

THE MASQUES OF OTTAWA

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The masques of Ottawa by Augustus Bridle

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AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

**THE MASQUES
OF OTTAWA**

THE MASQUES OF OTTAWA

MARIA CHAPDELAINÉ

BY

W. H. BLAKE

From the original French of Louis Hémon

Cloth 12mo. : \$1.50 net.

The Macmillans in Canada count it a high privilege to sponsor the very able translation by W. H. Blake of "Maria Chapdelaine."

It is not too much to say that Louis Hémon's intimate view of the moods and manners and moments of the dwellers in French Canada is indeed an immortal flowering in the somewhat straggling garden of Canadian literature. It may well be that "Maria Chapdelaine" will take its place in the undulating landscape of the literature of all time beside such classic stories as "The Vicar of Wakefield" and "Paul et Virginie."

TORONTO: THE MACMILLAN
COMPANY OF CANADA, LIMITED

THE MASQUES OF OTTAWA

BY
"DOMINO"

"Wherefore are these things hid?"

*.....
We will draw the curtain and show you the picture."*

—SHAKESPEARE.

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THE PLAY-HOUSE CALLED OTTAWA.

Do not imagine that I spend much time at once in Ottawa. I have never liked the kind of play-house that politicians have made on that glorious plateau in a valley of wonder-land with a river of dreams rolling past to the sea. Where under heaven is any other Capital so favoured by the great scenic artist? On what promontory do parliamentary towers and gables so colossally arise to enchant the vision? The Thames draws the ships of the world and crawls muddily and lazily out to sea wondering what baphazard of history ever concentrated so much commerce, politics and human splendour on the banks of one large ditch. Ottawa's house of political drama overlooks one of the noblest rivers in the world, that takes its rise in everlasting hills of granite and pines.

One, Laurier, used to dream that he would devote his declining days to making Ottawa beautiful as a city as she is for the site of a capital. To him as to others, Rome, London, Paris, Vienna, Washington, should all in time be rivalled by Ottawa the magnificent. But the saw-mill surveyors of Ottawa spoiled that when they made no approach to Parliament Hill to compare to the vista seen from the river. Ottawa was built for convenience: for opportunity: for expediency.

Parliament is its great show. Politicians are the actors. Time has seen some interesting, almost baffling, dramas on that hill. No other Parliament stands midway of so vast a country. But there are people who prefer Hull, P.Q., to Ottawa, Ont. We have had some mild Mephistos of strategy up there: some prophets of eloquence: some

dreamers of imagination : giants of creative energy scheming how to draw a young, vast country together into nationhood so that the show-men on Parliament Hill might have an audience.

But the Ottawa of to-day is a strange spectacle for the prophets. The great new Opera House is all but finished, when no seer can tell whether the plays to be put on there by the parties of the future will be as epical and worthwhile as those staged by the actors of the past. Imagination was not absent when Ottawa was created. But it needs more than common imagination to foresee whether these political playboys of the northern world are going to be worthy of the great audience soon to arise in the country that converges upon Ottawa.

Sometimes in Parliament you catch the vibration of big momentums in a nation's progress. Voices now and then arise in speech that reflect some greatness of vision. More often the actors are sitting indolently, hearing the clack of worn-out principals whose struts and grimaces and cadences are those of men whose cues should lead them to the dressing rooms, or to the wings, or somewhere into the maze of the back drop where nobody takes part in the show. Or they listen to men whose big informing idea constantly is that all we need to make economic happiness for everybody is to turn out the company now in and get another from the furrows. These latter believe that a nation is a condition of free trade—mainly on behalf of the farmer whose average idea of industry is a blacksmith shop on a farm.

One's head inclines to ache by reason of listening to the three-cornered claque on the Tariff as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. Now and again we are inclined to study the men who are elected to Parliament and some of those who gravitate towards Ottawa without the bother of elections. They stimulate interest and challenge criticism, not less because the interest and the

criticism come from a seat in the audience rather than from "behind the scenes"—which is not always a disadvantage. While the parliamentarians perform "Promises and Pie Crusts", the wives have their own play—"Petticoats and Power". The stage here is a triangle—Rideau Hall, Chateau Laurier, the Parliamentary Restaurant. At the cafe tables women from all the counties and electoral districts of Canada—many of them French—chatter about the great masquerade up at the Castle, the little-king show which at its best is worth more to Canada than the Senate. The homes of Ottawa are little shows whose players imitate the manners and the accents of the fine people in the Castle, the Restaurant and the Chateau.

"Nothing but a prinked-up panorama!" says the rugged Radical in a coonskin coat, member of a deputation with a railway ticket as long as his pocket. "Poor show! What we want down here is more plain farmers' wives——"

He pauses. This man's first cousin broke away from the farm a generation ago because farmers' wives were too plain, and farmers did so little reading, and the big thinkers and doers all seemed to live in town. As he talks, up dashes a sleigh, jangling its bells and dangling its robes, and from behind the bearskinned driver alights a company that makes his coonskin coat feel clumsy and uncomfortable. He glances up at the great pile of walls on the hill. The hill is alive with fine people. In one of the sleighs a lady bows and smiles—at him! He touches his cap and takes his pipe from his mouth.

"That lady?" he replies to his sleeping-car mate. "Oh, that is the wife of a Senator, used to live in our town. Clever little woman she is, too. They tell me she's writing a novel and that Lady Byng is taking her up. Lady Byng—oh, yes, she writes novels. Good idea. Likely her books won't be quite so rough as some of our Canadian novels are. I like style in a book, all that fine manners stuff; takes your mind off the humdrum of everyday life.