

## Sir Wilfrid Laurier

*The Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, by Oscar Douglas Skelton. Two volumes. New York: The Century Co. \$8.00.*

**W**ILFRID LAURIER, the offspring of sterling old French stock, was born in 1841. His ancestors came to Canada in the age of the Great Louis and the story of momentous days can be told in the terms of Laurier's family history. He was brought up strictly in the Catholic faith and educated at L'Assomption College in Latin literature and the sermons of Bossuet. No writings of Voltaire, Diderot, Victor Hugo, or Karl Marx, stained his youthful mind. His adventure in learning was safe. He took up the practice of law and settled quietly in a country village where the modest income of two thousand dollars a year made him rich. In 1871 he entered the provincial legislature and three years later the parliament of the Dominion. In 1887, at the age of forty-six, he was the leader of the Liberal party. In 1896 he formed his first ministry and until his death in 1919 he was associated, in office and out, with all the important political events that occurred in the Dominion.

A devout Catholic, made Liberal by peculiar circumstances, correct in habits, pontifical in public life, serene and circumspect, Laurier offers nothing picturesque to a biographer. He was solid, substantial, honorable, dignified, and cultivated. There was nothing impetuous or dashing about him. During the fifty years of his public life he passed through no times that tried men's souls. He was for Canadian autonomy, but not too much. He was inclined toward free trade, but not too insistent. Compare him with Charles James Fox, Lamartine, or Parnell and he seems as drab as a church warden. He belonged, in fact to the Gladstone school and came as near divining the future as did that great evangelist.

Mr. Skelton has been true to his subject. He has written a plain, prosaic account worthy of a plain, prosaic man, but nevertheless a work which we provincial Americans should all read. There is a chapter on the making of a Canadian as interesting as any background ever drawn for the Adams family. After the first forty-four pages, Mr. Skelton plunges into politics, giving us first a sketch of the general scene and then tracing fifty years of Canadian development. This is proper, for the history of Laurier is the history of Canada during his period. Here is an account of racial squabbles, religious conflicts, railway scandals, tariff battles, contests of kites and crows, reciprocity, imperial controversies, and finally the last days during the World War. Some of it relates to matters of little importance to Canadians and less importance to residents in the United States. No one on this side of the line need bother, for example, with "schools and scandals," except by way of gaining consolation. The chapters on imperial affairs, reciprocity, and relations with the United States between 1896 and 1903, however, ought to be read by every editor, teacher, and interested citizen in this country. There is plain speaking in them, but no rancor. They give a view from the north side of the fence which helps us see ourselves as others see us. The spiritual value of this kind of education is beyond question. No one should venture to write the history of the generation just past without consulting Mr. Skelton's full and judicious record.

Perhaps it is as necessary in biographies as in oil paintings

to be severe; but at the very end of Mr. Skelton's story there is a letter by Sir Wilfrid on Hémon's *Maria Chapdelaine*, a letter so full of tenderness and discernment that it casts a new light upon the thousand pages that precede it. Sir Wilfrid loved that marvellous book. Though he offered a criticism born of deep knowledge, he declared it "a work of worth and beauty." It gripped his heart. Then he must have had more of Lincoln in his soul than the debates on tariff and reciprocity revealed. Perhaps, perhaps he may have suspected that the sage of Hawarden did not possess the whole revelation. The great gray stone figure which Mr. Skelton has carved for us melts down a bit into common humanity at sunset.

CHARLES A. BEARD.

## From Bad to Verse

**P**OETRY is a saddening land, if you travel over it from one corner to the other. You will find there, of course, a Vale of Tempe, and caverns measureless to man, but there are many miles in between, and these miles are filled with merely noble groves or pretty brooks or empty formal gardens. It has, too, its perverse little patches where tulips and sunflowers grow together, its pathetically rustic arbors, its dismally comfortable suburbs with iron spaniels on the lawn. There are many small pleasant sheets of water in this country, most of them rightly called "Echo Lake."

You will never know this country unless, once in a while, you take a ticket to anywhere and get off at all stations on the way, no matter how unpromising.

Here to begin is Mr. Gustav Melby's *Twilight* (Minneapolis: K. C. Holter Co. \$1.50). It is "dedicated to the memory of Mrs. Nellie Gilrath Volstead." Poetry of a somewhat local flavor, for we have "Minnehaha in October"; and the lines "I have heard his speech against the wrong—It sounded like a torrent strong," refer to Senator Knute Nelson of Minnesota. Not entirely local, for there are some lines to Venus: "The fairest goddess poet ever made, without a fillet bathing skirt or hose." Due to a lack of certain qualities whose absence is not entirely explained by Mr. Melby's statement that "It is not long since I was but a youth" his volume hardly seems, as Baedeker says, "Suitable for a prolonged stay." Mr. D. W. Newsom's *Song and Dream* (Stratford: \$2.50) is more worth while. He solves the difficulty of finding a rhyme to "Babe Ruth" with "by gooth." He risks startling at least one of three from his grave with the lines "Keats and Byron seemeth dull, And old Wordsworth such a pull, When his heart's so raging full, As you know." The poem *To Mamma* is preceded by *Non Omnis Moriar*—luckily he did not choose *Exegi Monumentum*. He rather gives himself away toward the end with "I scribble on my shirt and cuff—Or on the Kitchen Soap."

Mr. Saxe Churchill Stimson's *Blue Lakes to Golden Gates* (Milwaukee: Published by the author. \$1.00) is interesting. It is the appreciative and informative record of a trip to the Coast: "Colorado is the nation's treasury of gold and silver and lead For Commerce, and rivals Switzerland with its towering Peak." "Still working westward, we cross the Mormon state." "On Mount Hamilton, one views the stars Through a Telescope, and worships their creator, Christ the Lord; The ascent is

easy, riding in cars." At last he reaches the coast, and with it a lyric pitch—

This is a sonnet to the Santa Clara prune.

