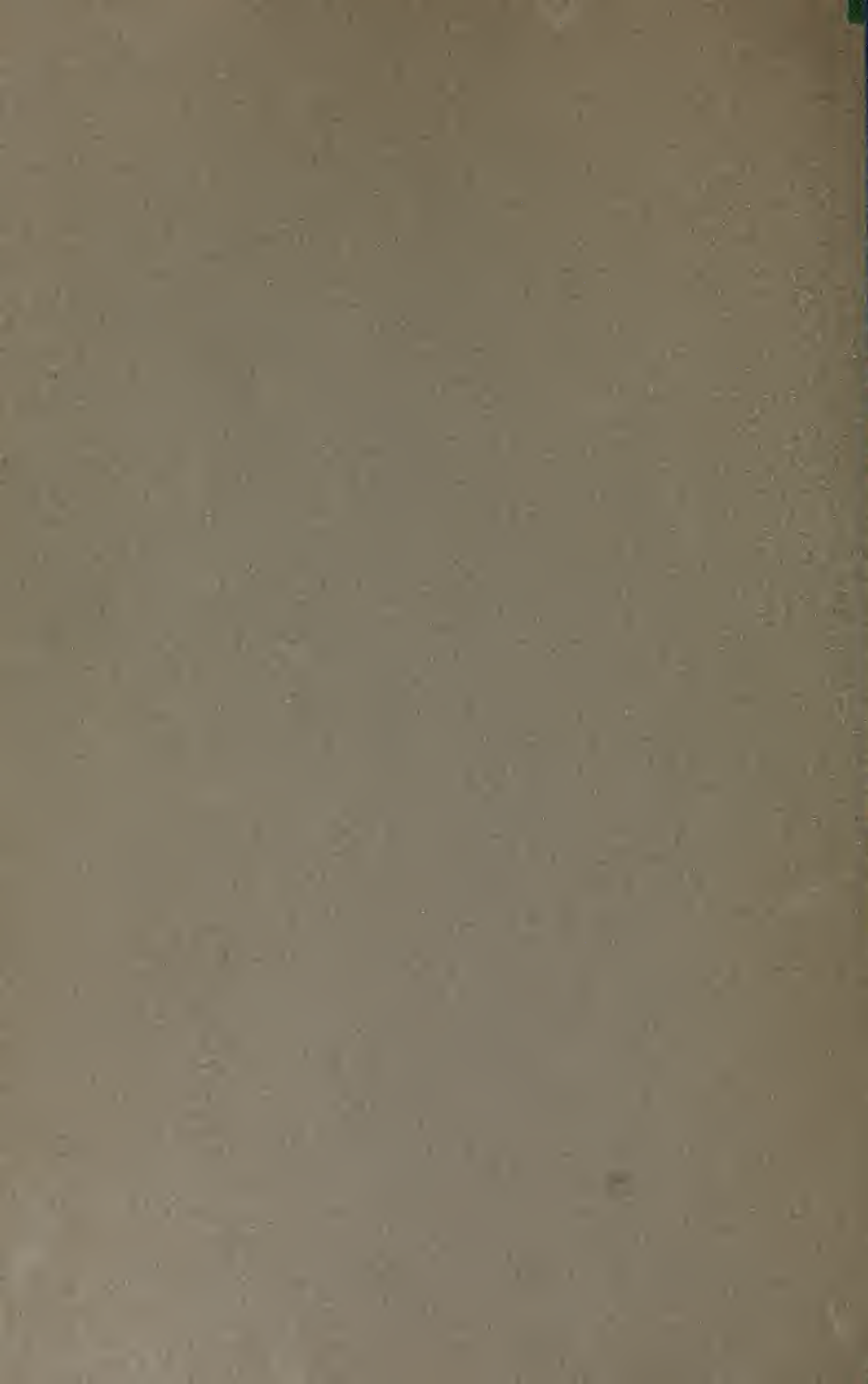


Hammond, Melvin Ormond
Edward William Thomson

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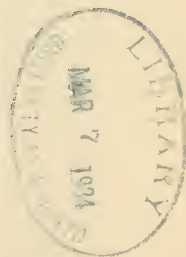


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EDWARD WILLIAM THOMSON

By M. O. HAMMOND



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EDWARD WILLIAM THOMSON

BY M. O. HAMMOND

EDWARD William Thomson was a Canadian who understood Canada. His varied racial strains, his many travels, his broad experiences of life, contributed to the thoughtful quality of his poetry, the insight and refinement of his short stories. A life of interesting contacts developed a rare personality and won for him enviable friendships in literature and politics.

