# WILL CARLETON

BY

A. ELWOOD CORNING

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WILL CARLETON

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## A Biographical Study

BY

A. ELWOOD CORNING

*With Frontispiece*

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TO

MY FATHER AND MOTHER

WHOSE UNFLAGGING INTEREST AND ENCOURAGEMENT

ARE EVER AN INSPIRATION

THIS LITTLE MONOGRAPH

IS DEDICATED

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## A FOREWORD

In giving this little study to the public, I desire to especially acknowledge my thanks to Mr. Carleton's niece by marriage, Mrs. Norman E. Goodrich, who so kindly aided me in its preparation by placing at my disposal all memoranda in the form of letters, unpublished manuscript and diaries, which were found among the Poet's relics after his death; for without her generous assistance much of the little book's authenticity would have been unverified.

To Miss Cornelia W. Conant, sister of the late S. S. Conant, I am grateful for the privilege of using some of her brother's letters written to Mr. Carleton.

My thanks are also due to Mr. Hudson Maxim for permission to use one of his letters to Mr. Carleton; to Mr. Julius Chambers, who kindly directed my attention to certain phases of the poet's life concerning which he had a personal knowledge; and to Messrs. A. B. Bragdon, of Monroe, Michigan, and George S. Richards, of Toledo, Ohio, both of whom were boyhood friends of Mr. Carleton, and who readily contributed facts of the poet's early life.

I am also indebted to *The Bookman* for permission to use parts of my article of Carleton contributed to that magazine and published in August, 1916.

# WILL CARLETON

## 1845-1912

### CHAPTER I

#### BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

IT is indeed very natural for one who admires an author's work to desire a knowledge of his personality. His characteristics, literary habits, and mode of living are, moreover, legitimate subjects of interest. Yet Will Carleton, it may be said, had his own views as to what should be allowed in one's lifetime to pass the censorship of biographical detail. Writing in 1873 to a friend who was preparing a sketch of his career, Carleton himself wrote this with characteristic terseness: "Don't let your readers into the details of my private life. You know how we hate to have the vulgar peeping in at our windows. Tell everything you please that happens outside the gate, but no more."

These views were expressed at a time when the name of Will Carleton was beginning to be known very widely by reason of the publication of "Farm Ballads," a collection of homely verse by which he was destined to achieve great popularity throughout the English-speaking world. There is no doubt, however, that these views were somewhat modified in later years, possibly to enlarge the financial rewards which spring from extensive self-advertising. But to the last our poet, while ever zealous to meet the fair demands of the persistent interviewer, was opposed to drawing aside the curtain which served to veil the privacy

of domesticity. Thus comparatively little was written of him during his life.

Yet few poets collected so voluminous a mass of biographical material. In letters and in small note-books, of which there remain a large number, he took pains to record unreservedly his inmost thoughts and personal movements: especially was this so when traveling or on lecture tours. Unfortunately for the biographer, some of this data, particularly the letters of more recent years, is no longer extant; having been burned, perhaps purposely, not long after Mr. Carleton's death. What remains, however, is indeed replete with naiveté, illumination and Carletonian individuality. Add to this the advantage of a personal friendship and an editorial association on the part of the writer, together with generous assistance from both men and women who can speak from personal knowledge, and we have the essential requirements—besides sympathy which, as Lowell observes, includes insight—for a comprehensive study of the author of "Over the Hill to the Poor-House," who, born in Michigan in 1845, was laid to rest in Greenwood in 1912.

Will Carleton[1] was born on the twenty-first of October, 1845. Ten years previous to his birth his father, John Hancock Carleton, with his young wife, had located on an uncleared farm two miles east of Hudson, Michigan, where the subject of our sketch was born. Edward Carleton, the first American settler of the name, appears in the records of Rowley, Massachusetts, as early as 1638. He seems to have owned extensive lands in that town, and to have

[1] His full Christian name was William McKendree, being named for a then distinguished Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The middle name was dropped in 1873, just prior to the publication of "Farm Ballads"; thereafter he was known by his boyhood appellation of Will Carleton.

been a man of considerable prominence. In 1642 he was made Freeman, and from that time until he returned to England, in 1650, was annually elected a member of the General Court. "Carleton's Island" was named for him. His son John, born in England, received a college education. He married Miss Hannah Jewett, daughter of Mr. Joseph Jewett, a man of wealth and wide acumen; and at his death young Carleton became his executor. This John Carleton was active in the affairs of the town of Haverhill, Massachusetts, where he probably located upon his return from England, being later chosen first County Recorder; then County Clerk for Writs, which office he held until his death. He was also first Selectman of Haverhill and Constable. He later was commissioned Lieutenant. In a History of the Carleton family, from which we have drawn the above facts, Lieutenant John Carleton is described as having had "distinguished energy, courage, and a manly, noble bearing, such a man as would be selected by a wise people to be a leader in public affairs."

After the lapse of four inconspicuous generations we come to John Hancock Carleton, the father of our poet. He was the third son of Jesse Carleton, and was born in Bath, New Hampshire, October 16, 1801. Having followed lumbering several years on the Connecticut, Ottawa, and St. Lawrence rivers, he migrated in early manhood to Michigan; an evidence of ambition. He seems to have been a man of deep conviction, and of singular prudence. Though kindly disposed, he could flavor, when the occasion as he thought required it, his less gracious thoughts with caustic vernacular. His character and temperament, however, were discriminately summed up by his distinguished son at the time of his death, in February,

1872: "I need not tell you how hard it is to see a parent go under the sod forever, whether you agreed with him in all things or not. He was a good man, an exceptionally good man, as the world goes; better than the majority of those around him. He did his work well, and has no reason to be ashamed of his account above."

But it is to the mother of our poet that we must turn to discover the greater semblance in the son. In 1832 John Hancock Carleton married Celestia Elvira Smith. The marriage was solemnized at Plymouth, Michigan; though Mrs. Carleton was a native of Castile, New York, where she was born on the fifth of September, 1815. She outlived her husband by twenty-four years, and survived all but one of her five children—three sons and two daughters—dying after a comparatively brief illness in 1896 at the home of her son Will, in Brooklyn, New York. She lived simply and wholesomely; the secret, provided one is normal constitutionally, of longevity; was strong-minded, intrepid, deeply religious, and sweet-tempered. Like so many mothers of English bards, and American ones too, as in the case of Lowell, for example, she was in the habit of singing old ballads while rocking her children to sleep. There is also evidence that she herself had an inclination toward versification; for her son, so late as 1897, a year after her death, chanced to find some poetry that she had written. It was, he tells us, in ballad measure, and in being mentioned by various journals, evidently had attracted some attention. A sketch, written by Mrs. Carleton, and still extant, gives us a glimpse into the hardy, often times perilous life of the frontier. She mentions of going out late one summer afternoon to find the cows that had strayed from their pasture ground, of losing her way, of hearing

wild wolves in search of prey, and of being miraculously led by the hand of God out into the clearing where her alarmed husband, having sought in vain, found her, cut and bleeding from under-brush. Carleton makes excellent use of this material in "The First Settlers Story," that epic of frontier life which, in point of length, in the supremacy of its pathos, and in the wholesomeness of its lesson, is one of the most ambitious, if not the most perfectly constructed, of his longer poems.

There would seem to be a fine possibility in this blended inheritance: a father whose wholesome austerity and strength of character taught the boy the nobility of labor, and the sense of obligation; a mother whose Christian fortitude, simplicity of mien, and fineness of soul, so moulded his plastic nature that kindness of heart and generosity of spirit were ever to be distinctive qualities of his character.

One thing, however, was lacking—health. The child from his birth was delicate, with a pronounced tendency toward consumption. His earliest years were passed almost entirely on his father's farm, amidst the plainest of rural surroundings; a locality indeed one would hardly have chosen in which to nurture a future poet, if scenic beauty plays any strong part in bringing to the surface of expression innate talent. But does it always? True, of Wordsworth, the grandeur of the Cumbrian hills were his inspiration; but of Keats, instinctively the more poetical, the most prosaic aspects of London life seem not to have dulled, but rather intensified his inborn genius. As young Carleton grew older he became at once more sensitive and dreamy. Being the youngest of a family of brothers and sisters, all of whom were much older than he, the child was allowed to indulge somewhat in this latter inclination. Perhaps

twenty rods in the rear of his house was a deep ravine through which ran a stream, nourished by a spring. Nearly directly over it we are told stood a wild plum tree, common in that particular vicinity. Under this tree young Carleton, with a boyhood companion, would lie on the grass of a summer day, and discuss with his friend, to whom he had already confided his taste for poetry, his ambitions.

That the youth was prone to dream is significant, though looking at Carleton's childhood analytically, it is not wise to lay too much stress upon this fact: others who have made little of their lives have, as youths dreamed, and idled away many an hour which could and ought to have been more profitably employed. Young Carleton's practical New England father, however, was not content to have his son's time wholly unoccupied. Then too, he needed his help on the farm; so until the lad was sixteen his life was little varied from that of the average farmer's son. But so unpoetical an environment did not seem to make the youth's precocious intelligence less keen, nor does he seem to have been backward in allowing it perfect freedom; for many a rhyme was composed while following the plow. Once when asked where his son Will was, the unsympathetic, but observing father is said to have replied: "O! Will is probably in some apple tree writing an oration to deliver to the horses this evening." It was no secret, however, that John Carleton, as he was familiarly called, feared his son was "spoiling a tolerably good farmer," to borrow the words of the son, "to become an intolerably bad orator." In the poem "Tom Was Goin' for a Poet" we get a fairly accurate glimpse of young Carleton himself at the period of which we are writing. This may be found in "Farm Ballads."

Less characteristic, but no less suggestive and picturesque, is the humorous glimpse we get of Carleton's boyhood in the anecdote he himself told of going to a country town to hear Cassius M. Clay, the Kentuckian, make a speech. Reaching the fair grounds he found so large a crowd that he could see nothing of the eloquent Southerner. Crawling between people's feet he came to a tree not far from the stand. Up this tree he climbed, and, perched upon a branch all went well until the orator, to illustrate the ignorance of some of his political opponents, cried out with an emphatic gesture, "They don't know any more about it than that boy there in the tree." A thousand eyes were at once focused upon the bashful youth, who had so suddenly been made an object lesson. "The sensation," said Carleton, in telling the story years later, "was very much as if some ice water were being poured down my back. I tried to conceal myself among the branches but that would not work, and I was not long in shinning down and making myself scarce. At home I had no sympathy; they told me I should have stayed and fought it out, not knowing that my sensitiveness at that time was positively abnormal."

This adolescent sensitiveness, moreover, was no less pronounced than the openness of mind with which he was inclined to analyze his own inner thoughts and motives. With all of his puerile, quizzical spirit we know from Carleton's own statement that he was also of a serious turn of mind; for in his earliest diary[1] we find this remarkable self revelation: "In looking over my motives, actions, and disposition, I hardly know what to think of myself. I hardly know whether I am actuated by right principles or not. I am very

[1]This diary was begun in the fall of 1859, shortly after his fourteenth birthday.

easily led astray, and I fear my character is not as well balanced as it should be. I am too apt to judge hastily, and in some cases, seem to myself incompetent to judge at all. I am very easily influenced by the opinions of others; and a remark from nearly any one, at times, serves to form my opinion, or change it, in regard to anything."

Before closing this necessarily succinct account of the circumstances and influences that surrounded Carleton's childhood two facts remain to be recorded. As to how early the youth took to reading, a later passion with him, we are not informed, unless a glimpse of his earliest school days, which will be considered in the next chapter, may give us a clue. That his tastes were early directed toward reading there is plenty of evidence; at thirteen we know he was absorbing literally all the books within his reach which, while not so numerous or of so fine a texture as those with which John Ruskin was surrounded in youth, were of a nature to quicken his intellectual ardor and stimulate his growing imagination.

But however books interested him, the actions of men had if possible a greater and more lasting effect upon his mind. This was true throughout his life. The scenes and suggestions of domestic life seem to have interested him more than even nature in all her wonderful plethora of detail. Indeed old Uncle Ned "floundering along the road with a gray horse and yellow cutter," in a snow storm, whom he once compared to a damaged life-boat trying to make port in a storm, was of more intrinsic interest to him than the sweet solitude of the wood, broken only by the purly murmur of a water brook. Even his first sight of the natural beauties of the Highlands of the Hudson failed to excite that intense enthusiasm which one would expect a poet to display.

The same is true for the most part in his notes of travel whether at home or abroad. No such outbreak of ecstasy over scenery in Scotland or among the Swiss Alps surpassed in fervor of appreciation his first sight of the English metropolis. "Oh London, London, London, London, London! Why haven't I been here before?" he writes in a letter to a relative, "if anybody wants to give me a foretaste of Heaven let them quarter me cozily here, with plenty of money, and then leave me alone. It's all here—the world, I mean. It has all come to London." Thus the throbbing, seething heart of humanity became his life study: to its interpretation he brought alike the pictorial gift of rhyme, and the descriptive talent of prose.

## CHAPTER II

### SCHOOL AND COLLEGE DAYS

CARLETON began his rudimentary education within a few rods of his own home. The small white schoolhouse, of a single class-room, with a raised platform across one end, on which stood the teacher's desk, and back of which was the blackboard, was located close by the highway on his father's farm. To this rural educational institution, only a little more modern than the log school of the pioneer days, he was entrusted to a female teacher who years later took pleasure in relating some of her experiences with him: "He was a chubby tot of four or five," she once said, "and had so many things to look at out of the window that I had hard work to get his attention to a book. When I presented the alphabet to him he steadfastly refused to pronounce any of the letters whose appearance did not please him. Finally I told him if he would learn them, it would make the books talk to him. 'And tell me everything I want to know?' asked the little lad eagerly. 'Yes, sooner or later.' The boy learned the alphabet in a day, and before the term closed was ransacking every book he could find and trying to spell out the words."

Having completed the studies of the district school, and being forbidden to study algebra and Latin, an allusion of which is found in "The Schoolmaster's Guests," we find young Carleton walking five miles a day so as to attend a graded school at West Hudson. This was in the fall of 1861. About this time he first became acquainted with Irving, the mention of which in one of his note-books is of

interest as showing at this period the trend of his mind. "I remember," he writes, "smuggling into my desk a copy of Knickerbocker's History of New York. I was an honest, simple youth, and supposed it was a regular history and that I was really improving my mind, although having to sacrifice studies to it. It was not long before, hurled from intense attention to a scene of unparalleled ridiculousness, I laughed aloud in school. The teacher was an own cousin of Garfield, whom he used to hold up to us as an example, telling us if we would study, maybe we would get into the State legislature some day, where his cousin Jim then was. He heard my sudden laugh, and started for me on a tour of chastisement with uplifted ruler. I begged of him to read the page before inflicting punishment and he read and also laughed out loud. Afterward I found out that the work was not written by Diedrich Knickerbocker at all, but by Washington Irving; and this was my first introduction to Irving and the Hudson."

