

**THE POETICAL
WORKS OF
MRS. LEPROHON**

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The Poetical Works of Mrs. Leprohon by R. E. Mullins

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(MISS R. E. MULLINS.)

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1881.

INTRODUCTION.

WHEN, in after ages, the literature of Canada comes to be written, it is to be hoped that among the mighty sons and daughters of genius now unknown, or as yet unborn, some room will be kept for the brave and loving pioneers who "gave the people of their best," and sang the songs of duty and patriotism and hope, ere life in our young land had ceased to be a struggle. With the growth of wealth and the spread of prosperity, will come leisure for more than material interests; and thus, in course of time, the author who has something to say will find an audience, prepared by culture and not too busy to listen to it. And, as supply is generally commensurate with demand, there will then be a literary class of corresponding merit. At least, something like this has been the rule in the progress of nations. But if those who come after, thus favored by circumstances, surpass their predecessors in literary skill or power, not less deserving are the latter who, with little prospect of reward, bore the burden and the heat of the day. This early stage in a nation's literature has, indeed, an interest and a value of its own, which only meet with due appreciation from a judicious and grateful posterity. If it has not the rich, warm splendor of the later morning, it has the welcome promise of the dawn, and a tender beauty of its own.

In this band of pioneers Mrs. Leprohon must be conceded a

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distinguished place. None of them has employed rare gifts of head and heart to better purpose; none of them had a wider range of sympathy; none of them did more willing service, with the purest motives, in all good causes. And, it may be added, none of them was more happy in attaining, during life, the admiration and friendship of a large though select circle of every creed and race among her compatriots. It is in order to place in the hands of those who thus loved and honored her a memorial of what she was at her best, intellectually and morally, that this little volume has been prepared. It contains the emotional record of a blameless and beautiful life, the outcome of a mind that thought no evil of any one, but overflowed with loving kindness to all. Before pointing out, however, what we consider the salient qualities in Mrs. Leprohon's poetry, it may be well to give our readers a brief sketch of her too short career.

Rosanna Eleanor Mullins was born in the city of Montreal in the year 1832. It is almost unnecessary to state that she was educated at the Convent of the Congregation of Notre Dame, so numerous are her affectionate tributes to the memories of dear friends associated with that institution. Long before her education was completed, she had given evidence of no common literary ability. She was, indeed, only fourteen years old when she made her earliest essays in verse and prose. Before she had bid adieu to the years and scenes of girlhood, she had already won a reputation as a writer of considerable promise, and as long as Mr. John Lovell conducted the *Literary Garland*, Miss Mullins was one of his leading contributors. She

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continued to write for that excellent magazine until lack of financial success compelled its enterprising proprietor to suspend its publication. It was some time before another such opportunity was given to the Canadian votaries of the muses of reaching the cultivated public. In the meanwhile, however, the subject of our sketch—who had, in 1851, become the wife of Dr. J. L. Leprohon, a member of one of the most distinguished Canadian families—was far from being idle. Some of her productions she sent to the Boston *Pilot*, the faithful representative in the United States of the land and the creed to which Mrs. Leprohon was proud to belong. She was also a frequent and welcome contributor to several of the Montreal journals. It is a pleasing evidence of her gentle thoughtfulness for a class which many persons in her position regard with indifference that she wrote, year after year, the "News-boy's Address" for the *True Witness*, the *Daily News* and other newspapers. One of her most pathetic poems, "The Death of the Pauper Child," may also be mentioned as a striking instance of that sweet charity which comprehended in its sisterly range the poor, the desolate and the suffering. The *Journal of Education*, edited by the Hon. P. J. O. Chauveau, himself an honor to Canadian Literature; the *Canadian Illustrated News*, edited by Mr. John Lesperance, distinguished both as a poet and a novelist; the *Saturday Reader*, the *Hearthstone*, and other periodicals, both in Canada and elsewhere, were always glad to number Mrs. Leprohon's productions among their most attractive features. She had always a ready pen, the result of a full heart and far-

reaching sympathies, and, therefore, was frequently asked to write on subjects of current interest. Among her "occasional" poems, several of which are in this volume, may be mentioned the touching stanzas on the "Monument to the Irish Emigrants," those on the "Old Towers" at the "Priest's Farm," those on the renewal of her vows by the Lady Abbess of the Congregation of Notre Dame, the poem on the "Recollet Church," and the address "To the Soldiers of Pius The Ninth." One of her most important efforts of this kind was her translation of the Cantata composed by M. Sempé on the occasion of the visit of the Prince of Wales to Canada in 1860.

