

**MORGAN'S LITERATURE
SERIES. SELECTIONS FROM
THE CANADIAN POETS**

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Morgan's Literature Series. Selections from the Canadian Poets by E. A. Hardy

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E. A. HARDY

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MORANG'S LITERATURE SERIES

SELECTIONS
FROM THE
CANADIAN POETS

CHOSEN AND EDITED WITH NOTES

BY

E. A. HARDY, B.A.

Not by the power of Commerce, Art, or Pen,
Shall our great Empire stand, nor has it stood,
But by the noble deeds of noble men—
Heroic lives and heroes' outpoured blood.
—*Frederick George Scott.*

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INTRODUCTION

The history of our Canadian poetry falls into three periods. The first is the period of the settlement of this country, of the laying of foundations, material and spiritual. Up to the middle of the nineteenth century the Canadian people were engrossed in establishing themselves in the eastern half of their great domain. There were forests to subdue, farms to till, houses to build, highways to make, towns to locate, provinces to organise, and with mighty purpose they bent their energies to the task. We are rightly proud of their success, and Dominion Day, 1867, is one of the milestones in the progress of the human race.

But this period of strenuous endeavour, physical and mental, was not, in its very nature, conducive to literature. The pioneer and the first generation or two of his descendants have scant leisure for the cultivation of the muses, and in this pre-confederation period we find few names that are likely to live in Canadian literature, though Dewart, in his *Selections from Canadian Poets* (1864), quotes 172 poems from 47 authors. It is probable there were 125 volumes of Canadian verse in print at this time, most of them slender alike in size and merit.

The second period of Canadian poetry covers about 25 to 30 years. This is the most prolific period in our literary history so far. There is an interesting parallel here to the period in American literature of Longfellow, Lowell, Emerson, Whittier, Bryant, Holmes, Poe, and others. Our poets came in with a rush. From central Canada and the Maritime lands, a chorus burst forth, tuneful, hopeful, triumphant. Lighthall's *Songs of the Great Dominion* (1889) quotes 163 poems from 56 authors, and in this second period some 250 volumes saw the light of day.

The last ten or fifteen years constitute the third period. Few new voices of note are heard, but one at least is distinctive, both in material and treatment. Most of the chief writers of the second period are still living and enriching our literature with new work. Rand's *Treasury of Canadian Verse* (1900) contains

344 poems, representing 135 writers, and probably 200 volumes of Canadian verse appeared in this third period.

As to the future of Canadian poetry, who knows? The vastness of this country, its resources great beyond our imagination as yet, its institutions of education and law and order, its blending of races, its achievements up to the present, all point to a time of national expression. Surely the singers will come in due time to reveal to us our triumphs, our failures, our ambitions, and our true ideals.

SUGGESTIONS TO TEACHERS

The aim in this little book is to be as helpful as possible to teachers of literature. In his selections the editor has endeavoured to choose poems that would appeal to a boy or a girl of ordinary capacity and taste, due regard being paid to the inherently beautiful. There has been no attempt to produce a small *Treasury of Canadian Verse*, but the desire has been to collect such poems as would really interest the pupil and stimulate him to a further acquaintance with Canadian poetry. Nature and love of country, therefore, have a large place in these selections. A few suggestions are herewith given that may be found useful to both teacher and pupil.

Note that the arrangement of the poems is mainly chronological. Trace in the patriotic poems the feelings of our Canadian poets in regard to liberty, love of country, nationhood.

Note how Nature appeals to our poets wherever and whenever they have written. Follow this up by more extended study of your poets, both in the various anthologies and in the individual volumes.

Have the pupils make a comparative study of poems on the same subject, e.g., Dewart's *Snow Flakes*, and Campbell's *Snow*. Let them follow this up with references to any other poems on this subject in any books at their command, e.g., Lowell's *First Snowfall*.

If possible, have the members of your class provide themselves with volumes of Canadian poetry from the school library, the public library, or private libraries. Let each one read his volume carefully and give in class (either verbally or in writing) some account of the volume, noting title, author, publisher, date, subjects treated by the poet, any features of the poems especially noteworthy, the student's opinion of or feeling towards the book, and his own selection of representative poems from it.

For composition some topic such as the following might be found interesting: "Does Canadian poetry possess real merit?" "Why should Nature play so large a part in Canadian poetry?" "Does Canadian poetry voice the real feelings and aspirations of the Canadian people?" Have the students discuss these topics strictly from the Canadian poetry they have read, and from their own knowledge of Canadian life and history. Rigidly prohibit the reading of other people's criticisms of Canadian literature until the pupils have tried to do at least a little independent thinking.

Another topic for composition would be "An Historical Sketch of Canadian Poetry," elaborating the brief sketch given in this book by filling in details of authors' names, biographical data, volumes, etc.

Let the teacher use his influence to build up a Canadian literature section in the library of his school and in the public library of his locality. *Songs of the Great Dominion*, W. D. Lighthall, *Treasury of Canadian Verse*, T. H. Rand, *Bibliography of Canadian Poetry*, C. C. James, and *Our Intellectual Strength and Weakness*, J. G. Bourinot, should be the foundation of such a department, and individual volumes constantly added. Then encourage your students to use these books, to become not only familiar with the chief names in Canadian literature, but to know the books and the poems therein, to memorise what appeals to them and to be able to discuss intelligently our Canadian writers.