Many years ago there was published a thick green book called *The Poets of Maine*. It can still be bought, for fifty cents. Some four hundred poets contributed to it, and at that time they must have amounted to nearly one percent of the state's total population. Unfortunately the book does not fulfill the promise of its name. There's nothing in it so good as the poetry of either Mr. Stimson, Mr. Newsom, or Mr. Melby.

There are stations, in this Territory of Poetry, at which one alights to feel a pang of something between pity and respect, and where one gets quickly on board again without a smile. Such is *The Silent Chord*, by the Rev. J. Dimpfl (Boston: The Stratford Company. \$1.25). We meet here old friends like "the riven mast," the "age scarred hills," and their inevitable companion, the "murmuring rills." We have the first cousin of other old friends: "The sun was glad when the dewdrop smiled," and many another worn pleasant phrase, hopelessly echoing worn, pleasant, friendly emotions. But even when exploring the very minor leagues of poetry one has preferences among the players. And Mr. Dimpfl is to be preferred to the *Land of Beginning Again* (by Louisa Fletcher. Boston: Small Maynard & Co.) because he is not pretentious. He never says anything like "my theme grows thunderous and my urge immense." He wouldn't think of summing up *Life* in this way: "Art at a distance stands to gaze; Bent history writes at her feet; Music close nestles to her heart, Poesy—cheek to cheek." (We thought Terpsichore alone did this nowadays.) Yet there are goodish traces in *The Land of Beginning Again*—flickerings of feeling and intelligence in the poem on Debussy.

It is high time we hit upon something with a modern note. It pierces here and there in Loureine Aber's *We Are the Musk Chasers* (Chicago: Ralph Fletcher Seymour), in a sort of emotional shorthand, in the constant recurrence of "hands," "fingertips" and "lips," in such lines as "The frank beauty of my body as it comes dripping from the bath." Not really a bit modern though—or she would not say "There is so much of wondering in every dinky thing." That's it: dinky; and also ice-creamish, and salt in the ice-cream. Mr. Ivor Winter's very slim *The Magpie's Shadow* (Chicago: Musterbrookhouse) is "modern" in a quite different way. On each page there is a title, and one line, such as "Winter Echo—Thin air! My wind is gone." One or two of the pages are completely naked. At the rate of nulla dies sine linea Mr. Winters spent a month on this volume. In yet another way Mr. S. A. De Witt (*Iron Monger*. New York: Frank Shay and Co. \$1.25) is also modern. The green-cellar-at-midnight-with-gargoyles kind: "Last night I overheard you chatting with a maggot." Occasionally he is arresting:

A negro Cyclops with one blind eye  
Grotes in a dead swamp  
Through swarms of fireflies.

By this time one is a little tired of casual travelling in the Poetry land of today. It is discouraging work. But there is some encouragement for these poets to be found in the poetry of the past, in this line, for instance,

Jones! As from Calais southward you and I

which was written by Wordsworth.

After swallowing much feeble poetry one loses all ability to recognize what may be good. It is a predicament a little like the professional tea-taster's.

With this difference: that the lucky tea-taster can spit the tea out again.

ROBERT LITTELL.

## Japanese American Relations

*Japanese American Relations*, by Iichiro Tokutomi. New York: The Macmillan Company. \$1.50.

YOU savor the quality of this book when you run through its pages and come to a chapter heading: *The So-called Shantung Question*, and under it the opening sentence: "The so-called Shantung question is a farce framed up at the very beginning of last year (1919) by Vi Kyuin Wellington Koo, C. T. Wong, Lansing, the then Secretary of State of the United States, and others." If you know much about Japan you will then have read enough to know all that the author has to say and all that he thinks. I did. On reading the first three pages I could have closed the book and recited the rest of it so that the author would hardly have known I was not reading aloud.

You will know that he will talk of the westward sweep of the thirteen colonies to the Mississippi; then the war on Mexico and the rape of Texas and California; then the sweep westward to the Pacific and then the annexation of Hawaii; then the Spanish-American war and the seizure of the Philippines, Cuba and Porto Rico. You know that he will say that the anti-Japanese feeling in China is the result of American incitation, as witness Shantung, whence America conspires to drive out Japan so that it may have the province as well as the rest of China; and that American insistence that Japan evacuate Siberia is due to America's design to conquer that, too. You know that he will dwell indignantly on America's exclusion of Japanese immigrants and then work up to a grand climax: America, locking its own continent against Japanese, simultaneously conspires to bar Japan out of its own continent, pinioning its starving inhabitants in their little islands. Thus he will explain all the questions growing out of Japan's actions in Shantung and elsewhere in China, in Korea, in Siberia. All American machinations. The Siberians, the Koreans, the Chinese don't mind at all.

In a sense this is unfair criticism. It is like saying that *Hamlet* is dull because it is so full of old saws. For Mr. Tokutomi is one of the major prophets of the school of thought of which the foregoing is the first principle. He is the foremost stylist and newspaper essayist in Japan, a member of the House of Peers and the editor of the *Kokumin Shimbun*, a Tokio daily of considerable influence. It is only because of his personality that his book is worth notice at all.

If there is any other reason, it is that there is so large an element of truth in his j'accuse, and for Americans it is good to know that only within their own borders does their country figure as the pure and spotless Columbia holding judgment on a peccant world. So one welcomes Mr. Tokutomi's unillusioned thinking and blunt speaking, particularly as contrasted with the soapy blandishments of the