Behind Thomson lay the humour of "Sam Slick," the ample historical romances of Richardson and Kirby, the stodgy poetry of Sangster and Heavysege, the pioneering nature verse of Charles Mair. Thomson, who preceded Roberts, Carman, and Lampman, caught up the thought of a new generation and in maturity expressed it with colour and acuteness. He became the interpreter of the types of the Ottawa Valley — the river-driver, the woodsman and the farmer. He paralleled the working lives of the "Group of 1860"; and as he passed from the scene there arose new realists, poets and novelists, who recorded the sombre life that followed war's disillusion, just as new painters in Canada set down in broad sweeps the solemn North, the fire-swept Laurentians, the lonely Rockies.

Most of Thomson's predecessors were provincial in outlook, or still strongly influenced by the European life they had left behind. He was a man of the New World. He had met Lincoln, had fought in the American Civil War, and had helped to repel the Fenians in 1866. He travelled to the West in 1869 with Joseph Howe, threaded the back counties of Ontario as engineer and surveyor, shared the unrest of the radicals of the North West before the rebellion of 1885, and

then joined in the Winnipeg 'boom' as the railway entered the West.

For the remainder of his life, Thomson was editor or special correspondent, productive but restless, his eager mind crowded with varied impressions, seeking outlet even in a busy man's letters to his friends. Though moody and temperamental, complaining and fearful for his financial welfare, he was cultivated and gifted of speech, the 'crony' and confidant of distinguished men.

Success or personal triumph brought little exaltation to Thomson. He had the journalist's indifference to personal glory. Writing in 1914 to W. E. Marshall, a Nova Scotia poet and new friend, he said:

May I say, without a particle of wish to offend or cavil, that your kind conception of my humble self as a person of any note or success in literature or anything else, sets me feeling at once a bit tickled and quite eager to get down and off the pedestal—lest I should laugh at myself too much! . . . To have been the old darkey "Joe" who died with John Brown—that was worth while—more than all the writing ever done.

During the early years of this century, when I most frequently met Mr. Thomson, he was in late middle age, a writer of wide and diversified experience. As correspondent in Canada for the *Boston Transcript*, he had much freedom and considerable influence. He wrote with editorial license, illuminating his columns by his long observations in history and statecraft. His letters were widely quoted in Canada, and his standing among public men was high and enviable. His impaired hearing limited his intercourse, but among intimates he was a welcome addition to any circle, where his wit, stories and reminiscences added immediately to the gaiety of the company.

Canada was emerging from colonial status into responsible government as Thomson was born on a farm in the Township of York, on February 12, 1849. The Thomson homestead, "Aikenshaw," comprising two hundred acres, which was later absorbed in the city of Toronto, at Dundas Street and Pacific Avenue, was cultivated until the seventies by the labour of escaped slaves. The sturdy old brick house, erected in 1846, with its bordering acacia trees, remains to this day a reminder of early comfort in rural Canada.

Colonel Edward Thomson, the poet's grandfather, served at Detroit and Queenston Heights in the war of 1812. Scottish and United Empire Loyalist blood flowed in the Thomson veins; and one ancestor, Parshall Terry, was attached to Butler's Rangers in the American Revolution. Archibald Thomson, another ancestor, was the first settler in Scarborough Township, near Toronto. Colonel Edward Thomson was prominent in the Legislature of Upper Canada, and in 1836 defeated William Lyon Mackenzie in a York election. Colonel Thomson's second wife was a daughter of Jesse Ketchum, and another marriage gave family connection with the Denisons.

The poet's father was William Thomson, and his mother was Margaret Hamilton Foley, a sister of Honourable M. H. Foley, editor of the *Brantford Herald*, and Postmaster-General of Canada before Confederation. The Foleys were an Irish family of note, having come to Canada in 1822, and several of them displayed talent on the platform and in poetry. E. W. Thomson's father moved about the Province considerably, but the lad received his education mainly at the Brantford Grammar School and at Trinity College School, then at Weston.

It was a time of great stir in the western world, and a sensitive lad absorbed many impressions. Canada was afire with the agitation for political change which led to Confedera-

tion. Beyond the frontier the anti-slavery movement was bringing about the Civil War, in which many thousands of Canadians participated.