Young Carleton now began to alternate his periods of reading by trying his hand at writing. He showed an early taste for poetry, and authentic specimens of his verse have been preserved from the age of thirteen. These are recorded mostly in his earliest diary, of which mention has already been made. He usually marked "Original" at the beginning of each poem. "The Dying Indian Chief," one of the earliest extant may be given here:

"I have fought for my tribe, I have fought for my life,
I have entered with pleasure, in many a strife;
I have fought with the pale face, I have fought with the red,
For my children, my wife, and my home, I have bled.
Full many a foeman my hatchet has felt,
And many a scalp has hung down from my belt;

I have chased the wild buffalo over the plain,
On my proud dashing steed, with his dark flowing mane;
With the fierce grisly bear, I have fought without fear,
I have hunted the otter, the elk, and the deer,
But come, my brave son, I am fast growing weak,
And in my last moments, to you I would speak;
And when I am dead, make my grave deep and wide,
And place my good tomahawk close by my side,
For my hair has grown silvery, and dim is my eye,
And my feeble health tells me that soon I must die.
And the great Spirit's land shall ere long be my home,
And o'er its vast prairies in freedom I'll roam.
And now let no unavenged insult go by—
And if you are conquered, then fight till you die.
Thus spoke, one bright morning, an old Indian Chief,
When he knew that his time in this cold world was brief;
And suddenly there, in his firmness and pride,
He gathered his blanket around him, and died."

But it must not be supposed that Carleton's education was uninterrupted. In the spring he was often required to leave school so as to assist his father on the farm; and sometimes the fall term would be in session several weeks before he was able to attend regularly. Then, too, soon after he had entered Hillsdale College, he began to teach irregular terms at district schools. His first certificate as a teacher was obtained in November, 1862, when he taught at Pittsford, some nine miles from Hudson, Michigan. The highest number of pupils on the roll at any one time, he tells us, was fifty-three. He received eighteen dollars a month, and boarded around among the families of his scholars. "This watching and scolding all day," he found "pretty perplexing business"; but he got a deal of fun out of it at the same time. Much of the material in "The Schoolmaster's Guests," later published in "Farm Legends" is reminiscent of this period.

But the war had aroused his patriotism. His brother Henry, a virile and robust man of twice his age, had become an officer in the Eighteenth Michigan regiment, which probably influenced Will in his desire to join the army, too. At any rate, one day he went to a neighboring town and enlisted in the same regiment. When he was examined by the regimental doctor he was rejected for the reason that he was still considered too delicate. "Your breadth of chest would not weather one campaign," tersely remarked the physician. In chagrin the youth went back to the farm. Thinking that perhaps he could enlist as a musician he tried again, this time coaxing the old doctor to pass him by asserting that if he was not able to carry a musket, he could at least trill martial airs. Again he was refused on the ground that the drum corps was full. A third effort was made to enlist as a bugler; but before he had bugled two days, he tells us, an order was issued dismissing all members of the regiment under eighteen years of age. Back once more to the farm he went, but not before he had resolved, he says, to some day be as strong and as physically fit as any one; and so diligently did he practice the rules of hygiene that in after life he seldom was ill.

The brother of whom we spoke died in 1865, just at the close of the war. It appears that he had been released from a Confederate prison in Alabama, and was returning home when he met his death. The relatives and friends were unable to discover even the location of his grave. But as he rests among the unknown, though not forgotten heroes of the Republic, his poet-brother has beautifully enshrined his memory in that dirge, "Cover Them Over," the seventh stanza of which is especially dedicated to the "patriot dead," fallen "where their friends cannot find them."

From the West Hudson school Carleton went to Hillsdale College. When he first matriculated in September, 1862, the institution had been established but nine years. During the war it suffered a depletion of its student body, as many of the scholars joined the army. By 1866, however, the college numbered some three hundred and fifty youths, instructed by a capable faculty, and presided over by Dr. Edmund B. Fairfield, who later was president of the University of Nebraska. We learn again from the diary that young Carleton first roomed with a fellow student, but that after five weeks he found a place nearer the college where he could room alone. We are also told that he paid one dollar and fifty cents for board and twenty-five cents a week for his room. He was careful to a degree in expenditures: indeed he knew what it was to be poor. He had also observed how hard it had been for his father to pay off the mortgage on the farm. So before he was actually prepared for college he had earned money in divers ways and laid it aside to help defray his expenses. His labors to maintain himself at college, as well as before, consisted of writing carriers addresses for neighboring journals, contributing to the local papers, composing music for country brass bands, teaching as we have seen in district schools, and in reading his early poems to small audiences in the nearby towns.

But this outside activity did not seem to lower his standard of scholarship, which on an average was high. He was fond of debating, and of essay writing; but preferred to compose a poem as his part of any original exercise. Mr. George S. Richards, of Toledo, Ohio, a college mate of Carleton's, says that the latter was always spoken of in college, as the poet, and that he well remembers how

Carleton would go to the room of his chum who would often repeat a line of some poem which Carleton would immediately take up by composing another line that would rhyme with it. His shyness as a boy had now given way to a dashing eccentricity which, together with his talent as a writer of verse, made him a great favorite with the students. Certain members of the faculty, however, are said to have taken exception to some of his pronounced views. His attitude toward the Rebellion, for example, led to his being expelled from the college on May 3, 1866. A number of others also went out with him, but all were honorably reinstated. A month later he is reported in Detroit and Chicago papers as having delivered an anniversary oration which attracted considerable attention among student bodies throughout the Northwest.

But much of Carleton's time, not employed in regular study and social activities, was spent in reading. From his savings he had purchased Shakespeare's works, which he read omnivorously. Sentimental literature also had its attraction. He was very fond of Bret Harte, being especially partial to the "Heathen Chinee." The year of Carleton's graduation, 1869, Trowbridge published his first book of poems—"The Vagabonds"—which Carleton perused with assiduity. By the testimony of those who knew him at college, it appears that history and poetry were the subjects to which he was most attached. Much of his earliest poetry was written in his college days, and he was accustomed to send his productions to one of his boyhood friends for criticism. This chum in turn would send his effusions to Carleton to read, and the honest animadversions which each would bestow upon the other's work kept them from falling into errors of literary judgment.

On June 17, 1869, Carleton was graduated. Having been elected class poet, he read at the commencement exercises a poem entitled, "Rifts in the Cloud." It was indeed no mean effort, if not equal, as some over-zealous admirers have contended, to the best of similar productions by graduates of leading universities. In spirit and workmanship, however, it foreshadowed a metrical fruitage soon to be more generally recognized. Carleton's previous poetical undertakings, save in a few instances, were shorter and except for minor corrections, struck off in the heat of conception. But in this composition there is noticeable a greater care in construction; a frequent mental pause, seemingly, to find the best word or the richest rhyme, which is lacking in his earlier, and much even in his later work. Then, too, this poem was undoubtedly conceived, and perhaps mostly executed in the quiet atmosphere of academic life, which tended to foster and encourage the analytical faculty. Published in his volume of poems, issued in 1871, it was reprinted, with slight changes, of words mostly, in "Farm Legends."

The poem also made a marked impression when delivered. As the young poet left the platform students and faculty joined heartily in congratulatory applause; and the college president, "usually a self-contained, undemonstrative man," as he has been described, rose quickly from his chair, grasped a bouquet of flowers and enthusiastically threw it after the descending student. Carleton, years later, was heard to remark that it was the most stunning compliment he had ever received.

## CHAPTER III

### JOURNALISM—A LEAP INTO FAME

AFTER leaving college Carleton did not experience, as have so many students, any uncertainty as to a choice of a profession. All his inclinations, as we have seen, tended toward literary pursuits. It may be said, moreover, that a good beginning of what were to be his vocations in life—journalism, lecturing, and writing poetry—was made as an undergraduate. The enterprise with which he went about these avocations as a student certainly was the means of attracting to him more than a local reputation, and undoubtedly led to his receiving before he was graduated, an offer of an editorial position on the staff of "The Western Rural," an illustrated agricultural and family weekly, of Chicago, to which he had already been a contributor. The salary was small, only twelve dollars a week, but it gave him experience. He remained on "The Western Rural" during the summer and fall of 1869, when he returned to the town of his alma mater to become editor and part owner of the "Hillsdale Standard," a local newspaper. This he gave up January 1, 1872, to assume charge of the "Detroit Weekly Tribune," on which he continued for about a year. His duties on the "Tribune," it appears, were to select from each week's dailies the articles most appropriate to go into the Weekly. As a rule but two days a week were required for this work, the remainder of which was spent in lecturing and contributing poetry and prose to other newspapers and magazines.

Nor were such opportunities few in number. Of his lecturing more will be said later. A search through the musty

files of "The Toledo Blade," "The Detroit Tribune," "The Western Rural," "The Kansas Magazine," and "Our Fireside Friend," to mention no more, will reveal only the extent to which Carleton's poetical productions were accepted. Indeed, in reading letters of this period, one is impressed at the many requests from editors for contributions. When he no longer was connected editorially with "The Detroit Tribune," that paper solicited contributions, and finally made a contract with him for a poem a month, in payment of $360.00 and an annual pass on the L. S. and M. S. Railroad. In addition to the revenue from his poetry, Carleton received for his lecture-recitals from $75 to $100 an entertainment; and he now was reading on an average of five nights a week. About this time he also conducted under another name in Hillsdale a book and news store; so his income from 1870 on was considerable. At times, as we glean from his correspondence, he would have from $500 to $1,500 in the bank waiting to be invested. Most of his principal at this time was placed out on bond and mortgage, or in small loans.

So engrossed in his work was Carleton at this period—he had been but two years out of college—that his letters deal practically with little save his writing and matters of a business nature. Though his poems had been widely copied, and his lecture-recitals had taken him into a number of States, he had not as yet become known throughout the country. A day of more general recognition, however, was at hand. One day in March 1871, a tall, somewhat awkward, slenderly built man, of youthful appearance, made his way to a seat in a country court-room in Michigan to report a divorce suit, then attracting considerable local attention. His gleeful manner, dapper eyes, and copious wavy brown

hair indicated his youth, though at first glance he appeared older than his years, by reason of a stringy mustache, and chin whiskers, a style common among Westerners of that period. The young reporter soon was intently following the case; one thing in particular impressed him. That was the attitude of the husband toward the wife he was about to divorce. He declared that she should have half of the property because she had helped to earn it.

With this picture on his mind, Will Carleton went to his room, and began to draft a poem that was written at one sitting. He called it "Betsey and I Are Out," and sent it gratuitously to the "Toledo Blade," possibly because of the reputation of the editor, D. R. Locke, who was then attracting attention under the pseudonym of "Petroleum V. Nasby."

The contribution, however, chanced to fall into the hands of Mr. Locke's assistant who, cursorily running over it, promptly threw it into the waste basket. Having occasion to re-examine a paper which he had only a few moments before discarded, the editor began overhauling the contents of the basket. Finding the legibly written Carleton ballad, he paused to read a verse. "What's this?" he inquired of the assistant. "Oh, some fellow who thinks he can write poetry, but can't even spell." Locke walked off with the poem: on March 17, 1871, it appeared on the top of the first column of the fourth page of the "Toledo Daily Blade."

Such is the story, unverifiable in its exact details, but in the main correct, of how Will Carleton came to write "Betsey and I Are Out." With this ballad he seems to have leaped almost at once into fame, for its reception was phenomenal. Copied into nearly every newspaper in America, it soon fell under the eye of Mr. Conant, of "Harper's

Weekly," who later republished it, illustrated, in that periodical, and asked the young country bard if he could write for "Harper's" ballads in the same idiomatic strain. Thus was opened up a medium, as we shall see in the next chapter, for the future "Farm Ballads," which were destined to make the name of Carleton famous as the poet of the farm.

Aside from the Emerson claim which will be discussed in another chapter, reports were rife which denied to Carleton the authorship of "Betsey and I Are Out." Rumors were current that D. R. Locke (Petroleum V. Nasby) had written the ballad; to all such, Carleton maintained a discreet silence. But the reports annoyed Locke, who wrote a personal letter to Carleton in which he stated that he had repeatedly denied having written the poem, but nevertheless was highly honored because the public had attributed the contribution to him.

But six months before the public had begun to discuss and admire the ballad that was to mark the beginning of Carleton's reputation as a writer of homely verse, he had concluded to submit his early poems for publication in book form. After a number of publishers, including Scribner's and the Harpers—who soon were to take up his productions with avidity—had declined the manuscript with the customary thanks for having had it offered to them, Carleton decided to get out the book himself. Early in 1871 the proof-sheets were being enthusiastically read by the young poet who, instead of suffering an eclipse because of the failure of publishers to discern the worth of his mental ebullitions, was the more determined to have his poems between covers.

In the meantime, however, his stock had risen: "Betsey and I Are Out" had created a country-wide sensation; and

the Harpers had already on hand several of his newly written farm ballads. Mr. Conant, editor of "Harper's Weekly," hearing of the proposed volume of poems, wrote the following letter to Carleton:

"I learn this morning from our common friend, Mr. Locke, that a volume of your poems is soon to be published by a house in Chicago. Permit me, even at the risk of seeming to interfere in another's affairs, to suggest the inadvisability of such a course, for reasons which will, I am confident, commend themselves to your judgment.

"We are about commencing the publication of your 'Farm Ballads' in the Weekly, handsomely illustrated by able artists. 'Betsey and I Are Out' will appear next week and the others will follow in quick succession. There is no reason to doubt that after the publication of these ballads, in a journal so widely circulated as Harper's Weekly, with appropriate and popular illustrations, would be a much better time to publish your volume than before.

"It is also quite as certain that such a volume ought to bear the imprint of some firm more widely known, and having more facilities, through business connections for securing a large circulation, than a Western house. If published in the West, the sale would be very likely to be limited, and if so, this would stand in the way of another volume. If published next fall in New York, there can be scarcely any doubt of its having a great success. Mr. Locke could not inform me how far your volume had progressed; but I think you would find your advantage in stopping it, even if you have to lose the plates.

