

OUR ENGLISH FRIENDS.

Among the incidents calculated to interest the votaries of Natural History, may be noted, the arrival at Quebec of the English Sparrow, some ten or twelve years ago, for which Canadians, if not the Sparrows, can thank Colonel W. Rhodes, of Benmore, one of our valued Associate Members. A few years later on, Montreal invited to its squares and house tops the hardy transatlantic stranger. Finally, other Canadian cities, tendered civil rights to the "wee birdie."

One of our Corresponding and Honorary Members, William Kirby, Esquire, of Niagara, has recently greeted in mellifluous verse, the early friends of his youth. It is with sincere pleasure, we make room for this poetical contribution, equally creditable to the heart and the head of the writer.

THE SPARROWS.

BY WILLIAM KIRBY.

Author of "Le Chien d'Or."

On seeing a flock of English Sparrows at my door, on the shore of Lake Ontario,
December 10th, 1876.

I SAT within my window, and looked forth
Upon a scene of cold magnificence.
Winter was come—Canadian winter—keen,
Austere and rude, maker of hardy men,
And women fairer than the south wind knows.
My garden, lately full of summer bloom,
Lay 'neath a sheet of snow—flower and leaf
Cut down by killing frost were dead and buried;
The cedars bent to breaking, and in drift
Knee-deep the sombre trees stood gaunt and bare,
With all their buds sealed up until the spring.
A plain, the threshing floor for winter's flails,
Wind-blown and swept, lay just beyond the lawn
Where snow heaps thrice sifted by the blast,
And wreathed like rams horns, over-peered the hedge,
And filled the garner of the cold north wind.
Beyond the plain, 'neath banks precipitous,
Stretched the vast lake covered with floating ice,
Its billows striving vainly to lift up
Their angry crests above the heaving mass
That overlay the struggling, groaning sea :
While the Frost-giant's breath in the keen air
Rose up like steam against the northern sky.

The scene was grand, but use so blunts the sense—
For thirty winters I had seen the same,—
That, like the weary king, I looked and said :
"There's nothing new of all beneath the sun !"
Of vanities the vainest is to live,
If each to-morrow be as yesterday,—
A beaten round that ends where it began.
God's presence and creative touch on all
Seemed things far off with boyhood's happy days,
Shut up in Eden like the primal world,
With flaming swords to guard it evermore.

But yet, though overlaid with years and care,
 The boy is in the man. The Eden seen
 By eyes of innocence in life's awaking,
 Is like the lily's root beneath the snow,—
 Asleep, not dead, ready to bloom again
 Clothed in the spring with robes new wove in heaven.
 I, too, had shared the common lot; eaten
 The fruit forbidden, drank, to quench my thirst,
 Of cisterns hewn by men; still more unsated
 As more I quaffed the bright, dead waters; while
 The living stream beneath God's threshold, ever
 Gushed forth a flood to swim in like a river

So sat I yesterday with weary eyes
 Looking at leafless trees, and snow-swept plains,
 And broad Ontario's ico-encumbered sea.
 My thoughts had wandered in a waking dream,
 Across the deep abyss of vanished years,
 To that dear land I never saw again.
 When suddenly a fluttering of wings
 Shook the soft snow—a twittering of birds
 Chirping a strange, old note, but heard before
 In English hedges and on roofs red-tiled,
 Of cottage homes that looked on village greens!
 An old familiar note! Who says the ear
 Forgets a voice once heard? the eye, a charm?
 The heart, affection's touch from man or woman?
 Not mine at least! I knew my own birds' language;
 And recognized their little forms with joy.

A flock of English sparrows at my door,
 With feathers ruffled in the freezing wind
 Claimed kinship with me—hospitality!—
 Brown coated things! not for uncounted gold
 Would I have made denial of their claims!
 Five! six! ten! twenty! But I lost all count
 In my great joy. Whence come I knew not; glad
 They came to me, who loved them for the sake
 Of that dear land at once both theirs and mine.