At the age of fourteen, young Thomson was sent on a visit to an uncle in Philadelphia and given a junior position in a wholesale establishment. One day as he stood in front of a pastry store munching a cheese cake, a tall man placed his hand on the boy's shoulder and said:

"Gqod, sonny?"

The man was Abraham Lincoln, then bowed by war's burdens. He remained ever afterward the boy's hero, as several of his poems attest. In October, 1864, young Thomson, who was robust and confident for his age, enlisted in the Third Pennsylvania Cavalry and saw service for almost a year before his distracted parents secured his release on the grounds that he was a British subject and under age. His corps was engaged twice at Hatcher's Run and was with General Grant at Petersburg. The experiences of these exciting months permanently impressed the youth's mind and are recorded in a number of poems and stories.

On returning to his father's home, then at Chippawa, Ontario, in 1865, "Willie" had not long to wait for another war venture. On the occasion of the Fenian Raid in June, 1866, he enlisted with the Queen's Own Rifles and took part in the fight at Ridgeway.

It was now time to choose a life vocation, and the boy took up civil engineering. In 1872 he was registered as a land surveyor, and practised until 1878. He worked in eastern Ontario for some time, mainly in lumbering and railway building. While working on the Carillon Canal on the Ottawa River in 1873 he met and married Miss Adelaide L. G. St. Denis, daughter of Alexandre St. Denis, of Pointe For-

tune, Quebec, a woman of unusual intellectual attainments. She died in 1921.

The gift of self-expression in words was strong in E. W. Thomson. He wrote easily and spoke with eloquence. Engineering failed to afford a complete outlet for his tastes and talents. In December, 1878, he joined the staff of the *Toronto Globe* as an editorial writer. Here he spent twelve years, save for an interval of two years when in 1882 he returned to his former profession as a land-surveyor, lured to the new city of Winnipeg by the real estate 'boom' of that time. When the boom collapsed, leaving him, as he expressed it, "with the street between two corner lots," he returned to journalism, first as Montreal correspondent of the *Toronto Globe*, then once more as editorial writer on that paper. Thereafter, almost until he retired in 1891, he had charge of the editorial page under the management of Mr. John Cameron. Mr. J. W. Dafoe, editor of the *Manitoba Free Press*, recalls the Thomson of this period as a "brown-bearded, stalwart, active young man of thirty-five, intensely interested in life, literature, politics and human beings."

Thomson possessed a trenchant pen, and was always ready to do battle against protection, centralized Imperialism, political corruption and exploiters generally. Though his father's family were Conservatives, the Foleys were Liberals, and E.W.Thomson's political views, reversing the usual course, moved steadily towards radicalism as he grew older. His newspaper writing was distinguished in style and independent in thought. His scholarship, derived from much reading, travel and contacts with other minds, was reflected in even his most casual writing. As a controversialist he was versatile, ardent, uncompromising and mildly rebellious. He hated the restraints of executive positions, and must have led his superiors in newspaper offices a troubled life, judging from a letter in

which he reproached a friend for not fighting her own battles more aggressively. "It is such dispositions as yours, all chivalry and generosity and consideration," he said, "that the scoundrels and bullies and thieves who so much infest the publishing business reckon on."

Thomson's later life was largely divided between his work in Boston, from 1891 to 1901, as revising editor of the *Youth's Companion*, his brief connection with the *Montreal Star*, and his position from 1902 to 1922 as Canadian correspondent of the *Boston Transcript*, with headquarters at Ottawa. His natural aptitude for writing short stories, including stories for boys, together with his keen critical faculties, equipped him well for the work on the *Youth's Companion*. His main task was to revise manuscripts in the interest of that wholesomeness and vividness which the journal required. It was important work in its way, but it probably dimmed Thomson's enthusiasm for writing of a more creative character. It was, in a word, a form of office drudgery. When he at last returned to Canada, he was in happy mood, and wrote from Montreal to a friend:

"Goodness! what a delightful place is Montreal compared with Boston. Of all the disgusting places and people, the worst is the place of literary coteries, and gabble-gabble about books and art and music by people who really don't know literature, etc., nearly as well as do the better educated inhabitants of country villages.

"I have returned to political journalism after ten years of disgust with literarism as she is exhibited in Boston."