"Mr. Fletcher Harper, Sr., as well as Mr. Locke, fully coincide in these opinions, and join with me in the hope

that you will for the present withhold the volume from publication."

But the book, of which 1,000 copies had been printed at a cost to the author of over $480.00, was two weeks off the press. Entitled "Poems," containing some 144 pages, it was "Reverently and Affectionately Dedicated to My Father and Mother." The entire edition was disposed of at a nice little profit, but is now long out of print, the plates having been destroyed in the great Chicago fire. Of the twenty-nine poems contained in the volume, however, mostly all of them were afterward republished in either "Farm Ballads" or "Farm Legends." Like most first volumes of poetry, it is replete with sentimentality and conventionality; there is little in it of poetic wealth or subtile ingenuity. Yet Carleton seems to have been very tender of this first child of his literary life; for on the fly-leaf of one of the last copies to be preserved by him, was written:

"Poor little faded tome.
  But you bring once more to view
The halls of a boyhood home,
  The dash of the morning dew.
And a summer gray,
With Hope's sharp ray
  Struggling and gleaming through."

As much as Carleton loved to dwell with the muse, and interpret his own verse on the public platform, he always had a strong bent toward journalism; he had only given up his former editorial duties because his associations were uncongenial, not the work. So not long after the 1871 volume of his collected poems was issued, we find him writing in strict confidence to a friend that he was about to

undertake the publication of a literary monthly at Detroit. It seems to have been his ambition at this time to develop some of the latent talent of his native State, and give her, as he says, a literature. He therefore wrote to a number of friends, with whom he made arrangements to prepare papers, and in each case suggested the themes upon which they were to write. To one he says: "I hope soon to be able to pay for articles, but am now incurring considerable expense in furthering my plans, and shall probably be short for a few months; but will put you on the free list at the outset, and do as well as possible by you in the future." To another he writes: "As to the payment for your services, silver and currency have I none, but I will give you editorial notice and place you upon the free list."

The panic of 1873 seems to have shattered his plans, for we hear nothing more of the project until December of the same year, when he writes to a friend who had been told the secret: "The magazine project is not given up, but it has, as you have perhaps surmised, been postponed a few months on account of the unprecedented financial situation. Everything looks blue monetarily. Everybody is retrenching and would sooner cut their present periodical list, than increase it. But the time is coming; a few more months at most will, I think, turn the tide, and then I shall go on with it."

But two decades were to pass before he was to undertake such a literary venture; and then not in the State of Michigan. In February, 1872, the third sorrow of Carleton's life came to him in the death of his father; a sister and brother having preceded him in death by several years. The loss seems not to have found expression in any poem, as in the death of his sister, of whom he sung in "The Fading

Flower"; but the grief was, however, deep, as is seen in this excerpt, written shortly after his father had been taken away: "This deep sorrow in a manner numbs me. I cannot realize it; it steals upon me at all sorts of unexpected hours, and makes life bitterer to me each time. But I have a man's strength, if not a woman's endurance, and will master it."

Six months after his father's death Carleton made his first trip to New York, ostensibly to confer with the Harpers, concerning his forthcoming book of poems; but pleasure was combined with business. While East he caught his first glimpse of the Hudson; visited cities and historical shrines which he had long wanted to see; met and dined with many of the litterateurs of New York, including Mark Twain, and John Hay, who was then on the staff of the "Tribune"; and returned home much elated over the reception his "Eastern cousins," as he called them, had given him, and enthusiastic over the favorable outlook of his prospective book, "Farm Ballads."

## CHAPTER IV

### FARM BALLADS

WE have reached the period of Carleton's career when he seems to have found himself; when, having deliberately turned aside from a natural ambition for artistic writing, to test his talent in poetic veins "of unworked ore," to use an apt phrase of Benson's, he becomes convinced, not only of his own latent gifts, but of the possibilities of colloquial verse. Up to 1871 Carleton's metrical contributions, strictly speaking, have no real distinction; they showed promise, but most of them were written in boyhood, and many of them, as he modestly said, were crude and carelessly executed. Yet in these earlier productions we observe that lucid pictorial emphasis, and that emotional exuberance which are among the chief characteristics of his more mature work. There may also be found in these early effusions a rhythmical gift which seems to have been naturally an instinctive tendency toward the sentimental; and a love of the pathetic.

But "Betsey and I Are Out" was of a different cast. In this idiomatic ballad Carleton struck a neglected key on the instrument of poetic fancy; and its success from the first, as we have seen, was pronounced. Two weeks after the ballad was first published the author received a letter from S. S. Conant, editor of "Harper's Weekly," in which the latter stated that he had asked the editor of the "Toledo Blade" for permission to copy from that paper the ballad; and that if Carleton had any more poems of similar character and equal in originality, freshness, and truth of feeling, he would be glad to have him become a regular contributor

to the Weekly. In the issue of May 27, 1871 appeared "Betsey and I Are Out," copied from the "Toledo Blade" of March 17 of the same year. "Out of the Old House Nancy" was published in the Weekly, June 3; "Over the Hill to the Poor-House," June 17; "Gone with a Handsomer Man," July 15.

These initial ballads are good specimens of the series, which continued to run fairly regularly for a time in the Weekly; and, except "How Betsey and I Made Up," "Over the Hill from the Poor-House" and "The New Church Organ" are the best known of the "Farm Ballads," on which Carleton's reputation as a writer of colloquial verse must rest. Much of his later work, moreover, was of similar scope, but he never quite regained the old afflatus, though it may be said that sometimes in the ground-work of technic a finer workmanship is discernible. But Carleton knew the rural Western mind and character, and the homely vernacular that went with it; and in thus evoking the sentiments and playing upon the emotions, the human element became his chief weapon of appeal: in consequence his popularity grew apace.

It was not long before flattering offers began to pour in from other periodicals; and when he suggested dividing his verses between the Weekly and certain Western papers which it appears had offered for his work more remuneration, he received from the editor the following reply: . . . "I think that your own interests, as well as our own would be better served if for the present at least you should give us the first chance to publish your productions. The character and wide circulation of 'Harper's Weekly' will give a currency to your poems appearing in its pages of which they would lose the benefit in a local newspaper.

This is especially the case with the 'Farm Ballads.' We should like you to continue the series; and would at the same time express the hope that you will exercise your best talents to keep them up to the high standard of merit and popularity attained by those already published. We shall employ our best artists in their illustration, so that when the series is complete they will make a very attractive book."

The admonition of keeping his work up to an already established standard was indeed a bit suggestive; for Carleton perhaps was inclined to write too freely for sustained effort. A circumstance received at first hand may serve as an illustration: being impressed with the homely realism of Carleton's early ballads, Mr. William Dean Howells, then editor of the "Atlantic Monthly," told the present writer that he solicited a contribution. The response took the form of a poem so shot through with sentimentality and artificiality that the "Atlantic's" genial editor was compelled to decline it.

In Carleton, however, the "Harpers" had a contributor whose productions appealed to the popular taste. "Your 'Betsey and I Are Out' is making a great sensation; we hear of it from all quarters" was one of many comments he received from Mr. Conant, while others wrote him as flatteringly. While he was zealous of the Harper's continued support, Carleton was characteristically extremely independent, as will be seen in this letter to Mr. Conant, of January 23, 1872:

"I have several additional 'Farm Ballads' commenced, and some finished. I write to know whether you will probably need them for 'Harper's Weekly.' Other Journals have importuned me for contributions, and are ready to pay me good prices. I prefer 'Harper's Weekly,' but infer,

from the return of one ballad, and the continued non-appearance of another, that my later productions are not to your taste. Of course, I must publish, right or wrong; if not in your paper, in others. If I cannot do best, then I must do as well as I can. May I hope for an early reply?"

" . . . We shall be glad to have you send your new ballads to us," wrote Mr. Conant in reply, "and if they are found suitable for illustration they will be used in the 'Weekly' or the 'Bazar.' If not, they will be promptly returned to your address. The reason we were compelled to return the one to which you refer was that it was not considered by our artists susceptible of effective illustration. The one we have on hand has been illustrated, and will be published as soon as we get through with some of our long serials, which now take up so much of our space. Of course it is for your advantage to publish with us, as no other journal of equal circulation could furnish illustrations which will be of immense service to your book when it is published."

The first suggestion of collecting the ballads into a book was made by the Harpers in a letter as early as April, 1871, and we learn that the illustrations were made with that end in view; a year from the following August Mr. Fletcher Harper took up the subject with Carleton personally in New York. The book was to have appeared by the end of the year, but owing to the stagnation of trade, said to have been caused by the political campaign, as well as by the large number of books which were about to be thrown upon the market, the Harpers thought it wise to defer its publication until February or March; in point of fact, however, it was not issued until late in April, 1873. The reception of the book was indeed phenomenal. From a

commercial point of view, it proved to be a financial success to both author and publisher. Possibly no other volume of poems up to that time, unaided by the prestige of a great name, had had a more immediate success. In a letter in August of the year of publication, the author writes that 10,000 copies of "Farm Ballads" had been disposed of "with demand unabated." By December the book had reached a sale of over 20,000 copies; in eighteen months, of over 40,000; and, it may be said that it still sells to-day. Carleton personally employed agents who were given exclusive territory. In one instance a single representative in five weeks without a copy to display, sold 400 books. There is no authentic record of how many books in this way were sold; but in letter after letter we find Carleton remonstrating with his publishers for not forwarding more promptly additional copies, as the demand was greater than the supply.

Of Carleton's "Farm Ballads" "Betsey and I Are Out," and its companion piece, "How Betsey and I Made Up," are perhaps the most rugged in their human interest, as "Over the Hill to the Poor House", and its sequel, are the most pathetic. How "Betsey and I Are Out" came to be written has already been described in the preceding chapter.

We believe that the brace of ballads, "Over the Hill to the Poor-House" and "Over the Hill from the Poor-House," may be regarded, not perhaps as the best of Carleton's writings, but as the most deservedly popular; and their popularity is not difficult to divine: it lay in the human note which runs through every line. The conception of these unpretentious poems is said to have been purely imaginative, though in reality both have been justified by similar facts in life. Carleton, however, was often questioned as to their

origin. To such inquiries he was generally evasive. At a home-coming festival, held at Hudson, Michigan, in October 1907, however, he is reported to have said: "Over there to the west, in Hillsdale, there stood in the old days a county poor-house. Sometimes I used to visit the inmates there and hear their troubles. And sometimes I used to see old people—old women, yes, old women—who had put their property into the hands of their children, passing up the road on their way to the poor-house on the other side of the hill to the south of Hillsdale, about three miles. It was a pretty considerable, large hill. I had thought much about the cruelty of children to parents, and when it came time to write the poem called 'Over the Hill to the Poor-House' I may say that it seemed fairly to write itself. Such was the origin of that poem."

But whatever may have prompted its creation, read to-day, one detects no artificial pathos, no forced humor, no affected emotion. The sad truth of neglect is seen with pitiful lucidity; and in its companion piece, the resurrected son, "known as the worst of the Deacon's six," bringing his old mother from the poor-house, and installing her in the old homestead with a filial devotion the more impressive because of its circumstances, we have a fine example of that surging, emotional ballad style, which has made Carleton's colloquial verse so popular.

The history of these ballads deserve a few words: the first was written probably in March, or early in April, 1871, when it was sent to "Harper's Weekly," in which it was published. The author got $30.00 for the poem, a sum subsequently received for each of his other "Farm Ballads." Both poems are written in couplets, the stanzas of the first are uniform; while those of the sequel are unequal in length.

We make no attempt, however, to criticise these poems from the point of view of technic; for nothing would be gained. The alternation of humor and pathos, of emotional intensity, and of searching insight into Western rural character, is the answer for their wide appeal. Indeed, Carleton in a preface to a special holiday edition of these ballads, issued thirty-three years after their first appearance, says that many of his more elaborate poems which involved ten times more labor failed to produce anything like the impression upon the public heart. He goes on in this introduction to tell of the influence of these two poems; of how he had received letters from recreant sons and daughters who came to regard their parents with greater love and veneration; and of how superintendents of poor-houses had reported a decrease in the number of inmates, occasioned by the withdrawal of old people, whose children were ashamed of their neglect.

"The New Church Organ" is a ballad humorously conceived, and splendidly told. The earnestness of the true and simple-hearted church sister is very amusingly developed. It is said that Carleton's mother vigorously objected when an organ was first installed in the little Methodist church of Hudson, Michigan, of which she was a devout member, and that this incident suggested the poem. Be this as it may, it proved, to borrow Carleton's own words, to be a "trump card." "My judgment may not be good," he writes in an early letter, "but I believe it will have a better run than any of my ballads since 'Betsey and I Are Out.' It is a pet of mine, and I have held it a long time, so as to keep it fresh for recitations."

## CHAPTER V

### THE CARLETON-EMERSON CONTROVERSY

THE year 1873, however, was not to be without its darker aspects. The sunshine of good fortune was to be followed, for a time at least, by the cloud of obloquy; which, however patiently borne, tended to stiffen the fibre. The first intimation that one, Mrs. N. S. Emerson, claimed to be the author of the popular ballad "Betsey and I Are Out" was heard soon after it had been printed in "Harper's Weekly"; no notice having been previously taken by her of its first appearance in the "Toledo Blade," or later when it was copied into the "New York World" with slight verbal changes, with an introduction, setting forth its claims of popularity. Shortly after its publication in "Harper's Weekly," however, a representative of Mrs. Emerson interviewed the editor, S. S. Conant, and presented the claim of the former. The agent was informed that Harper's would be glad to examine proofs of this claim, and that, moreover, if the claimant cared to submit for their consideration other ballads, the firm would be pleased to accept them, provided the contributions were equal in literary merit to "Betsey and I Are Out," and remunerate her at the same rate they were accustomed to pay Mr. Carleton.

Later Mrs. Emerson, or, as she then called herself, Mrs. French, called on Mr. Conant in person, and boldly reiterated her agent's contention that she herself and not Mr. Carleton was the true author of the now famous ballad. She declared, moreover, that she had written it in 1869; that several manuscript copies were made of it, which were distributed among her friends; and that in some way Carle-

ton obtained one of these copies, and published the ballad as his own in a Western newspaper. Previously to this, however, she had averred that the ballad was composed while in a trance, and had been sold in New York to Will Carleton for the absurd sum of two dollars. Learning subsequently that Carleton's first trip to New York was not made until 1872, she shifted to the former statement. Thus matters rested until the announcement of the publication of "Farm Ballads," when the controversy was renewed.