We have attempted such a classification of the poems as we thought would best show the range of Mrs. Leprohon's powers. Under every one of the headings which we have adopted the reader will find something to profit and delight. The lover of nature will find himself carried in fancy to the fairest or grandest of Canadian scenes; he who loves to indulge in reveries of the past can with her stand with Jacques Cartier on Mount Royal three centuries ago and survey the mighty expanse of forest, destined one day to be the home of a thriving people; those whose pleasure it is to read of heroic deeds will hear her sing of ennobling courage and fortitude that blenched not at death. But by many, we think, Mrs. Leprohon will be most cherished as she tells in sweet and simple rhyme of the tenderness of a mother's love, of a wife's devotion, a husband's loyal trust, of the pious offices of the domestic altar, of the parting by the death-bed that is not without hope, of the

loved and lost that yet are "not lost but only gone before." To illustrate these varied characteristics by quotation would demand far more than our allotted space. We can, therefore, only refer the reader to the book itself, confident that in its pages he will find all that we have indicated and much more.

Just a word as to Mrs. Leprohon's prose writings. Though in this sketch we have dwelt upon her work as a poet, it is as a writer of fiction that she has won her most marked popular successes, that she has reached the hearts of the two great communities of which this province is composed. For no less than four of her most elaborate tales have been translated into French; these are, *Ida Beresford*, the *Manor House of Villerai*, *Antoinette de Mirecourt*, and *Armand Durand*. Besides these, she has written *Florence FitzHarding*, *Eva Huntingdon*, *Clarence FitzClarence* and *Eveleen O'Donnell*. In the *Manor House of Villerai* she has described with a skilful pen the manners and customs of the forefathers of the French Canadian people, such as they were at the period of the great contest which changed the destinies of Canada. In *Armand Durand* we have a courageous struggle with adverse fortune, which is at last crowned with success. The sad consequences of secret marriage, unblessed by parental consent, are unfolded in *Antoinette de Mirecourt*, one of the finest of Mrs. Leprohon's novels, and of which the French translation has lately been honored by a new edition. Of her merits as a novelist one of the ablest of French Canadian critics writes thus: "Gifted with a deep knowledge of the human heart, she finds in domestic life the subject of attractive pictures, full of delicacy and good taste,

which she dramatizes with remarkable power. Her charm lies, not in any complication of intrigue or in problems hard to solve, but in a skilful working out of details, in incidents which fix the reader's attention, in the conception of her characters, in the painting of personal traits, in purity of thought, in sweetness of sentiment, in beauty of style, in the harmony of the parts, and in the most scrupulous regard for morality." This is high praise, and it comes from high authority. We will simply add that, with a few necessary changes, it may also be applied to Mrs. Leprohon's poems.

From this imperfect sketch of Mrs. Leprohon's literary life it will be seen that she was no sluggard. But we would leave a wrong impression if we gave it to be understood that all her time was passed in the writing of either poems or tales. Far from it. They constituted but one phase in a life nobly, yet unostentatiously, consecrated to the duties of home, of society, of charity and of religion. Mrs. Leprohon was much more than either a poet or a novelist—she was, also, in the highest sense, a woman, a lady. Had she never written a verse of poetry or a page of prose, she would still have been lovingly remembered for what she was as wife, as mother, as friend. It is, in a great part, because they are associated with her in these more endearing aspects, that they are the true mental and moral offspring of her very self, that those who knew her will find in them so much to prize. Alas! these and loving memories, that can scarce be separated from them, are now all that is left of her. On the 20th of September, 1879, after a tedious illness, endured with Christian resignation, she passed away. She did