It would be a fair inference from this that Thomson was temperamental, and there is plenty of supporting evidence in his letters. Writing from Boston in November, 1892, shortly after his arrival there, to his friend, Ethelwyn Wetherald, the

Canadian poet, he presented a different view. At that stage he was all for Boston, and all against the Toronto he had left.

"No, I have no wish to see a stone of Toronto again. You know I always detested the narrow, bigoted, canting spirit of that active Belfast. It was the misfortune of my life to like the Tories individually and their general way of thinking, while believing their politics to be in the main idiotic and ill calculated.

"Boston men, as I know them, are pretty accurately sketched as 'men who were born in the Congregational Church, have pews in the Unitarian Church, and go to the woods on Sunday.' The city is bookish and critical in art, music and literature, without being productive of much of anything valuable."

One of Thomson's correspondents who lived on a farm stirred his wrath by a careless remark reflecting contempt for the rural neighbours. The reply throws light on the simple and direct attitude he held in such matters:

"By scorn we lose the best things life offers, to say nothing of quantities of literary material. You, like many literary minds, are given over to the error of fancying a superiority in people who like books and talk of books' contents to people who read no books and talk more or less ungrammatically about realities—crops, barn-raising, horses, people they know, and all the round of things familiar. Because you have books and have a fine taste in literature, you scorn your neighbours and call them 'moujiks!' Many a year I fooled away in this sort of scorn. It is, in fact, the merest conceit."

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"I'm so deaf I learn little now by talk, and am perforce much a reader, but, Lord, I could never be bothered reading a book if I could live with and hear my fellow-men and women."

This sympathy for the average man coloured Thomson's friendships and influenced his choice of topics. It accounts

for his admiration for a man like John Burns, the English Labour leader, of whom he wrote in a letter in 1909:

"I hope you will like my *John Burns*. I like it best of all my verses. John Burns really does seem to me to be a cut above the mortal—there is that in his life, acts and utterances which I've never observed so perfectly in any recorded man. He was an archangel in stuggy boots and blue jeans. His sentences flash supernally among those of his biographers. He was a great spirit—never knew the touch of fear—wrote as if inspired—and as dogged as the ideal bulldog."

This sympathy for the common man, however, did not indicate a common mind. Thomson possessed a sharp mentality and a keen power of criticism. Walt Whitman and Matthew Arnold aroused his enthusiasm. "Walt Whitman's threnody," he wrote to a friend in 1911, "is one of the finest poems ever written, and *Captain, My Captain* another. Whitman, Poe, Emerson, and occasionally Bryant are the only great American poets, in my opinion."

Among the older Canadian poets, Lampman won chief admiration from Thomson as being 'far and away the best' in *Songs of the Dominion*, the anthology by W. D. Lighthall, issued in 1889. Campbell, he declared in his vernacular, "is a poet not to be sneezed at." Some of Isabella Valancy Crawford's work he admired, but he detected affectation in Roberts and Carman. *The Little Fauns to Proserpine*, by Marjorie Pickthall, published in 1913, he hailed as one of the two or three best poems of "unusual quality" which have been written in Canada.

During much of his life Thomson was in close relations with statesmen, and there was doubtless mutual gain from extended conversations. He enjoyed the friendship of Henri Bourassa, an eloquent and provocative champion of the

French-Canadians, and described him as "a good fellow abominably wronged by party liars." He wrote in 1911 that "Politics is the most fascinating of human games, and that is why it is so interesting."

It will aid in appraising Thomson as an observer of the world about him, to quote from a letter of February, 1911, an impression of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, then Prime Minister, but already entering the rapids which led to political disaster in the reciprocity election of that year:

"'Laurier's feminine,' say you," he writes. "He is an iron man, most resolute, quite unbendable in having his way, and as smooth as the smoothest lady's—we'll say skin. He yields on unessentials with perfect grace and goodwill, stands fire like a mud-fort, and bears no animosity unless you really thwart him. Then he does not hate you, but he will carefully remember, and not hurt you one little bit, unless it be to his political advantage. He bamboozles me most sweetly, often. I know when he does it, and he knows I know. Still, I am bamboozled, which is the main thing.

"Really, Laurier is a wondrous being, and a man of genius—the only one now in English-speaking politics, save Lloyd George, who is utterly different in disposition. Laurier's patience and foresight are marvellous. . . . He is crafty in the extreme, and manages everybody, while everybody thinks that Laurier is being managed. He flies deviously, but always gets to the place he meant to reach when he started. He has euchred the Jingoës all along the line."