During this time Carleton appears to have taken no public notice of the false imputations, though we know now by his letters that he was naturally incensed. "The Emerson affair," he writes to the Editor of *Harper's Weekly,* in March, 1873, "is going to hurt the sale of 'Farm Ballads' in this section unless something is done to counteract it. Everybody is saying, Why doesn't he contradict it? I have not contradicted it, publicly, because Mr. Fletcher Harper informed me that you were going to handle the case, and I have been waiting, hoping that you would say something that I could use, without entering personally into the matter. A few words in the *Weekly* would be extensively copied and remove from me the charge of being a plagiarist. I am being paraded through the press of the country, accompanied with the conundrum of whether or not I am a fraud. It is needless to say that the sooner this sort of newspaper literature is laid, the better I shall be suited."

"Fret not thyself because of evil talkers," wrote Mr. Conant, in answer to this appeal, "there is no occasion for worry in respect to what the woman Emerson may say, while it would be very impolitic for *us* to say any-

thing until she has developed her case more fully. She will be sure to commit herself to some false statement which will enable us to confound her. The fact that Harper and Brothers are doing the book is a guaranty of their confidence in your claim; and when the book appears, we shall take pains to have it brought properly before the public through the press.

"If anything were said now, it would only put Mrs. E. on her guard and make her more carefully weigh her statements and dates. Besides, what could we say, at present, except that Mrs. Emerson's claims were unfounded? That would have no weight with the public. We must let her make some slip as to facts and data, and then expose her as thoroughly as to leave her not a leg to stand on. I certainly sympathise most heartily with you, placed as you are so unjustly under suspicion, and do not wonder at your impatience; but I am sure that the course which I advise is the very best one to pursue."

"Farm Ballads," as we have seen, was issued late in April, 1873; on the seventeenth of May G. W. Carleton and Company, of New York, announced the publication of a volume of poems by Mrs. N. S. Emerson, entitled "A Thanksgiving Story." "Among the stories related," declared the Publishers in an advertisement in the New York *Times* of May 17th, 1873, "is the famous ballad of BETSEY AND I ARE OUT, which has been, in a mutilated and feeble form, so widely printed and spread over the United States with another name as author." This directly accused Will Carleton of literary piracy. The charge was the more damaging because of the statement printed in the advertisement quoted in part above, in which Mrs. Emerson is said to have declared that she was "prepared to

substantiate and prove her claim" to the authorship of the ballad in question.

Her proofs, or what were termed such, appear to have consisted solely of inspired newspaper articles, written, we are told, by paid agents, in which were set forth statements which she must have known to have been false, as they afterward were repudiated by those to whom they were attributed. Mr. Eli Perkins, among others, was sent to interview Mrs. Emerson. In an elaborate sketch, he speaks of her as being a cousin of Ralph Waldo Emerson; that "Betsey and I Are Out" was a true account of her great Uncle, Eliab Pratt, deacon of the First Baptist Church, of Reading, Massachusetts, and his wife, Betsey Flint; and that Parker Pratt, then living in Reading, well remembered the old quarrel of Eliab and Betsey. The Boston *Advertiser* later published an interview with Mr. Parker Pratt, in which he asserted that he had never heard of Eliab, nor of Mrs. Emerson, nor even of Will Carleton, and that he knew nothing of the disputed ballad. He admitted, however, that he did have an Uncle William Pratt, who married Betsey Flint, about the year 1820, but that he was never a deacon of the First Baptist Church, of Reading, nor of any church; that his married life was happy; and that he died in New Hampshire, where he had lived for over twenty years. The family of Ralph Waldo Emerson also denied any relationship. Others to whom she claimed to have read the ballad before its publication likewise disavowed having ever heard it.

So much for the Emerson side of the controversy. Let us now turn for a moment and see what course Carleton was contemplating. As Mrs. Emerson's volume contained no other ballad of Carleton's, save the one in dispute, which

in fact was unprotected by copyright—it having been reprinted from *The Toledo Blade* into *Harper's Weekly*—the Harpers could not be parties to a suit against either Mrs. Emerson or her publishers. It, therefore, rested with Carleton to take the initiative and to collect all necessary evidence on which to establish the authenticity of his rightful claim. Mrs. Emerson, being on the aggressive, it was his policy to so keep his line of defense a secret that she would be drawn into issuing some statement which would enable him to refute, and thereby prove her to be an impostor.

His letters at this time are full of the subject, and he writes his views very freely, sometimes disdainfully, when some thoughtless person had the impudence to ask "Is it so?" as the following extract will show: "In your letter of April 7th, you enclose me a clipping, the substance of which went the rounds of the papers some time since, relative to a woman in New York named Emerson. In your question 'Is it so?' you, of course, do not mean to ask me if the woman's claims are true, as that would be an insult which no writer with a proper respect for himself could overlook. I suppose you mean to ask me if there really is a Mrs. E., and if she puts forth the claims as stated in the paragraph. I have reason to believe there is such a woman, making such claims, although I have never seen her, or heard of her, till a short time ago." "The whole Emerson story," he writes in another letter to a friend, "is a clean lie, without one solitary fact to save it from falling of its own weight. Its object was to secure the sale of some copies of her book which would have attracted no attention, but for this discussion, which has been carried on in her behalf by paid agents. . . . I shall

probably survive this attack, and, if necessary, a good many more just as violent; but I shall not always be as quiet about these things as I, through policy, have been for the past three months."

That the public in certain quarters viewed Mrs. Emerson's claim with tacit approval was evident. Even in parts of Michigan, where Carleton's verse was so widely known and admired, derisive comments were current. Before it was known, however, whether or not Harper and Brothers would be a party to any possible legal action, that is, prior to the publication of the Emerson book, Carleton had sent to his publishers the points which he was able to prove by sworn testimony. They were first embodied in a private letter to the Editor of *Harper's Weekly,* under date of April 25th, and were as follows:

"1. My character for veracity in this community (Hillsdale, Michigan) where I have resided eight years.

"2. My local reputation as a writer of verses during several years previous to the publication of the ballads—some of the poems written during that time having been copied in several Eastern Journals, as well as many in the West.

"3. That I had, previous to the *Blade* ballads, contributed poems to the *Blade,* to the Chicago *Tribune,* to the Detroit *Tribune,* to the *Western Rural,* and other papers, which were approved and extensively copied.

"4. That I read the poem 'Betsey and I Are Out' previous to its publication in the *Blade* to a friend, and made some changes in it, at this friend's suggestion.

"5. That the poem was not sold, but given to the *Blade,* as I had given others; which I would not have been likely to do, had I first bought it, as the woman French-Emerson claims.

"6. That the 12th stanza of 'Out of the Old House, Nancy' (which stanza was afterward illustrated in *Harper's Weekly*) was not in the original draft of the poem, but was supplied by me at the suggestion of D. P. Miller, then of the *Blade,* who suggested that something concerning its subject was needed to improve the coherence of the poem. This I could not have done had I received my poem from Mrs. Emerson.

"7. That I was not during the year preceding the publication of "Betsey and I" absent from the State of Michigan long enough to go to New York and return.

"These facts I can prove by the sworn testimony of

"1. The *Blade* Editors, who have expressed their eagerness to serve me in the matter.

"2. The Faculty of Hillsdale College, who have for many years been acquainted with my literary efforts.

"3. My business associates, who have in their day-books entries made by me for almost every day of the time above stated.

"4. My landlord, who for the past three years has kept an exact account of the number of meals missed by me, in order to deduct them from my bill.

"5. Friends to whom I have shown different poems in various stages of completion."

Finally, upon the advice of his attorney, Carleton issued the following card, which was printed in *The Detroit Tribune* and extensively circulated in other papers.

CONCERNING "BETSEY AND I ARE OUT":

"To my frends:

"I have thus far treated with silent contempt the alleged claims of a Mrs. or Miss Emerson to the authorship of the

above-named poem. I now deem it proper to inform the public that the statements she is said to have made concerning the matter are base, deliberate lies; that the ballad BETSEY AND I ARE OUT, as published in the Toledo *Blade,* in March, 1871, was wholly my own conception and composition; and that any claim she has made to the authorship of the poem or any part of it, places her in the position of a rank impostor, and a literary pirate, in the fullest sense of the term.

"I shall, at the proper time, disprove the contradictory and irresponsible statements which have been made concerning this matter, by sworn testimony from persons of established character and reputation.

"I trust that the many journals in which my poems have, from time to time, had the honor of appearing, will kindly give this a place in their columns, and assist in making the denial as public as the accusation has been."

The card seems to have had the desired effect, for after its publication Mrs. Emerson did not undertake to further press her claims. In July the Chicago *Inter-Ocean* published an impartial review of the Carleton-Emerson episode, which was copied in *Harper's Weekly,* with Carleton's portrait; and in the same month we find Mr. Conant writing to Carleton, "Mrs. Emerson's book does not sell, I am told. Yours goes remarkably well."

It has been thought well to give somewhat in detail the circumstances of this unpleasant literary controversy, and its final collapse; partly because some of the facts are new; partly because of the persistent feature of its insolent character; partly because that it again proves that on the side of truth and right recognition ultimately will prevail.

## CHAPTER VI

### A POET AND HIS LITERARY FRIENDS

FOR five years after giving up his Editorial duties on *The Detroit Tribune* (1873-1878) Carleton lived at Hillsdale, Michigan; though much of his time was occupied in travel, incident to fulfilling lecture engagements. Frequently he was required to ride from forty to fifty miles over rough country roads in a carriage after lecturing, because of the lack of train connection. This entailed a deal of fatigue, of which he often speaks in his letters. "It is a tired-out, half-sick fellow," he says in a letter to a cousin in 1874, "who writes you to-day. Having come home from a lecturing-tour, in which I had done some hard work and close traveling, I discovered, when the excitement was over, that I had a little over done; and several days of rest have only just lifted me out of the slough of despond."

He then goes on to tell of some of the things which had occurred on the trip: "But I had a splendid time in and around Cleveland—beautiful, warm-hearted city. They petted and applauded me when I was so hoarse that I couldn't speak except with pain, and, of course, my voice wasn't pleasant; but they averred it was all delicious, and made me give them another evening. I fell among Methodist people there, and, though they were not the most literary people I ever met, they were cordial, and more than willing to use their wealth to make poets comfortable. Among the celebrities I met at Cleveland recently were General Kilpatrick and Tom Nast. The General is a good, jolly fellow to have a talk with; is between thirty and

forty, I should think, and is making money. Tom is below the medium height; has a dark complexion, and looks the Jew. He took pains to denounce Miss Emerson to me, and I, in return, took pains to denounce his friend Eli Perkins to him. By the way, while filling a recent engagement in Indiana, I found by the programme that the second-named lecturer for the course which I headed was Eli Perkins, and the third one Andrews (son of S. Pearl) both of whom scurrilously went for me in the late ballad unpleasantness. . . . Down about Marietta, Ohio, I found ever so many Carltons. They all came six or eight miles to hear me. We took supper together at the hotel, and had a table-full of Carltons. They, or rather their ancestors, some years ago dropped the e out of their names. They originated in Vermont. Although we couldn't strike any facts, dates or Christian names in common, we concluded that we were some relation. The only thing that troubled them was my dash of Scotch blood." Anything pertaining to his ancestry interested Carleton; later, when in England, he made a research along certain lines so as to ascertain the truth of some statements, of which he was not positive. The omitting of the letter e in the name led him to write some humorous lines, "From Carleton to Carltons," beginning with—

> "Re-une, O ye Carltons! enjoy it and tell it!
> A Carlton's a Carleton—no odds how you spell it."

After reciting his poems successfully for three seasons throughout the West, in the fall of 1874 Carleton came East, and gave lecture-readings in various sections of New England to appreciative audiences. That year he also joined "The Redpath Literary Bureau" of Boston, and soon be-

came almost as well known personally in New England and the Atlantic States as he was beyond the Ohio.

Meanwhile he was contributing to *Harper's Weekly* many of the poems which later were to be included in "Farm Legends," a third volume of verse published in 1875. During the preparation of this book, Mr. Conant again admonished Carleton not to "scatter" his "productions through different periodicals," so long as they were having a regularly and widely read medium of publication, advice which he most generally followed. While the "Legends" exhibited perhaps fewer striking characteristics than the "Ballads," they won an audience almost as large. "The Schoolmaster's Guests," the initial poem in the volume, rivals in vividness Whittier's kitchen scene in "Snow Bound." In this poem, as in others, the poet undoubtedly drew from his own early experiences. That the five "good district fathers" who always agreed with their leader, even when he "swore oaths of a violet hue," were known to Carleton personally, we do not pretend to say, but that he had experiences of a similar nature is more than likely. Here is one, reminiscent of the days when he taught a district school. "There was a tremendously large stove in one of the school rooms," said Carleton, who tells the story, "and the rear end of it had been burned out. It was supported, however, by an iron brace, and I told the director that it ought to be fixed. He found out it would cost seventy-five cents, and he said we had better wait until next year, when he would attend to it. Not very long after that a very old, but good gentleman died in the neighborhood, and they held the funeral in my schoolhouse. I attended the services, and the director whom I had asked to fix the stove was present also. After some few minutes he came over to where I was sitting and whis-

pered, 'Don't you think we are having a pretty good funeral?' 'Yes, but don't you think it is a little cold here?' He confessed he thought it was, so he picked up a big stick and began putting it into the stove. In went the stick, and out went the end of the stove, and the coals flew all over the floor beside the corpse. The services were delayed until things were arranged; but the next day the stove was repaired."

"Three Links of a Life," "The Christmas Baby" and "The Key to Thomas's Heart," the last named a tribute to the undying influence of a mother's love—the most priceless treasure of those who have it—are among the best in the book. While of unequal merit, they rivet the attention by the combined alternation of humor and pathos, of tenderness and grotesqueness; a *sine qua non* in such compositions.

In 1876 Carleton published, through the Harper's "Young Folks' Centennial Rhymes," a volume of juvenile verse which, as Trowbridge correctly observes, "bears evidence of having been written in haste." Its sale, too, was nowhere commensurate with his two previous books. Among his most lasting impressions of the Centennial year was his meeting with Walt Whitman. While visiting the Exposition, Carleton, with a friend, on October 31, went over to Camden, New Jersey, to call upon "the good, gray-haired poet." They had little difficulty in finding the house, one "of a block of fine brick residences."

