

WAIFS IN VERSE

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649730711

Waifs in Verse by G. W. Wicksteed

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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G. W. WICKSTEED

WAIFS IN VERSE

TO
THE MEMORY OF MY WIFE

AND TO
MY CHILDREN AND MY FRIENDS

THIS VOLUME IS
AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

Ce fin recueil de poésies détachées, où l'enthousiasme du patriote se mêle à la verve caustique du chansonnier, la note légèrement sentimentale avec la petite pointe du satiriste de bonne humeur. C'est là un petit volume fort intéressant sous bien des rapports, et pour lequel nous offrons nos plus sincères remerciements à l'auteur — Dr. L. FRÉCHETTE, *La Patrie*, 15 July, 1884.

"WAIFS' IN VERSE," a brilliant amusing and instructive little volume. Mr. Wicksteed's great age (over 80) does not prevent him from still indulging in the writing of excellent verse, and occasional translations of great merit. SKRANS, *Canadian Birthday Book*, Toronto, 1887.

AN
APOLOGY
FOR MY
WAIFS IN VERSE.

GENTLE READER AND FRIEND,

Except only in the matter of *dollars*, any intention of making which by the sale of my Waifs I utterly renounce, the Preface I wrote for my good friend Mrs. Grant's "STRAY LEAVES" so nearly states the inducements which led me to print this little volume, and the spirit in which I wish you to read it, that on the points which that preface touches I need scarcely say more;—and I have, therefore, (contrary to my general rule.) placed it first in my table of contents. But the reasons therein given for bespeaking your favorable criticism, relate only to the quality of the articles, and I must therefore say something about their matter and spirit. They are indeed WAIFS, born of the occasion and with no object beyond it; and so little care had I taken of them, that many were lost altogether, and but for the kindness of some of my friends who had kept copies of them, and more especially of my brother and my excellent friend, the late Honorable Judge Black of Quebec, I should have been unable to collect enough to make this modest little book; and as WAIFS, written each for its own special occasion, and generally at the instances of some friend whose views and feeling it was to express, I wish them to be judged. Many of those which may seem most trivial to the general reader, will be most acceptable to some of my dearest friends, from the pleasant memories they will awaken. For the rest, I must not hope entirely to escape the application of Mrs. Grant's confession: I *may* have a modest wish for honorable mention in

the Canadian List of Authors, as having written something besides Statutes and Tables of Statutes;—

In Morgan's useful book my place is small;

In stately Taylor's work I've none at all.—

I *may* have a secret aspiration for a higher place in the former and some little obscure niche in the latter:—"Vanity perhaps assisting." I have arranged the pieces almost always in the order of their birth, and the earlier ones are therefore the most sentimental. I was young then and am old now; but hope you will think the lines on old Christ Church, and the touching *In Memoriam* to the *Times*, shew that in my old age the quality is not quite extinct in me.

But, you may ask, why should I, a rather ancient Q. C. and Law Clerk of the House of Commons, write and print verses. My good friend, what I have done officially is the very reason and justification for what I am doing now. An English author apologizing for his hero, an apothecary, who attaches a short poem to the neck of his physisic vial, exclaims,—

"Apothecary's verse!—and where's the treason?"

"If patients swallow physisic without reason,"

"It is but fair to add a little rhyme;"—

and asks indignantly—

"Can n't men have taste who cure a phthisic."

"Of poetry tho' patron God,

"Apollo patronizes physisic." *

Now I have helped to make the public to swallow some thousands of pages of heavyish reading prescribed by legislative doctors, in the shape of laws, and I am, therefore, not merely entitled, but bound in fairness, to give them a *little rhyme*? Lawyers and Legislators have been poets. A grave Lord Chancellor of England in advising students at law as to the distribution of their time, after bidding them give six hours to the

* See Notes.

study of "equal laws," and certain other hours to other things, tells them to give the rest to the Muses,—"*Quod superest ultra Sacris largire Camænis.*" Talfourd was a sergent-at-law when he wrote "Ion," on the beauties of which our leading litterateur is so fond of discoursing. The late Mr. Joseph Howe and Mr. D'Arcy McGee, both published some very capital poetry. I do not know that any of our present leading politicians have distinguished themselves in verse, but they must have the main element of poesy in them, when their very opponents acknowledge their speeches to be "full of invention," and of "imagination all compact." On this point, therefore, I am justified by precedent and authority as ample as a lawyer could wish for.