I ran to get the food I knew they liked;
 Remembering how—a child—in frost and snow
 I used to scatter crumbs before the door,
 And wheat in harvest gleaned to feed the birds
 Which left us not in winter, but made gay
 The bleak, inclement season of the year.
 The sparrows chirped and pecked while eyeing me
 With little diamond glances, like old friends,
 As round my feet they fluttered, hopped and fed,
 In perfect confidence and void of fear.

Their forms, their notes, their pretty ways so strange,
 Yet so familiar—like a rustie word
 Learned in my childhood and not spoken since—
 All ! all came back to me ! and as I looked
 And listened—a thousand memories rose up
 Like a vast audience at the nations's song !

Old England's hills and dales of matchless charm,
 Sweeping in lines of beauty, stood revealed :
 Her skies of frequent change and winds that waft
 The soft and measured chime of sabbath bells.
 Her fragrant lanes where woodbine trailed the hedge,
 And little feet with mine ran side by side
 As we plucked primroses, or marked the spot
 Where blackbird, thrush or linnet reared its young,
 While sang the cuckoo on the branching tree.
 Those meadows, too ! Who could forget them ever !
 So green ! with buttercups and daisies set,
 Where sky-larks nested and sprang up at dawn
 To heaven's top, singing their rapturous lay !
 Those gentle rivers, not too large to grasp
 By the strong swimmer of his native streams ;
 Those landward homes that breed the nation's strength ;
 Those beaoned cliffs that watch her stormy seas
 Covered with ships that search all oceans round ;
 Those havens, marts, and high-built cities, full
 Of work and wealth and men who rule the world !
 All rose before me in supernal light,
 As when beheld with childhood's eyes of strength,
 And stirred my soul with impulses divine.

My heart opened its depths — glad tears and sad
 Mingled upon my cheek, which forty years
 Strange winds had fanned and heat and cold embrowned.
 God's hand is nearer than we think—a touch
 Suffices to restore the dead ; a word
 Becomes a wonder of creative power.
 The little sparrows in their rustic speech
 Talking a tongue I knew—this message brought
 From Christ who spake it, merciful to man :
 " Are not two sparrows for a farthing sold
 And not one falls without the Father's leave ?
 Fear not therefore ! for of more value, ye,
 Than many sparrows, yes, whose very hairs
 Are numbered by the loving care of God."

I blessed the little messengers who brought
 These words of consolation from my Lord,
 To teach me resignation, hope and peace.

Like children in a darkened room we cry,
 Despairing for the light when 'tis most nigh!
 And Oh, my brother! Tried and tempted sore,
 And losing of't thy solitary way!
 When ere thou feel'st forgotten of his care,
 Eating thy crust in discontent and pain,
 Perplexed with bootless questioning of fate,
 Or racked by stern inquisitors of doubt
 Over life's issues and the ways of God;
 Be patient. Bide thy time. All will be well.
 The callow bird must wait its wings to fly,
 And so must thou! God's love is law in love,
 Working in elements of moral strife
 That will not yield obedience but with pain.

“Perfect through suffering.” Comprehend'st thou that?
 Upon the cross who was it dying, cried,
 In the last agony that rends the soul:
 “Eli! Eli! Lama sabaothani?”
 No other way! Christ, too, must drink that cup
 Before his human life was made divine
 And our redemption possible from sin!
 Or, if a gentler lesson thou would'st learn,
 Dismayed at those tremendous mysteries,
 Think of the birds, the lilies, all things, He
 Takes care of to the end: why not of thee?
 But while their round of life is here complete,
 Thine but begins! The law of laws is love,
 That needs two worlds to perfect all of man,
 And an eternity to teach God's ways!

Wait humbly, then! placing thy hand in His
 To lead thee from the dark up to the light!
 Although the floods beat high against thy house,
 And earthly clouds obscure thy mortal sight,
 “God sits upon the flood—a king forever!”
 And in those clouds at last shall be revealed!
 Build on the rock thy soul's foundation firm,
 And earth and sea may pass, but thou shalt live!
 The sparrows trusted thee—trust thou thy Lord.

NIAGARA, Ontario.