There were signs in Thomson's later years of the irritability which ill health brings to age. When light-hearted adventurers thought of the Great War as a mere summer diversion, he prophesied that it would not soon cease. On August 2, 1914, before Great Britain had entered, he wrote to Miss Wetherald: "It will last long, not improbably ten years," and

added: "There is no disaster conceivable which is not likely to come to 'civilization.' In the same letter he wrote: "I am a sick old chap, and shall be so, probably, till the end."

On the eve of a birthday he struck a light note: "Sixty-two on Sunday—now pensionable by the U.S. as a veteran of civil war. Behold me with a fixed income of \$12 per month! How respectable!"

Though Thomson led a varied and stimulating life in many scenes, his short stories are largely reminiscent of early impressions, and chiefly of his observations while a land surveyor in the lower Ottawa valley. As his face bronzed in the sun and wind, while he tramped through settlements barely opened as yet by the lumberman's axe, his mind stored up many memories, and he observed and remembered for a purpose quite distinct from his later observations of public affairs. A few stories touch his experiences in the Civil War; one or two concern the years in Boston.

Were we to seek a common, or at least a frequent, note in Thomson's short stories, I think that it is his fondness for male characters of strong individuality, and one of the qualities most often found, perhaps naturally enough, is obstinacy. Thomson possessed it in large measure himself, and apparently admired it in others. Sometimes it leads his characters to misfortune, but it always aids in making them interesting. He gloried in the rough, honest, hardy pioneers; and whether they were Scottish, English, French or Irish, he found the gold under the rough exterior. He loved humour, and his use of Scottish humour, as in *Privilege of the Limits*, reminds us, at a distance, of Barrie.

Another type he pictured successfully was the old soldier who lingered on from the Napoleonic wars. *The Waterloo Veteran* provides an example in John Locke, an antique and

martial figure in knee-breeches and long stockings who peddled fish in a Lake Erie village. Here was a type familiar in the pioneer counties of Lake Ontario, introducing a certain immovable loyalty and stern sense of duty which gave character to the nineteenth century building of central Canada.

Those who would study the Thomson short story at its best, in *Old Man Savarin and Other Stories* (1895), should read *Privilege of the Limits*. It possesses the conciseness and humour that mark so many of his stories, and it reveals the pawky Scotsman who brought colour to many an Ontario pioneer community. This is a story of old Mr. McTavish, of the County of Glengarry, famed for its Caledonians. McTavish bought a plow from Tougal Stewart, a Cornwall merchant, on promise to pay one-half in October "and the other half whateffer time he felt able to pay the money," according to his granddaughter's narrative. With sterling honesty he was on hand to pay the first half before the Stewart shutters were down on the first of October. Not so the other half.

"Then the crop was ferry pad next year," we are told by the granddaughter, "and the year after that one of his horses was killed py lightning, and the next year his brother, that wass not rich and had a big family, died, and do you think wass my grandfather to let the family be disgraced without a good funeral? No, indeed. So my grandfather paid for the funeral, and there was at it plenty of meat and drink for eferybody, as wass the right Hielan' custom those days and after the funeral my grandfather did not feel chust exactly able to pay the other half for the plough that year either."

Well, to make a short story still shorter, McTavish met Tougal Stewart, who had sold him the plough, and was reminded of the debt and of the extravagant funeral. High words passed, and McTavish was taken to court. He lost his

case, and stubbornly he went to jail rather than submit. The jail yard was surrounded by cedar posts, within which was the "privilege of the limits." Neighbours called daily all summer, bringing news and offers of money, but the proud Hielan' man refused all aid.

Then his child fell sick. Now was trouble indeed. After three days of worry a happy thought came. He pulled a post out of its hole and, taking great care to hold the post in front of him, started for home. Turnkeys followed, but he knocked them down with the post and pressed on to his family, taking care to stand the post on the farther side of the house, so that he would be within the "limits." Officers came for him, but the settlement would not let them get within a mile of the house.

When the child recovered, Mr. McTavish returned to the jail, and that autumn, as there had been a good crop, he paid his debt of two pounds five shillings with glee, for he knew that Tougal Stewart had paid out six pounds, four shillings, and eleven pence for his keep while in jail for debt, in accordance with the law.