Carleton's account of the interview, as recorded in his note-book reads: "A middle-aged man came to the door, who it seems was Walt's brother, and who in reply to my inquiry if Mr. Walt Whitman was at home replied, 'I guess so. Walt,' he called upstairs, 'come down here. Oh,

you are coming down. All right.' We waited in the parlor some minutes, and then Walt slowly descended the stairs. What we saw was a tall, gray-haired, gray-bearded man, looking fully sixty years old, dressed in gray, with a slouch gray hat on, and a shawl on his arm. He was evidently just starting out on some short journey. He, however, gave us half an hour's talk, and then came back with us to Philadelphia. . . . He was a cordial host, and a good talker—although a very slow, sententious and deliberate one. His words seemed farther apart than his ideas; he wasted no time on small matters—or at least what he would consider as such. But any subject of humanity toward one's fellow-men easily took first place in his estimation—however small in the general estimation the circumstances connected with it. . . . I asked him if he was going to hear Martin Farquhar Tupper read Thursday night (the interview took place on a Tuesday). 'No,' he replied, 'I do not consider Tupper as amounting to anything. I would not go across the road to hear him read. Oh, he's a kind o' goody critter, but then I don't care about hearing him read.' He said Joaquin Miller came over there frequently. 'I don't read much of his writings,' he said, 'but I kind o' like him as a man. He's what some might call affected, but it seems to be natural with him, and I think he's quite manly.' . . . 'Who does your publishing?' I inquired, knowing, I am sorry to say, all the while that no publisher would assume the responsibility of doing it. 'Oh, I do it myself,' he replied. 'That is, I get my printing done in New York. The publishers won't see me. There was never but one publisher who would take hold of my works, and he busted' (with a chuckle). . . . During the conversation the matter of autographs was men-

tioned, and the inquiry made if he, like many others with whose names the world is familiar, did not get a good many requests for his 'hand-write.' I happened to remember just then (although not caring to tell it) the experience with him of a friend of mine—a prominent editor. 'How did you come out?' I asked. 'Walt simply beamed on me—so sweetly—and shook his head,' was my friend's mournful answer. But now he was furnishing them 'hand over fist' —by mail, personally—anyway you happened to want them —for a dollar each! This appeared even a little too thrifty at first: till it was explained that the money invariably went to a pet charity of the poet, where it was needed very much. 'Any one's autograph is worth a dollar if its worth anything,' he chuckled, 'and it's a pleasure to have mine going round doing good.' . . . The Quaker cleanness pervaded everything about Walt Whitman, including his clothes, which when I saw him were always of the conventional gray. His manner was contemplative, as if everything he saw suggested deep thought. He seemed so earnest in trying to understand the language of nature that he had little leisure for the commonplace events around him."

This visit to Walt Whitman is typical of many others that Carleton made in the earlier part of his life. In those days "Little Journeys" to literary and historical shrines, both in America and in Europe, were with him a passion; some of these were interestingly recorded in his note-books; others were elaborated into sketches and published in current periodicals. Many of his contemporaries he came to know personally; and he took a justifiable pride in his autographed presentation volumes and portraits from authors and others whose fame extended throughout the world.

There is no direct evidence, so far as we know, of intimate friendship with Emerson, Lowell, Longfellow or Holmes, yet he had an acquaintanceship with each of them. With Whittier, however, he was on terms of close friendship. In a copy "At Sundown," of which there were only fifty privately printed, was inscribed: "To Will Carleton—It gives me great pleasure to send thee this little token of my esteem and admiration of thy writings. From John G. Whittier."

Carleton's feeling toward the "Quaker Poet" is admirably presented in his "Ode to Whittier," which was read at a celebration given by the city of Haverhill. The following stanza may serve as a specimen of its quality:

"If Honesty, Humanity, and Truth
Have laid the solid stepping-stones of Youth,
If they have smiled upon a Summer-time,
And strewed with flowers the pathway of a prime,
If tenderly they have bent down and kissed
A toil-worn brow amid the Autumn mist,
If they have decked, with e'er-increasing glow,
Unsullied drifts of Manhood's purest snow,
If every action Memory leads to mind,
Has been a free help-offering to mankind,
Until the good man's very form and face
Becomes a benediction to his race,
Then let the world take cheer;
But when into that life of goodly fame
Creeps Genius, with its ne'er extinguished flame,
Till every thought reverberates afar,
And every word throws radiance like a star,
And Honor's torch lights up his every hour,
And the whole world admits a master's power,
When every moon has listened, fondly long,
To the sweet cadence of another song,
And each sun's golden finger has thrown bare
The mighty thoughts that made their ambush there,

Then reverence must appear;
Then the proud earth its wrinkled hand must raise,
And crown the singer with its choicest bays;
And so, to-day, we ask the world to praise
Our good and grand Whittier.

In the notes which followed the publication of this poem in *Every Where* for January, 1908, the author speaks of a particular pilgrimage that he made to Haverhill when hundreds of Whittier's admirers gathered to celebrate one of his birthdays. "Among the most distinguished visitors," says Carleton, "was Charles Carleton Coffin, the great war correspondent, and author of many historical works—himself since gone on into the great hereafter. He had with him the key to a Richmond slave-prison, which he had wrenched from its lock and brought to Whittier, who directed that it should be returned to Mr. Coffin after his (Whittier's) death. After detailing this circumstance, the key was hung over the kitchen fireplace, on the nail where the bull's eye watch is mentioned as hanging in 'Snow Bound.'"

The mood of unqualified eulogy, such, for example, as we find in the Whittier ode, is indeed rare with Carleton. He was a good admirer, but seldom a zealous one. As a rule he was not predisposed to comment on the mediocrities of others, though he never hesitated, when importuned, to give his opinion as to the abilities of his contemporaries. He once declared that he preferred personally "kind criticism to high praise"; yet he was naturally gratified when his own work received favorable recognition. Nor was he insensible to the honors that he received from time to time. On one occasion, upon leaving the platform after an evening's lecture, he was accosted by a kind, shabbily dressed old lady who asked if she might have the handkerchief

which he had used that evening. "Why, what on earth do you want that for?" inquired Carleton. "I am very poor, Mr. Carleton," she said, "and if you give me that handkerchief, I think I can live on it a year." Later the poet learned that she had embroidered his name on it, and in raffling it off had been able to realize several hundred dollars, enough to sustain her for a year.

Another not infrequent honor came in the form of parents naming a child after him. In answer to a request to stand as Godfather to an infant, Carleton writes: "Yours of the second is received, announcing that you've named the boy after me. I accept the responsibility, and will gladly stand Godfather to the innocent newcomer. Give him my regards, and tell him I want his picture and autograph as soon as he can make up his mind to be 'shadowed.' Tell him to be a grand old boy; to love his mother tenderly and gallantly; to respect and fraternize with his father; and to be so much of a man that the old Will will be proud of him. With respect, yours truly, Will Carleton."

In the same month in which this letter was written (February, 1877) Carleton received from his old teacher at Hillsdale College, President Edwin B. Fairfield, an unexpected honor in the shape of a proffered Professorship of Rhetoric and English literature, in the University of Nebraska, at a salary of fifteen hundred dollars. Carleton apparently was in a receptive mood. After some delay, however, the Regents of the State, much to the regret of President Fairfield, who seems to have been under the impression that his candidate would be chosen, selected a Harvard man, because it was thought to be good policy to take a New Englander, as no member of the present faculty came from farther East than Pennsylvania.

In a letter of March 6 of the following year (1878) Carleton writes of a prospective trip to Europe. He was to sail from New York in the early part of June for Queenstown, ramble through Ireland, south through Scotland, east and west through England, spend two or three weeks at Paris, and come home. From his diary it is clear that he followed this itinerary in all its essentials. His literary activity during this period, however, was very slight, though incidents which occurred on the trip occasionally suggested themes for future work, as, for example, his poem "The Siege of Londonderry," which grew out of references jotted down in his note-book at the time of his moonlight peregrinations around the ancient walls of the Irish city, and which years later was published in the *Youth's Companion.* At Queenstown Carleton purchased the first Edition (1671) of Milton's "Paradise Regained," and other rare volumes; his intense interest in Burns led him to call when at Ayr on the Scotch poet's two surviving nieces, of whom he wrote most interestingly. From his diary we are amused over many of his comments and observations; yet they do not differ materially from other keen observers who have gone over much the same ground. In the fall of 1878 he was back in America, making arrangements to settle with his mother in Boston, where, as he says, he was to "lecture about half the time, and live the other half with books and opportunities." He was afraid that his mother, being elderly, might get home-sick, or that the climate might not, as he expressed it in a letter to a cousin, "exert itself to please her." "I have written her about it," he continues, "and she says, 'As I write, it seems to me I should like it; but can't say how it would turn out until after trying it.' Isn't that kind o' good and sen-

sible? As I write, it seems to me that, although she is not as demonstrative and gushing as the average woman of my choice, yet she is the dearest old mother I ever had, or ever want. She shall go to Boston with me, if she will, and then have a railroad ticket home every time she gets blue."

## CHAPTER VII

### LECTURER AND EDITOR

ON his return to America, in the fall of 1878, Carleton, with an intensified love of city life, found his establishment at Boston very much to his taste. Typically a Western product, with a rugged mentality and an initiative which by inheritance belongs to that section of the country, he was devoted to the haunts and rural scenes of his native soil, and naturally was loath to leave them. But, having become convinced that the opportunities of the East were superior to those of the West, he was not of the kind to allow sentiment to deter him from the more alluring path to success. A city so full of literary and historical interest as Boston had indeed much to offer; and it may be said that Carleton was not remiss in drinking at all of the available fountains of inspiration.

But such spells of educational leisure, so to speak, were not of long duration. His literary output at this time was perhaps as prolific as formerly. Certainly some of his most popular compositions were written while he was domiciled at Boston. It is to be regretted that Carleton did not chronologically record the first appearance or date of composition of his various poems. We know, however, that among those written during this period—1878-1882—were "The First Settler's Story," "Our Traveled Parson" and "The Lightning-rod Dispenser." These, with others, such as "Eliphalet Chapin's Wedding," "The Second Settler's Story," "The Death-Bridge of the Tay," "Song of the Reaper" and "The Tramp's Story," were published in "Farm Festivals," a volume issued in 1881. The next year

the Harpers brought out an enlarged edition of "Farm Ballads." The original 1873 edition contained but twenty-three poems; that of 1882, some ten additional selections, thus "bringing it up in size," as Carleton says in a revised Preface, "to other members of the Farm Series." One of the newly incorporated poems which attracted considerable notice at the time began with the words reported to have been exclaimed by the mother of President Garfield, upon hearing of his attempted assassination:

"Why should they kill my baby?—for he seems the same to me
As when, in the morning twilight, I tossed him on my knee."

There begins to appear in Carleton's writings at this period a perceptible change of theme, perhaps preparatory to his City Series. While still the "Poet of the Natural Man," he endeavors to interpret the scenes and thoughts of urban life, rather than of the fields and of the rural firesides, whose propinquity to nature had at first so deeply awakened him. In thus scattering his powers by going outside of the field which he almost alone had occupied, his verses become less dramatic and more artificial; in other words, more objective, and less subjective. But whether interpreting rural or cosmopolite life, Carleton remained near to the pulse of humanity. The touch of sympathy, the tear drop, and the sense of humor, were to him more potent than all the formulated theories of scientific prosodians. The lack of this heart extroversion, so to speak, was the quintessence of his criticism of Stoddard's verse. "Stoddard," says Carleton, in one of his note-books, "is almost entirely objective—scarcely ever getting down to anything below the senses. He is, indeed, almost entirely sensual. His figures are all drawn from the senses; he has no dra-

matic power, no attempt at humor, seldom any pathos, and then not deep or sincere. There is no honesty or reality in him, except when he describes some old scene like 'The Old Mill' or 'The Blacksmith Shop.'" While too biased a judgment, it shows the length that Carleton would go in his denunciation of what he conceived to be a misconceived poetic spirit. Closely akin to this was his love of the multitude, which was as pronounced as was the contempt of the same in Carlyle. Perhaps it was nowhere better exemplified than in the tender little offering "Let the Cloth Be White," now found in "City Ballads."

Such notes of sympathy and spiritual insight, which are contained for example in the above-mentioned poem, inspired people of all classes to write Carleton thanking him for the good his lines had done them; among his files of correspondence there are scores of such letters. "You are too kind," he writes in response to one such communication, "in the mention of my poor rhymes. But allow me to say, my dear friend, that while I am proud that you like them, I am more than proud—happy, to know that they have brought you a single pleasure or soothed a single pain. Not your praise, but your sympathy and appreciation, incites me to further efforts."

In 1882, the year of his marriage to Adora Niles (Goodell), Carleton moved from Boston to Brooklyn, N. Y., which was to be his home for the rest of his life. In a letter to a friend dated November 3d of that year, he asks that his books and other "impediments" be boxed up and sent to his new home at 16 Fort Greene Place. "You have been kind, kinder, kindest," he goes on to write, "to keep 'em all for me, and my heart goes West in Thankfulness to the dear friend who has so patiently and lov-

ingly borne with the various irregularities of my nature, and done for and with me as for and with a favorite brother. . . . Mother is due in a few days, and I'm going to try for the first time in my life to pass a winter in a good staid family-man sort of way. Only, you know, when you come down (as come you must, if I have to send an attachment after you) we'll have good old bachelor times, roaming about the streets of New York, Brooklyn and adjacent territory. We will hear Beecher, Talmage, Pentecost, etc., etc., to say nothing about other dramatic attractions."

From now on Carleton's lectures seemed to increase in popularity. From his college days it will be remembered this form of literary work had been not only a source of revenue, but a means of intellectual stimulus. His first actual lecture-reading began in his junior year at college, the facts of which will bear a word: it was vacation time and money was required to enable him to complete his collegiate course. He had written a political campaign poem entitled "Fax," and decided to try its effect upon an audience. He announced his own appearance in a distant town by huge posters which he printed with a paint brush on the back of regular size cuts of a cheap grade of wall paper, especially purchased for the occasion. His handful of hearers are said to have remained near the door so as to slip out quietly if the reading proved to be uninteresting. Instead, they not only remained, but suggested at the close of the recital that the young entertainer repeat his reading the following evening in a church to a much more representative audience, which he did, earning in this way in the various near-by communities enough money to meet his senior year college expenses.

After his graduation, and while employed on *The Western Rural,* of Chicago, Carleton won quite a local reputation as a reciter for "Moody's Ragamuffins." Dwight L. Moody, then just in the first flush of his great evangelical work, was in the habit of gathering large bodies of newsboys, bootblacks, or whoever would come, as Carleton says, and entertaining them with music and readings. Before this band of uncouth youths Carleton appeared one evening, and so completely captivated them that they would accept nobody else that evening, or in fact for many evenings to come. Indeed, they would often urge him to recite poem after poem until, becoming so exhausted, he was compelled to escape through a side door. He once said that although he had since "read before the best blood and brain of the world," nothing ever came so near turning his head as this magnetic submission of a class of hearers, inclined to be the most critical of all audiences.

