



















## INTRODUCTION

A year ago I happened to notice a reference to the poem included in this volume. In discussing its significance, a critic remarked that he could learn nothing of the author but her name. "Who is Eva Rose York," he inquired, "and what else has she written?" Since these questions will be asked by those who read these pages, I have promised to tell something of the life and work of the writer.

Eva Rose York, as she has been known for thirty-six years, was born at Norwich, Ontario, in 1858, the daughter of Heman Parker Fitch and his wife, Melissa Wolverton. This fact explains much that seems contradictory in her life. When liberty of conscience was established in the Netherlands, one of the English Fitches fled to Holland, where his descendants remained until they returned to England with William and Mary. Under the Georges, two brothers, sons of one of these refugees who wrote his name *Fitch*, emigrated to New England. At the Revolution their paths separated; one became a Loyalist, the other a Continental. Though the latter, unlike his brother, did not join the Northward Migration at the close of the war, his grandson Heman, deserting the Congregational Establishment of his fathers, became one of the founders of the Baptist Church in what was then Upper Canada. From him his granddaughter inherits her loyalty to the denomination with which she has been most intimately connected. On her mother's side, too, she comes from the New England element—Puritan and Loyalist—which has contributed so much to the moral and intellectual progress of the Dominion. Naturally,

then, a reader will expect to find in the record of her life little but the harshness of theocracy in Massachusetts and the commonplaceness of its aftermath in Ontario. Yet, though the Wolvertons, faithful to their origin, may have accepted the religion of the Pilgrims in its ultimate harshness and commonplaceness, they still clung to the culture that survived the exodus to the New World. To her parents Melissa Wolverton owed the love of music and of literature which she bequeathed to her daughter Eva Rose.

Nothing can be more typical of these two ancestral streams and of her dual personality than the education of that daughter. As a matter of course she was sent to Woodstock College, the single centre of Baptist education in the province. There she followed the ordinary academic curriculum, which savored largely of the religious views of its founders, and accepted many of the principles on which it was based. From Woodstock as a matter of course she was entered at a private school, from which she was graduated in music. If she had other ambitions after her graduation, they were overshadowed by her marriage, in 1879, to Winford York, an Ontario physician. This interruption of her educational career, however, was of short duration ; for her husband died in the following year, and, in 1881, she became a student at the New England Conservatory of Music.

Entering on her profession, she returned to Woodstock as a member of the faculty. Thence she went to Iowa City as organist of St. Mary's Church and instructor at the Conservatory of Music. In Belleville, where she resided while organist of the Eastern Methodist Church of Napanee, she founded the Belleville Philharmonic Chorus and Orchestra, which did much to develop musical taste in Eastern Ontario. Her work as conductor, which

was interrupted by a residence of four years in Toronto, where she was organist, and, later, choir leader of Grace Church, was resumed with renewed energy on her return to Belleville as organist of St. Andrew's. During the next three years, during which the choirs of the city were united under her leadership, her success was continuous.

Meanwhile she had not been idle with her pen. For some months she was editor of the *Dominion Musical Journal*. Even then, however, she appears to have been oppressed by the conflict of "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," and to have entered definitely on the path of the author of *Paradise Lost*. In *Chaon Orr*, a biographical novel published in 1896, the magnitude of this struggle is apparent. Already, too, her *Waif Stories*—echoes of her interest in the Hospital for Sick Children—had shown that her thoughts were turning towards the poor and the unfortunate. It is not surprising, then, that her next book, *The White Letter* (1902), should reveal the complete dominance of the religious and philanthropic spirit to which she had gradually surrendered.

After her withdrawal from the Belleville Philharmonic Chorus and Orchestra many of her friends had been grieved by her inexplicable neglect of her profession. On the appearance of *The White Letter* others had to confess that her literary aspirations had also been obscured; for nothing of the promise of *Chaon Orr* is to be found in this slight didactic story of social regeneration. Yet few, indeed, knew how complete had been the surrender. After her widowhood she had found solace in the companionship of friends and relatives who were bound to her by common interests. What it cost to reject the brightness of these associations for the shadows of Redemption Home no one can estimate. This is not the time to write of that rejection; but the unhappy girls who came under her roof