Old Man Savarin, the title-story, has broad humour of the French-Canadian type. The scene is a village by the Ottawa. There is more obstinacy here, with Savarin a village Shylock. Narcisse Laroque and Frawce Seguin are rival claimants for the use of the Savarin fishing platform by the Rataplan Rapid, and they decide to fight the matter out. They spend all day getting drunk enough to fight, and then set out from rival taverns for the great battle in the street.

"My fader he's tear his shirt and he's yell, 'Let me at him!'" says young Laroque. "But de men hain't goin' for let dem loose, for fear one is strike de oder ver' hard. De whole village is shiver 'bout dat offle fight—yes, seh, shiver bad!"

The rivals bellow threats at each other for hours until both are exhausted and not a blow is struck nor drop of blood shed. They are hardly able to stand up, their clothes are torn to pieces by the exertions of the careful backers, and the fighters kiss each other. It is all very ridiculous, but highly amusing, and perhaps revealing.

One of the most satisfying of Thomson's stories is *McGrath's Bad Night*, another record of obstinacy. Peter McGrath had eleven children, but he refused to take a wage reduction for work in the woods, and stayed home to eat his heart out while his family slowly starved. When every spoonful of food was gone, he went out in the darkness to pilfer the storehouse of his old boss, only to be caught in the act. John Pontiac merely led the intruder home, loaded with provisions, and gave him a job.

The Ride by Night is a story of the Civil War, so full of colour and action that it must have been based on personal observation. *Great Godfrey's Lament* pictures the departing grandeur of the McNeils, in the Ottawa valley, as the last half-breed son, his mind and body weakening, tells his wistful story to a neighbour and plays "Great Godfrey's Lament" in memory of the younger brother, Godfrey, the only white child of seven boys. Finally, so far as the *Old Man Savarin* volume is concerned, there is *Miss Minnelly's Management*, a satirical treatment of the conduct and policies of a journal something like the *Youth's Companion*.

Thomson's book of poems was not published until he was sixty. It was issued in the United States early in 1909 under the title, *When Lincoln Died, and Other Poems*, and later in the same year in Canada as *The Many Mansioned House, and Other Poems*. Each title poem made direct appeal to the country of publication.

A first book of poetry at three score is a novelty. The loss in rapture was compensated by maturity of thought. Thomson has not the music of Lampman or Carman, nor the imagination of Marjorie Pickthall, but he shows a vision that comes of broad experience of life and understanding of world problems that cannot be solved in a day.

The poet's long intimacy with Canada and the United States placed him in a unique position to interpret each to the other. His early devotion to short story writing was valuable equipment and gave dramatic force to his narrative poems. The poetry of everyday existence is mirrored in his lines, and the democracy of his political views may also be traced. Personal experience is constantly detected, from the first sight of Lincoln when the "downy-lipped boy" was eating a cheese-cake, through various war episodes and the experiences of advancing years in Canada.

The presentation of the "melting pot" aspect of Canadian life, as we have seen it in the twentieth century, is one of Thomson's chief contributions to poetry. The French had occupied and developed the St. Lawrence valley in their own way for three centuries. English, Scottish and Irish were in possession of Ontario. The half-breeds added their note of primitive life and adventure farther west, and to the prairies in later years came motley races from all parts of Europe and the United States. We find a reflection of this new Western Canada in *We Talked of Lincoln*, the very theme of which recalls the Civil War. The opening lines read:

"We talked of Abraham Lincoln in the night,
Ten fur-coat men on North Saskatchewan's plain—
Pure zero cold, and all the prairie white—
Englishman, Scotchman, Scandinavian, Dane,
Two Irish, four Canadians—all for gain
Of food and raiment, children, parents, wives,
Living the hardest life that man survives. . ."

Another impression of the West is found in *Thunder-child's Lament*, picturing the tragedy of an Indian boy who

was sent to Mission School to learn white men's lore for the benefit of his tribe. There—

“the Mission Priest had bent my will
From the art to steal and the mind to kill.”

When he returned his father was starving. In desperation the boy sought a white man's herd and slew a steer. As he bore the meat toward the tepee he was overtaken by the herder.

“And I saw never help in plain or sky
Save that he should die or my father die.”

The herder's blood was spilled and the Indian boy went to jail. This poem may be compared with the pathetic moralizing of Pauline Johnson, herself of Indian blood, in several poems of protest against the white man's aggressions.

Thomson was too much a lover of nature to escape its influence in his poetry. He wrote sweetly of the Canadian Rossignol, and there is a joyful boyhood reminiscence in *Sweetest Whistle Ever Blew*, describing the making of a whistle from a willow found by an April pool.