From now on public readings added materially to his income; by 1871, when only twenty-six years of age, as we have already observed, he was on the lecture platform on an average of five nights a week. In an early letter he writes of farmers driving ten and twelve miles to hear him, and of the streets being lined with teams from the country. Thus season after season, for over forty years, up and down the land he went, into Canada and through Europe, where he was nearly as popular as in the United States, giving "The Chain of Success," "Written and Unwritten Poetry," "The Drama of Life," "Every Man a Poet," to mention only a few of his subjects. Here was a lecture and recital combined: the lecture was didactic, but never prosy; the recital, an interpretation of the author's own ballads. Some of his more popular poetical intersper-

sions in his lectures were "Over the Hill to the Poor House," "The First Settler's Story," "Gone With a Handsomer Man," "Picnic Sam," "Out of the Old House, Nancy," "Betsey and I Are Out" and "Uncle Sammy." He would, morevoer, often reserve for a time a ballad exclusively for public rendition, as, for example, "The New Church Organ." It later appeared in "Our Fireside Friend" and was republished in "Farm Ballads."

Having a most retentive memory, Carleton would sometimes change his lectures after reaching the platform; and being never lost for speech his extemporaneous utterances often enhanced the effect of his lecture. On one occasion, when he had prepared an elaborate poem as part of the exercises at the dedication of a soldier's monument, a severe electric storm prevented him from delivering it at the appointed hour. Taking cognizance of the incident, and looking up at the clear blue sky of the afternoon, with the warm rays of the sun shining upon the patriots' graves, he closed the recitation of his original poem with this improvision:

> "And as the clouds that vexed the morning's sky,
> Have vanished like a dream before the eye,
> And as above this weeping summer day,
> God, smiling, bent and kissed her tears away,
> So He will lift grief's clouds around us spread,
> And smiles, e'en now, above our patriot dead."

which so carried away his hearers that they somewhat surprised the poet by assuring him, after the exercises, that these last lines were "worth all the rest of the poem."

Like all public lecturers, Carleton's experiences were many and varied; some were humorous, some thrilling. Having returned from a Chautauqua trip to Illinois, in August,

1909, he writes of a series of adventures not down on the programme. "Was held up by a railroad wreck just ahead of me," he says, "then started for destination by automobile; gasoline stopped serving when stranded ten miles away from the city in which I was to lecture. Went into a farm-house to telephone ahead. A woman was making large cookies, each about as wide as a saucer. I recollected all at once that I had had no dinner, so begged for some of the cookies, and was told amiably, but inexorably, that I could have just one, as she was cooking for threshers. I tried hard to get another for the chauffeur, but failed. I divided with him, however, then went on again at about thirty miles per hour when we soon ran against an obstruction that came within an ace of making the machine turn a complete summersault. Finally proceeded again, reflecting how I might have lost my life and a two hundred and fifty dollar fee. Had just time to don a white vest and black coat and face several thousand people."

On another occasion Carleton was on his way to Mansfield, Pennsylvania. Arriving at Elmira, he was told that the Mansfield train had gone, in fact was some few miles down the line. He immediately chartered a special engine which chanced to be already steamed up in the yard of the depot. Within less than five minutes he was on his way in pursuit of the train. The news of the adventure is said to have spread rapidly, and soon the people along the route hurried to station platforms, only to catch a glimpse of smoke and flame as the engine rushed past. After a most exciting race, the train was overtaken. The lecturer quickly boarded the train, sent the engine back, and reached the hall just in time to give his recital.

But by his own admission, Carleton often grew weary of the excitement and the fatigue of travel. "Thank heavens," he writes so early as 1879, "there are only three weeks left of my roaming slavery, and then the railroads that know me shall know me no more for a long time. I am going to settle down cozily with my honored maternal relative, and read and dream." Indeed he would often regret that his lecture engagements took him so much away from home and friends. Yet, when asked on one occasion whether he ever got home-sick, he replied that he did, but had "traveled too much in one place and another not to have learned that one carries much of his world with him."

To go back and take up the thread of the narrative: Carleton's life in Brooklyn was naturally more domestic than it had been in Boston; otherwise, it was little varied, for between his lectures and writings he led much the same sort of simple, but busy, life. In the summer of 1884, with Mrs. Carleton, he sailed a second time for Europe. In the British Isles he went over much the same ground as on his former trip, though this time as a public lecturer, instead of as a private tourist. His tour of the Continent, however, was more extensive, visiting Paris, Berne, Turin, Milan, Venice, Rome and Naples. These cities were visited before commencing his lecture itinerary, which was opened on October first at Morley, England, before a packed house in St. Mary's Congregational Church. As he passed through the United Kingdom, he was entertained and toasted by the Lord Mayor of London and other officials and celebrities until his trip was said to be "more like a continuous ovation than a mere lecture-tour." Of the recital at the Nottingham Institute, where an audience of fifteen hundred persons filled the lecture hall, "The Guard-

ian" had this to say: "It was a strange and interesting effort, a poetical monologue, judiciously interspersed with delightful recitations of beautiful poems, which went straight to the heart. Jest and earnest, gayety and gravity, were deeply interwoven, laughter and tears alternated for the mastery, people being compelled to laugh through their tears and cry in the midst of their laughter." *The Bradford Observer* spoke of the lecture at Saltaire as one "of great originality—the monologue being in verse of varying meter, in accordance with the varying phases of his subject, now slyly satirical in treatment, now tenderly pathetic, now racily humorous, and now vigorously dramatic. His poetic illustrations were delivered with great power." Other Journals were as complimentary.

Such notices of appreciation, together with flattering personal greetings which he received, naturally pleased Carleton, who took occasion at one of the last dinners given in his honor to thus close his response to the formal welcome of the toastmaster: "The furnace fires are already lighted and the sails already set that shall hurry me away from this land, where I have been made to feel so much at home; but as I journey to the westward—as every vibration of the engine says 'Home, home, home'—as it would to you if you were sailing eastward—I shall drag behind me a lengthening chain. It will be a golden one; and upon it will glisten the gems of memory. There will be the emerald to remind me of the green hills, valleys and trees of your beautiful island (loud cheers); there will be the sapphire, which with its clear blue will echo the yearning of my heart not to be forgotten; there will be pearls and rubies, suggestive of the grand and beautiful women I have met within your borders; and there will be diamonds that

will represent the brilliant worth and endurance of our noble old Anglo-Saxon race. Brothers, I thank you with my tongue; I thank you more with my heart."

The year after Carleton's return from Europe (1885) "City Ballads," the first volume of his city series, was published. It contained such selections as "Farmer Stebbins on Rollers," "Flash: The Fireman's Story," "The Dead Stowaway," and the other Farmer Stebbins verses, for each of which he received one hundred dollars; but, while it proved on the whole to be more popular than the two succeeding volumes, "City Legends" and "City Festivals," which were published in 1889 and 1892, respectively, the sales were considerably below "Farm Festivals," the least popular of the Farm series.

In September, 1894, Carleton founded his magazine, *Every Where,* a sixteen-page monthly periodical devoted to poems, short stories and timely topics. As we have already seen, he had had some experience in newspaper work, and back in the early seventies had contemplated starting a monthly publication. Carleton had always had an unerring aptitude for news, and in this journalistic venture it is evident that his aim was to combine the news of the month, together with such literary articles and poems which would create a circulation commensurate with his own illimitable popularity. But, while the magazine grew in size and worth, it took on no such ecumenic propositions. He had his own little peculiarities as to how it should be edited, as, for example, in his frequent use of the colon. He never allowed, moreover, the article "the" to precede the name "United States." In an editorial on the subject, he wrote: "This is a departure; but we consider it as a sensible and logical one. Time was when Michigan was

referred to as The Michigan, Ohio as The Ohio, etc., etc.; but no one at present thinks of using that absurd method in mentioning them. United States is a nation; the United States are its different divisions. It would be just as reasonable to say, The England, The France, or The China, as it is to use the term now generally employed. The spirit of the age is condensation; and this is in accordance."

To the admirers of Carleton, and, such were legion, the magazine was a welcome visitor. Throughout its life of eighteen years, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Margaret E. Sangster, Kate Upson Clark and others of lesser prominence contributed to its pages; but the editor was its chief contributor. Much appeared by Carleton over sundry nom de plumes, the more important of which were short stories. Before the magazine was launched two of his short stories —"The Vestal Virgin" and "The Old Infant"—had been published, and it may be said that in this field of literature he displayed the same lucid discernment into human nature as in his poems. In 1896 seven of his short stories were collected into a volume, and published by the Harpers. Other stories from time to time appeared and were received with favor, but with none of that striking success which greeted his poetry.

The year preceding the publication of "The Old Infant, and Other Stories," the Harpers issued "Rhymes of Our Planet." In this volume of verse appears some of the most characteristic poems of Carleton's later years. This was followed in 1902 by "Songs of Two Centuries."

## CHAPTER VIII

### LAST YEARS

THE last years of Carleton's life were perhaps as full of work as any of his career. The hand of time dealt very lightly with him; and he always was radiant with new enterprises. Yet no man enjoyed the recreations of life better than he and few indulged in them more light-heartedly. When not on a lecture tour, or attending some special function, at which he frequently recited an original poem, or delivered an address, Carleton's daily routine would be something like this: his mornings were spent in his study, provided he felt inclined to arise at all in the forenoon, because often he followed the custom of Victor Hugo or Mark Twain, both of whom he greatly admired, and wrote in bed. The afternoons would be given over to business details at his New York office in Nassau Street, and usually he would spend a little time at his printing establishment over in Vandewater Street. In the evenings he would read, receive friends, or fulfil some engagement, as the occasion required.

In 1908 Carleton was asked by the Moffat, Yard Publishing Company to write a poem to correspond with certain illustrations which had already been made for a poetical production which was to have been written by James Whitcomb Riley; for obvious reasons the poem never materialized. Carleton responded by writing "In Old School Days," of which Hudson Maxim wrote, in a letter to the poet: "Shall I say that the 'Old School Days' have come to hand, or that they have returned? 'In Old School Days' is one of the best things you ever did—one of the best

things anybody ever did. You have a happier faculty than almost any other poet of harnessing the heart up to your work. You have builded your old red school-house in verse with bricks of poetry. It is full of good lines—some great poetic lines." Indeed so successful was this little book that soon after its publication the supply was exhausted. In the same year Moffat, Yard and Company published "Drifted In," a book replete with quaint philosophy, wit and sentiment. There is also in this volume an exhibition of that variety of thought and wholesome wisdom of which Carleton's poems are so generously endowed.

Four years later "A Thousand More Verses" was published by the Every Where Publishing Company, of which Carleton was President and Treasurer. This was to be his last volume of poems, though there were no signs that his facile pen was so soon to be laid aside. Indeed only a few nights before his fatal illness he was heard in public with all that effective skill and facial fascination so peculiarly characteristic of the man. But the end was near. In the early part of December, 1912, Carleton started out on an extensive lecture tour. He was soon taken ill with bronchitis, but refused at first to abandon his trip. After a few days, however, he grew worse, and returned home; but even then he was not considered dangerously ill. Refusing to remain in bed, he in all probability took more cold by being about the house; for bronchial pneumonia presently set in. On the seventeenth of December, though in a very weak condition, he dictated and signed his will; on the eighteenth, still perfectly conscious, he went into a coma. Now and then he would rally, and converse with his nephew and the nurse; but before the day was over,

without a word or a struggle, Will Carleton had entered upon his last sleep.

Impressive Masonic funeral services were held in his Greene Avenue home[1] on the evening of Friday, the twentieth; and the following morning they took him out to Greenwood, and laid him by the side of his wife. Here he rests near those whose lives, like his own, had helped in one way or another to lift the burdens of life, and make comradeship the more wholesome. The sweet Cary singers —Alice and Phoebe—sleep not far away. In the adjourning plot lies Henry George, and only a little farther down the hill to the right one may look upon the monument of, perhaps, America's greatest pulpit orator—Carleton's friend and admirer—Henry Ward Beecher.

[1] Carleton had lived for the past eight years at 444 Greene Avenue, to which he moved shortly after Mrs. Carleton's death. Prior to this their home had been for years only a few doors away in the same avenue, No. 420. He rented both houses; but usually spent the summers when Mrs. Carleton was alive in the White Mountains.

## CHAPTER IX

### CHARACTERISTICS AND PERSONAL PREFERENCES AS REFLECTED IN HIS LETTERS

IN the preceding chapters the writer has endeavored to present the salient points of the external facts of Carleton's life with a degree of continuity. Before commenting briefly upon his poetry, there remains to give a more intimate portrait of the man; and in recording his chief characteristics and personal preferences, as these are reflected for the most part in his letters, we have not only a revelation of character, but a fresh insight into the man's personality.

As we look back over Carleton's life, his memory does not seem to evoke a genuine personal affection. Admiration of his genius hardly creates adoration of the man. In him there was no wistful sensibility such as one discerns, for example, in Drake, whose very inconsolable spirit was an overture of sympathy. Yet Carleton sustained griefs, like Drake, which penetrated to the very roots of his being, and, while the wounds did not heal readily, there were no outward signs of plunging into the depths of depression; no apparent changes in the routine of life; no fruitless self-absorbtion. The reason lies probably in the self-sufficiency which dominated his entire career, and in the fact also that his work is biographical, rather than autobiographical. Success had come early; in his quest of literary preferment he never was compelled to peddle his poetical wares; in cultivating the lecture field he was no less fortunate. He never had any misgivings about his

mission in life; he went about his work as business-like, if not so methodical, as a merchant would conduct his shop. He had as much money as he needed; did not live extravagantly, so far as his personal tastes were concerned; enjoyed excellent health; was passionately interested in people; was never an animated conversationalist, but always very individualistic in his talk and manner. Tall of stature, Carleton impressed one as physically vigorous. His devotion to mountain climbing, love of walking, and fondness of outdoor life tended to keep him in perfect health. He had a peculiar way of shaking one's hand, which was at once odd and disappointing. In greeting a friend he would look steadily ahead for a moment, as if to take his aim, advance rapidly forward, lithe of step, with right hand extended, until he was a foot away, when he would look off to one side and catch hold of his guest's hand with an infirm grip.