But you may perhaps object, that I have occasionally been a little harder on public men and their doings than befits my position:—that I by no means inculcate teetotalism as becomes the author of a Temperance Bill;—and that I am sometimes slightly critical on my French Canadian fellow subjects. But be pleased, my dear friend, to remember that I almost always wrote in a representative character, and had to express the feelings and views of my constituents, my *non-paying* clients, rather than my own. The Quebec Gazette, under the late John Neilson, and his successor, had its own notions about things in general, and the Coalition in particular, very different from those of the Transcript, a literary paper edited by Mrs. Grant:—while the Pilot differed from both;—and when I said, in the New Year's Address of the latter, that, Mr. Hincks,—

"Would the Taxes impose in so charming a way,

"'Twould be bliss to receive them and pleasure to pay;"

my Muse was in charge of her Pilot, and steered my verses as he directed, and if Mr. H. did not *quite* fulfil her vaticination it was not my fault,—nor perhaps his; he tried his best, as Mr. Cartwright is doing now; and even *he* may possibly come short, and the complete accomplishment of the prophecy may beleft for

the Finance Minister of the Millenium. Then as to Temperance;—I am myself fond of cold water,—but I was not to sing my own songs. Lord Byron complains of being expected to make Lucifer talk like a Clergyman; and no one who knew my friend Archibald Campbell, Esq., Her Majesty's Notary Public, of Quebec, would have thought it natural to make him sing like Father Matthew or a Rouge from St. Roch's. When I wrote for my worthy brother or Major Lindsay nothing could be more innocent and harmless than my lines.

As to my Gallic fellow citizens, I loved them dearly, as Mr. Neilson did, until they broke out into rebellion, and I love them again (as he would do if alive) now that they are quiet and loyal. They should not have rebelled; but after all they only contended for what we would all now fight to retain. Messrs. Papineau, Viger, Vallières, Lafontaine and Cartier were my tried and honored friends. Of all the Speakers under whom I have served, no one was kinder or more courteous than Mr. Papineau; of all the Ministers I have worked with and for none more so than Sir George Certier. I have always loved the eloquent language of France and been conversant with it. I was Translator before I was Law Clerk; and perhaps the most acceptable compliment I ever received was from Mr. Vallières, when in returning me with thanks a translation I had made for him, he said "*Æquavit no-dum superavit exemplum.*" I was young then and had a name to make and never forgot the kindness.

The New Year's Addresses are only lively versified memoranda of some of the more marked events of the expiring year, viewed in the spirit of the Journals they were written for, but they will, I hope, awaken many not unpleasant recollections of old times in many of my readers. The Ephemeral Government Bill, and the *Coup d'Etat*, are but short chapters in rhyme of the history my heroes made; and the White-Wash Bill is a

versified "Tract for the Times." The "Little Gun" is the only article into which any thing like personal feeling entered. With the help of Messrs. Hincks and Dunkin, I amended the Attorney General's Seigniorial Bill, and abolished that opprobrium of the seigniorial tenure, the *lods et ventes*, or mutation fines. We did not think we got our full share of credit for this work. Hence our little squib. But we are all good friends now, and have been for the four and twenty years since past. L. T. D. and Mr. Dunkin were made judges, Mr. Hincks became Sir Francis and a Governor, and I got my Q. C., not undeservedly, I trust, for, apart from this great service to Lower Canada, few men have given H. M.'s advisers more *accepted* advice than I have done. I was told that on *this* occasion I came near upsetting the good ship Coalition, but the Attorney General kindly gave way and relieved the strain, and she swam upright again.

With this exception I never had a misunderstanding with Minister or Member; yet before this year is out I shall have been fifty years in my present office of Law Clerk and Translator, and forty of these as Chief; nor has any one ever said that I gave undue preference to any party or person, though it has depended on me that many *thousands* of bills should be examined, printed, corrected, noted, translated and put through all their stages, each in its lawful order and turn; and a very considerable portion of them had to be drafted or amended. I made many a Bill for the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada, and translated the famous 92 Resolutions;—was Chief Assistant to Mr. Attorney General Ogden in the time of the Special Council, and helped to make (among others) the first Registration Bill and Municipal Bill for L. C., and the first Board of Works Bill. For the Legislature of the United Canadas, I drafted, under Mr. Draper's instructions, the first Municipal Bill for U. C., the first Post office Bill under Mr. Lafontaine's and the first Currency Bill under Mr. Hincks,