The Many-Mansioned House, with a subtlety worthy of Kipling, refers to the British Empire, its many diverse peoples and interests, yet its unity under the Crown, its love of justice and freedom. The thought is delicate, the words carefully chosen, and the meaning not easy to grasp at first reading. Thomson's interest in the Empire was no mere theoretical sentiment, for when the Union of South Africa was being formed, Sir Wilfrid Laurier recommended him to the authorities of that new Dominion and he gave much valuable advice concerning a Constitution.

Several vivid poems bring memories of personal experience in the Civil War. I may mention especially *Mary Armistead*, the tale of a girl's night meeting with soldiers of the North as she bore her wounded General through rain in search of a surgeon. *When Lincoln Died* presents in a few stanzas the dumb sorrow that struck soldiers of both armies

at news of the assassination. Captured by the spirit of the great emancipator himself, a group of Yankee soldiers in Virginia hitched their cavalry horses to a plough, that an absent Southerner might return to find prospects of a crop. As they ploughed, Colonel Pinckney, the owner, returned, a martial figure, straight as a soldier on parade. His heart responded to the kindly gesture, but his lip quivered and the illusion of peace was shattered:

"Soldiers—he eyed us nobly when
We stood to 'attention'—'Soldiers—men—
For this good work my thanks are due—
But—men—O God—men, if you knew,
Your kindly hands had shunned the plough—
For hell comes up between us now!—
Oh, sweet was peace—but gone is peace—
Murder and hate have fresh release!—
The deed be on the assassin's head—
Men—Abraham Lincoln's lying dead!"

Thomson was a Canadian, who saw the races about him fusing into a new division of humanity. He loved the Empire, he loved the neighbouring republic, but his native Canada had his first affection. There is no other poem in Canadian letters quite like *Peter Ottawa*. It has the far reach of the political philosopher, the veteran observer of a nation's development, and yet every line is alive as we follow the mythical character's wanderings and thoughts. Peter Ottawa, like Samuel Chapdelaine of Peribonka in Hémon's novel, had an eternal thirst for the frontier, as thousands of others have had, much to the advantage of Canada. 'He was a mighty rover in his prime,' says the poet, and his farmer neighbours used to say:

"He's off again! God knows by what he's led!
Old Peter Ottawa'll never die in bed!"

The poem, which is marked by beautiful lines descriptive of nature, makes Peter Ottawa the symbol of the composite Canadian race, with four strains in his blood—Scottish, French, English and Irish—and asks:

"Lives there a man in all the world to-day
Can wish one pioneering race away?"

"One painted autumn" Peter went adrift again and ended up on the far Athabaska trail. Others followed and made a settlement, and later came the railway, too. In the wisdom of his old age, Peter muses on Canadian problems, and attacks those who would make all Canadians live by rules and creeds suitable for only one section of the population. There is a little iron but much good nature in the philosophy. Here is a fragment from the prescription for a happy, prosperous Canada:

"Give me to live where public matters wait
The careful issue of the long debate,
Where steady champions of divergent creeds
And differing races urge their various needs.
Where nought of serious consequence is done
Unless approved as fraught with wrong to none,
Where every honest man of every kind
(Though momentary party passion blind)
Shall know full well within his sacred heart,
The adopted course is common sense's part.
Expedient in its time, and therefore sound
For all alike within the nation's bound.

In such a land, though many a year we go
So patient-cautious, neighbours call us slow,
We shun the abyss, we move by reason's light,
We march as brothers, and we climb the height
Where yet our flag shall gently be unfurled
Symbolic of a federated world,
Whose problem do we daily solve while we
Climb upward, peaceful in Diversity."

Ill health clouded Thomson's later years, and, following his wife's death, and injuries he sustained in a motor-car accident in Saskatchewan, he spent his last months with a loved grandson in Massachusetts, where he died on March 5, 1924. As in the home yearning of Bliss Carman, so Thomson's national spirit may perhaps be inferred through these lines from his *Canadian Abroad*:

"When the swallows slant curves of bewildering joy
As the cool of the twilight descends,
And rosy-cheek maiden and hazel-hue boy
Listen grave while the Angelus ends
In a tremulous flow from the bell of a shrine,
Then a far-away mountain I see,
And my soul is in Canada's evening shine,
Wherever my body may be."



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