But in Carleton this did not indicate any lack of wholeheartiness. He had a strong impulse to be of service to his fellow-men; this was seen no less in the man than in his poetry. Perhaps no feature of his generous nature was more touching than in the liberality which took the form of both sympathy and material aid toward those of his fellow-craftsmen who had freely given, but meagerly received. Take, for example, the case of Fanny Crosby, the noted blind hymn writer. Living in one room, in a poor section of Brooklyn, Carleton discovered that while not in actual physical want, she was receiving in many instances only two dollars apiece for the hymns that were singing themselves into the hearts of thousands all over the world. He and Mrs. Carleton invited her frequently to their home; sometimes here, sometimes in her own small quar-

ters, or as Carleton once expressed it, "in a corner in some one else's home," he drew from her detached narratives of her life's story. These were afterward written out by Carleton and submitted to Miss Crosby. Securing her approval, he paid her at the rate of ten dollars an article, and published them in his magazine, *Every Where*. Some two years later Carleton suggested their being collected and issued in book form. When he asked her permission, offering her the same royalty as he was then receiving from *Harper's* for his own books, she replied with that perfect candor and generosity so characteristic of her that the articles were his property, as he had himself written them.

The book was eventually brought out at Carleton's expense and extensively advertised by him. Within eight months after its publication he was able to send Miss Crosby, in royalties and small donations, over $400. In order to push the sale of the book, he also undertook to personally conduct in churches, and before various religious organizations in different cities and States—paying his own railroad and hotel expenses—what were termed "Fanny Crosby Evenings," in which her hymns were sung, and an address delivered on "Fanny Crosby, as Girl and Woman." In this way a fresh interest in her noble work was constantly manifested. Not infrequently checks as high as fifty dollars from a single source would, through this means, be sent to Miss Crosby.

Carleton also was profoundly impressed with the Christian fortitude and innate patience which characterized the most unique life of Mollie Fancher, the Brooklyn invalid, who for over fifty years was confined to her bed. He often visited her and aided her materially. "As for Mollie," he writes to a friend in 1909, "she has constantly some new

suffering, added to the terrible one that has been constantly with her two and a quarter score of years, and compelled her to live in a tomb. She has now a visitation of inflammatory rheumatism, from which she is almost constantly in great pain. . . . She has rented the shop underneath her to a laundry, which gives a very pretty showing in the windows, and makes one wish that he were yet larger so he could exhibit still more starch when wearing a dress suit. It is a branch of another establishment, and perhaps sure pay of rent, though less than she had from the bakery. This, too, she misses from the heat it used to give her room, and from the lack of which she had some weeks ago an attack of pneumonia. We are trying to make it up with a gas stove, but the success of that is problematical, as there may be some fumes that will make it impossible to use the apparatus. I hope you will attempt the Carnegie enterprise as soon as you can. . . . I think, considering all Mollie has borne and the bravery with which she has met it, that she ought at least to have a share of the hero fund. Meanwhile, she will not allow any public demonstration in her favor, and there is nothing to do but for such of her friends as can afford it to send or leave her a five-, ten-, twenty-dollar bill now and then; for which she is always grateful, not in a mendicantish way, but as one who believes herself appreciated and approved by those who know her best and the lessons she is giving mankind in steadfast patience and womanly fortitude."

His charitable work also extended to public institutions. He was greatly interested in the Brooklyn Home for Consumptives, and was most untiring in his efforts in its behalf. "The Hectic Ghost," a poem of seven stanzas, writ-

ten in couplets, was composed especially to help raise a fund in aid of this institution; and it was only one of many gratuitous acts he did for this worthy charity over a period of many years. Another charity in which Carleton took a deep interest was the Mary A. Fisher Home for poor authors and artists, located at Tenafly, New Jersey. He would often arrange Author's Readings at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, and invite distinguished litterateurs whom he personally knew to aid him in helping those of their fellow-artists who had been less fortunate. Mark Twain, Hamilton Wright Mabie, George Cary Eggleston, Marion Harland, Julius Chambers and Andrew Carnegie were among those who readily responded to Carleton's call to aid him in this work. Frequently he would drop in some penal institution, and give the boys a selection or so from his own works; these little visits were begun in early manhood, for in acknowledging a report of the Prison Inspectors of the State of Michigan for the year 1872, he writes: "I wish to thank you for the kind reference which your special report contains of myself. It is, as I have often said to you, a comfort to me and an incentive to future efforts, to know that my writings can for a moment cheer the hearts or interest the minds of the unfortunate."

Such accounts of his benevolences as these indicate purely the magnanimity of the man. The same spirit was manifested in other ways, perhaps more intimately, though expressed more unconventionally. To a well-stored and active mind like Carleton's *ennui* is the old enemy; so when not occupied with pressing work, he would often turn to the simplest, in some instances the most trifling amusements, out of which he seemed to find pleasure. Only a few weeks before his death the writer found him playing

tag around the room of his New York office with one of his young lady employees. His great interest in them, however, won him their loyalty. If a celebrity chanced to be calling on him at his office, Carleton would give, with perfect unconcern, a certain signal, the meaning of which was to have all of the employees group themselves in an adjoining room, when Carleton would invite the guest to accompany him into the next office to view some new interesting feature of New York from a particular window. Upon reaching the room they would find an audience of young ladies prepared to listen to a ten-minute talk from the guest. While a bit disconcerting, it was one of Carleton's good-humored ways of bringing about entertainment to himself and others, and at the same time giving instruction to those whom he employed.

Carleton enjoyed no less to encourage and help children, though it may be said he was not a lover of them like Lewis Carroll, or our own Eugene Field. On one occasion the writer observed him writing in one of his books which he afterward handed to a clerk to be sent away. When he had finished the inscription he looked up and remarked: "I am sending this to a little girl in Canada." This is how it had come about: Not long since, when on a lecture tour in the Dominion, he was riding in an automobile when the machine broke down. The accident happened on a country road, and Carleton said that he would walk along, and, when it was repaired, the car could overtake him. He had not gone far when he noticed a child picking strawberries by the roadside. Stopping, he asked to buy some of the berries, which she gladly consented to sell. As they sat down on a stone wall by the road, the poet inquired about her school, and if any subject came

particularly hard, whereupon she told him that arithmetic was especially difficult for her. He volunteered to assist her in working out some examples, at the conclusion of which she declared that never before had she understood percentage so well. They finally parted without the little girl knowing the name of the distinguished stranger.

This interest in the welfare of others was indeed very characteristic of Carleton. He also was imbued with the spirit of comradeship. While he would banter his friends sometimes rudely, his affection for them was only less sincere and ardent than his affection for his family. The letters bring out this characteristic very strikingly. "I have, this morning," he writes to his friend, Charles S. Bentley, in October, 1872, "to while away a dismal hour, been reading "The Angel of the Depot, or, What Came of a Kiss," by Neal Neff. You will recognize it when I remind you of our reading it on a Sunday morn on the piazza. Chas, I would give a V to read it over with you again. It can't be beaten—in its line. That grand scheme we concocted, you remember, to read the same books? Well, I am ahead of you on some of 'em, perhaps. You will immediately proceed to peruse "The Marble Prophecy," by Dr. Holland; "The Pennsylvania Pilgrim," by John G. Whittier, and "The Golden Legend" (not foot), by Hank Longfellow, and Robbin's "Ancient History." Meanwhile, I'm going to read Blackstone—not for business, but for sport." . . . Thirty-seven years later to the same correspondent he writes: "The Alfred David was received, but with no William. It seemeth to me that all these things you do for me should get guerdon. Specify how much. Am glad and have been glad each day and hour, anent the breezy uplift of which you speak. Am also glad that you liked

me well enough to tell me about it soon. Shall listen to more, with eagerness. Journey home was sans detail, beyond occasional rapping of sconce against headboard of berth, horizontal dancing along the lake, the canal, the Mohawk, and the Hudson; then shifting of toes under berth while dressing, to keep some fool from treading on them; then a lonely breakfast in library car; and then 'All out for New York!'—where found usual pleasures, usual pains, usual hard work, usual night-sleeps in own bed, with no jiggles or strange footsteps apparent. Have been reading the "Knickerbocker History of New York" again. Do you realize the way-down-deep chuckle-humor there is in that wonderful book? The idea is so grotesque of Peter Stuyvesant's marching his miltia up and down the streets of New Amsterdam all day, and then camping them in the vicinity; and then, a hard rain coming up during the night, finding himself at sunrise alone with his trumpeter—every mother's son of the rank and file having scampered for home! That was a great Irving. . . . Write me a long Bentleyonian letter, and tell O. S. that there is no limit to the desire that I have for hearing from him."

The letters show also that Carleton dwelt much upon the thought of his mother; to the end of her life he was constant in his love and care of her. The following incident may be cited as an example of her natural pride in his gifts: Soon after Carleton had started on his first extended reading-tour, a good old lady who had known him all his life chanced to call upon his mother. "What is Will doing nowadays?" she soon inquired. Mrs. Carleton, a woman of few words, informed her good neighbor that her son was reciting his poems in public. "I shouldn't think *that* would be much of a business," said the old lady, "you'd

better have him come home and work on the railroad with my son, Alva. He gets a dollar a day, rain or shine. What does Will get?" "Only a hundred dollars a night," replied Mrs. Carleton, quietly, and went on with her knitting, whereupon the visitor looked greatly surprised, and quickly changed the topic.

With all of Carleton's natural affection, it is rather surprising that in early manhood he never thought seriously of marriage. It cannot be said, however, that he looked with disfavor upon the union of two hearts: "the true love of one pure heart," he writes in 1872, to a friend who is about to be married, "is worth all the honor and fame and wealth in the world." But in the next sentence he frankly admits the reason of his own celibacy. "Don't think I am sentimental," he continues, "for I'm not. I go in for stamps, and for making people know I am alive as long as I am on terra firma. As for domestic life, I am not adapted to it, never expect it, and consequently do not allow myself to sigh for it."

Ten years later, however, we find him looking at matrimony differently. The old hallucination had completely disappeared, and in November, 1882, the year of his marriage,[1] he writes to a friend: "We are delightfully situated, on a retired, quiet, rather fashionable street, (16 Fort Green Place, Brooklyn, N. Y.), in a cozy brownstone front, with everything in good shape, and a splendid room for a study, a thing I haven't had for ever so long." Mrs. Carleton,—whose first husband was Dr. Goodell, a missionary to Karens, in Burmah, where he and their two little chil-

[1] Mr. Carleton was married to Mrs. Adora Niles Goodell March 2, 1882, at Roseville, N. J., by Rev. C. D. W. Bridgman, Pastor of Madison Avenue Baptist Church of New York.

dren died—was by the evidence of all who knew her a woman of rare charm and purity of soul. For over twenty years her bright, gentle, unselfish nature, exerted a benign influence on the poet's life. They were preparing to attend some function when she was stricken with apoplexy. On the night of her death, November 9, 1904, Carleton is said to have walked the streets of Brooklyn until early dawn, and when questioned on his return, not to have been able to say where he had been. But the letters are again the best index to his heart at this period. One may be quoted here as a type of many others: "Many thanks for your kind sympathy," he wrote to General Stuart L. Woodford; "such sorrows must be borne—men are bending under them every day—and I, who had been so mercifully exempt for year after year, could not but expect that the iron must some time enter my own soul. It was a terribly sudden, sudden thrust: but God and my other friends are helping me." At a "Valentine Breakfast," held in New York a short time after her death, the poet read some lines which very sweetly brought out the tender devotion in which he held her memory:

"I know not how these lines to send,
Dear soul that took the starward flight—
And yet our Past a hope doth lend
That thou canst read me as I write.
And if not so, thou yet wilt know
These whispers that are thine and mine:
For God hath ways to make it so—
And thou shalt be my valentine.

"But if by some good messenger
This world must seek thy cherished name,
Thy heart, I hope, will yet infer
Wherefrom the earthly message came:

Some little ways of thought or phrase—
  Some hidden thrill 'twixt line and line,
That we two knew in olden days—
  Will tell who wrote the valentine.

"Sweet one, they cannot make me fear
  That stately Heaven can check thy glee,
Or bar me from the comrade-cheer
  That made the earth like Heaven to me!
For e'en amid thy toil to rid
  Of pain and sin our suff'ring race,
Oft came the merry laugh unbid,
  That never lost its girlhood-grace.

Of Carleton's religious views, it is more difficult to speak. While cradled in Methodism, he never, so far as we know, connected himself with that, or any other evangelical creed. He once said that he saw good in all denominations. The religious element, however, was very strongly developed in his family; especially in his mother and wife, who were devout church members, the former belonging to the Methodist, the latter to the Baptist faith. "My sweet mother I used to think," said Carleton a few years before his death, "lived in two worlds at one time, here and in heaven. But her religion was cheery and helpful. Night after night she was with the sick—not as a trained nurse, except as love and duty and devotion trained her—not as a paid nurse, except as God was her paymaster." Though Christian precepts were not lacking in Carleton, they sometimes appeared in a different guise, which once caused one good brother to remark that were it not for one thing, the people among whom he lived would be more proud of him. "What is that?" inquired the poet. "Am I a drunkard?" "Oh, no." "Do I dissipate, in any way?" "Oh, no."

"Don't I always mind my own business?" "Certainly." "Don't I, contrary to the habits of poets of all ages and conditions, pay my debts?" "Oh, yes." "Then what's the matter?" "Well, it is not a matter of practice, at all; your life they have no fault to find with; but they think your theories are not correct. They mistrust you as an infidel." But from what we know of Carleton it is evident that he believed in deeds, rather than in words; that his writings evince deep moral and Christian convictions; and that while having a clear belief in God and the hereafter, he gave little consideration as to any precise conception of what lay beyond.

Yet to one who knew Carleton it is hard to avoid thinking that he failed in certain respects to fulfill the possibilities of his more wholesome nature. This view is especially forced upon us when we undertake to review the management of his finances, which discloses the least attractive side of his nature. Few poets ever commenced their literary life under more propitious skies than Carleton. Aside from the income from his poems and prose, for weeks, in the early seventies, when he was only blooming into fame, he was on the lecture platform, on an average of five nights out of every week, realizing from seventy-five to one hundred dollars an evening. For over forty years his lectures netted him a lucrative income. In the first two years after the publication of "Farm Ballads" in royalties alone he had received over eight thousand dollars, a sum which was enormously increased by the large sale of each one of his various other volumes. Money so honestly and so easily earned naturally led him to obtain as much as possible for his work. This is seen in his attitude toward editors: in submitting a poem for publication he invariably placed upon

it a market value; so rigidly did he adhere to his fixed price that he seldom could be induced to change it. He even went so far on one occasion as to donate a contribution rather than accept a figure lower than he had named. Having been offered $30.00 for "The Dead Stowaway"—a poem later published in "City Ballads"—after he had rated its value at $50.00, he promptly returned the check "not in sorrow or in anger, but because I don't feel that I can turn my soul wrong side out and pound it for a month for less than an even half hundred." He concludes by offering the poem as a gratuitous contribution.

This commercial attitude prompted inimical critics to speak sometimes of Carleton as "a money-making poet": when asked if he would not rather have his books salable than artistic, he remarked, characteristically, "I want my books to sell, for two reasons. First, so that what good there may be in them may do the greatest possible good; secondly, so that I may retain enough financial independence to enable me to write as I think and feel. The time was when a poet was kept so poor that he could not live, except with the kind permission of some earl or duke; the time has now come when the people are the lords, and they appreciate a writer who says what he thinks and expects them to pay him for his work, just as they would anybody. This is the only sense in which I can be called 'a money-making poet'."

But Carleton was not content to confine his efforts to lecturing and the writing of poetry. Since the days when he had eagerly tried to start a literary magazine at Detroit, the desire to be an editor and publisher had never entirely left him. In 1894, as we have seen, he established his magazine *Every Where*, the initial success of which was due,

perhaps, more to the reputation of its editor, than to any intrinsic merits of its own. There is no doubt, however, that *Every Where* in its early days was a commercial success. But later it was equally true that the revenue was not sufficient to sustain the business, as conducted. Two offices, one in Brooklyn, the other in New York, where more help than was required was employed, in addition to a well-equipped printing establishment, was as unnecessary as it was poor business management. Yet it accorded with Carleton's idea of outside display, all of which is admirably summed up in an anecdote which went the rounds of the press some years ago: one day Carleton appeared at his office with a new coat. He hung it up, but later it chanced to fall to the dusty floor. The office-boy, whose duties included the brushing of the editor's clothes, picked up the garment and helped Carleton put it on. Catching a glimpse of his own shabby appearance in a mirror, the poet exclaimed: "Boy! What do you mean by this? I come in here looking like a publisher and you'd send me out looking like an author."

But Carleton was self-willed. He was too confident in his own ability to admit of failure; it may even be questioned whether he considered that he had failed from a business point of view. This was because he knew that by drawing from private sources he was able to meet all pecuniary obligations. But the assignment of the Every Where Publishing Company, less than three months after his death, with liabilities in excess of assets, clearly shows how such a course almost completely depleted his own exchequer, without providing a fund to adequately care for the stockholders who had been led to believe in the soundness of the enterprise. If Carleton had lived we do not

doubt but that he would have found some way by which to remedy existing conditions; for his integrity as a man was as sterling as his wholesomeness as a poet. But to have allowed himself to get into such a position adds one more to the long list of literary workers and statesmen who ought never to have engaged in the avocation of business.

Yet the impression produced by the character and the genius of Carleton at his best is one of exceptional excellence. In one of the sentences of his lecture on "The Methods and Mission of Poetry," where he speaks of an author's communicating a depth of feeling to his readers, Carleton says that "no author can touch the heart of an audience, unless his own heart has first been touched." Or again in his lecture on "Burns," he says "No writer has ever made the world read him, unless he plucked his pen from the quivering wing of his brain, and before he wrote dipped it in the crimson ink of his own heart's blood. Burns could not have made the world weep, if his own eyes had not first been blinded with tears; he could not have made so much brain believe him, had not his own brain first believed so implicitly; he could never have thrilled generation after generation of his own race, if Heaven had not first thrilled him." In these passages we catch a glimpse of the man's inner self, and thus realize the more that there is a sentiment in humanity that makes men great.

Such then was Carleton: liberal, comradish, of keen perception; with a sympathy that was more helpful in deeds than in words; headstrong, exacting, emotional; with a catholicity of taste, and yet intellectually encumbered by prejudices; versatile, humorous, whimsical, with a look that was indeed interrogative, yet possessed with a cognizance of his own ability that was after all beautifully tempered by

a due appreciation of the elements of strength in his contemporaries. Like all humorists, he was sometimes an enigma to the casual observer, sometimes to his intimates, not infrequently to his critics. He also had a way which complicated the process of analysis; yet when traced to its source this subtlety, if subtlety it was, served only the purpose of the hour, and was not of lasting significance. Like Dickens, he was wont to reconnoiter amidst the haunts of men that he might the more truly interpret human nature; and his interest in humanity grew out of his desire to benefit humanity, and not to exploit its idiosyncrasies. No better testimony of this is needed than is found in the appeal which his homely creations inspired.

## CHAPTER X

### CARLETON'S POETRY

HOWEVER Carleton may have succeeded in impressing his versatility and personality upon his age, we think of him primarily as a poet: in spite of various avocations, the writing of poetry from the first was his real vocation. What is more extraordinary, when some of our earlier poets are taken into consideration, he relied on his verses for support. This was accomplished in a three-fold way. First, by selling his poems to magazines; secondly, using them as original material in public readings; thirdly, collecting them afterward into books, which met, as we have seen, with unprecedented sales. He was one of the first poets in this country to recite in public from his own works; and being essentially a poet of contemporary things, of local color as it were, many of his themes were suggested by thus coming so closely into contact with his fellowmen. He once said to his friend, Julius Chambers, that "the poet must know before he can imagine"; and no poet of modern times understood the common heart of humanity better than Will Carleton, and this was because he was studying it constantly. That he interpreted it so unerringly is proved by edition after edition of his Farm and City series which passed through the press and were greeted by an eager, loving constituency which numbered into thousands of readers.

The truth is that Carleton was thoroughly in tune with his age; his thought was never extraneous, and his muse never got away from the busy world of strife and of play, of which he was so much a part. Nature in all her beauty

and suggestiveness was only incidental to human nature in either her most sublime or more commonplace aspects. He had no inclination to invade the inner sanctuaries of an unfathomed philosophy; nor to create a poetic school in which disciples after much pondering would finally discover in the work of their master only commonplace ideas which he had sought to obscure by surface intricacies of thought. Rather than to invite the ephemeral praises of an artificial admiration society, Carleton preferred to interpret in homely diction the simple annals of the plain people; and he aimed, moreover, at absolute lucidity, not merely because he wrote ostensibly for simple folk, but because he held "there is no thought so great, so grand, so complicated, so ineffably sublime—that is, if it is really a thought, and not a mere vapidity—that it cannot be understood by the human intellect, when properly presented to it." Or again, as he says: "The clearer the window-pane, the brighter may be seen the flowers of the garden and the tints of the sky as observed through it; and the simpler and more lucid the author's language, the more easily are observed and felt whatever beauty and power the thought may possess."

It was this very quality of simplicity that gave Carleton his hold on the public. At first he was inclined toward more ambitious work, as when in his college days he contemplated writing an epic on the Civil War to which he would give his entire life. During this period he commenced a systematic reading of the poetry of all ages which he kept up pretty constantly through life. This naturally had a broadening effect; but like Whitman in his sphere, Carleton determined to create his own atmosphere and to construct his own poetic theory. However it may have differed in its totality from more generally accepted theories, it at

least is congruous with the whole purview of Carleton's work. Unlike Poe, who makes "beauty the province of the poem," or Johnson, who would give "form" the chief place, Carleton substitutes "motive"; all else is infinitesimal to this one object. The artistic framework counts for little, except as it performs its function of carrying out the intention or the motive of the whole; and either the wholesome edification, or the reasonable amusement of the human race, should be, in the view of Carleton, the incentive of the motive. How William Morris would have railed at such a theory; for to him the writing of poetry was purely a business of craftsmanship. Secondly, Carleton places feeling, which must be the servant of the motive; and this is to be hearty, deep, sincere. Thirdly, he puts subject matter, which ought never to be above the general comprehension of the average mind, even in diction; and fourthly, form. In placing form last he does not necessarily place himself in the class with those who rebel against what they are pleased to call the "tyranny of form." Carleton, moreover, was a believer in form, but would not hesitate to sacrifice the method for the motive.

In 1891, in an interview with Julius Chambers, he cited a poem, "Hear the Drums March By," which had recently been published in *Harper's Magazine* as a Memorial Day contribution, and, using it as an illustration, endeavored to elaborate his theory. His motive in writing the verses was to reawaken the memories of comradeship: to an old soldier they would recall the dark days of a war that had ceased to be looked upon in anger, and now were remembered only in sorrow. To produce this effect he imagines an old crippled and blind veteran sitting by his window on the morning of Decoration Day. His ears are alert to catch

the sound of the martial music that announces the coming of his old comrades. In animated tones he calls to some individually.

But the old veteran forgets—and this is the thought —that he is the last survivor of his own regiment, and in reality has been cheering a "spectre band." Often throughout the poem, as Carleton pointed out, art is immolated to feeling. In the second and third stanzes, "the method," as Carleton says, "is ruthlessly sacrificed to onomatopoeia." "The tramp of the boots on the street," he continues, "must be got into the measure, though my art suffer. I could take a sharp-pointed pencil and improve several of those lines, but I would destroy the pre-eminent idea, and I wouldn't do that under any circumstances. The language of the old veteran, sitting at his tenement-window, might be more carefully chosen also, but that would be a sacrifice of realism that would be fatal. The verses must have the vitality of life—human life—about them. If they fail in that quality all excuse for having written them fails. If they possess that quality, I owe nobody any apology for having published the poem."

This, then, was Carleton's conception of the mission of poetry; or, as he averred on another occasion: "True poetry is that which voices the sentiment of its time; which stirs the blood of living generations; which draws its descriptions from nature as it is, and not from old accounts of it as it was; which rejoices with them in their pleasure, and weeps with them in their woe." This is well exemplified in his poem, "The Burning of Chicago."

Carleton also excelled in descriptive narrative. In his Custer poem, "The Heart and the Sword," we get some vivid passages, as when, for example—

"He walked in the famous West Point town,
That clung to the Hudson's ragged side,
Where ancient mountains looked grandly down,
And lorded it over the rushing tide."

Or again in his lines on "The Coming of Greeley"—

"'Twas a day of summer quiet in the dusty village street;
All the chair-haunts were deserted where the gossips loved to meet;
Scarce a letter made its exit from the small postoffice door,
And a lonely clock was ticking in the crude old country store."

Perhaps Carleton was at his best when extracting the poetic element from ordinary things; and, together with his quaint humor, picturesque manner of treatment, and wholesome moral, without which no work of Carleton's would be complete, he reaches an audience to which the subtleties of Browning, or the art of Pope, passes unnoticed. But Carleton's homeliness of phrase, and simplicity of thought, strike a deeper and more lasting note than mere popularity. The soul that he manages to get into his verse goes to the heart, and who can appraise the influence of such a gift? Who is there that can not feel the heart-throb in "The First Settler's Story" or "Over the Hill to the Poor-House" or "The Convict's Christmas Eve" or "The Waif's Thanksgiving?"

Another characteristic of Carleton's poetry, which stands in close association with the heart element, is a half-hidden humor attained by a peculiar tenderness of expression as, for example, when the settler, having spoken unkindly to his wife, goes to his work of chopping trees in the woods, and suffering from remorse, endeavors to work off his guilty conscience by making—

"——the wounded trees bear half the pain."

Or again in "The Festival of Praise" when a hen, robbed of her children for Thanksgiving dinners, mournfully and absently searches for worms,—

> "Forgetting, as she picks them out,
> That worms have mothers, too."

Carleton not infrequently employed another kind of humor, that of "talking in fun while thinking in earnest," as for example in "The First Settler's Story," when the pioneer husband rebuked his wife with words which, while they half crushed her, failed to bring a tear. Yet—

> "That night, while theoretically sleeping,
> I half heard and half felt that she was weeping."

Or in "Our Traveled Parson" who, having been given by subscription a ticket to "the lands across the ocean" so wearied his flock on his return by constantly citing in his sermons foreign illustrations that one "free-expressioned brother" wished—

> ". . . The Lord had made one cont'nent, an' then
> never made another!"

Another characteristic of Carleton's verse is the human way in which one is introduced to the unexpected touch of sentiment, so suggestive of the truest love; and this is the nearest he gets to the delineation of the zealous passion of human affection. Note such an example as—

"Then she hung me in the garden, an' betwixt two twilight hours,
Once she coaxed them out together, for to view some blossomin' flowers.
An' they came there, kind o' listless, as to what they was to see,
An' in turnin' round a corner, spat they run up onto me!
An' they knew me in a minute; an' their hearts began to date
Back to where they used to linger, by the Old Front Gate."

from "The Old Front Gate," now found in "Drifted In," published by Moffat, Yard and Company.

Finally, Carleton's poetry at its best possesses a true emotional appeal, replete of human interest. This, together with a keen perception in emphasizing the universal in each individual, gives to his crayon studies of domestic life that vitality of human life, without which the laws of technique are as empty of real significance, as a spaciously designed home with every ornamental beauty, but with no children whose laughter and gayety serve to brighten up its otherwise somber and austere grandeur. Yet when Carleton disregards the laws of technique—which he often did—so as not to sacrifice realism and the vitality of human life, his verse loses in unity. His customary mood and habit of composition, however, ought to have been the means of making this less obvious; for it were of a kind to amend any looseness of structure or lack of substance which often is the result of too rapid work. The quickness with which he is said to have composed "Betsey and I Are Out" was indeed exceptional. Usually, when his themes involved the telling of a story, he would study it in all its ramifications; then he would usually write the story out in prose, select the more important features, then, as he said, "swing them into verse." When a poem, moreover, dealt with history he was most exact in the matter of facts. In his earlier days he wrote very much by inclination. "I couldn't write anything during these autumnal dog-days," he wrote in the early seventies, when besought to contribute a poem for some special occasion, "if my life depended on a rhyme. It is a time for the dissipation of idleness." As time went on, however, he wrote more and more at stated periods, without waiting for inspiration. Unlike Whitman, Carleton did

not compose slowly nor with difficulty. He used to say that after he got the first line of a poem it generally went along pretty easily; and as evidence of his genius his least ambitious and apparently most spontaneous poems are among his best.

It may be said, however, that Carleton's poetry would have gained in strength and in smoothness if he had revised more zeauosly. Sometimes, also, his crude diction and imperfect taste is not in keeping with his theme, as in the "First Settler's Story" when he makes the young husband say:—

> "With no desire my glory for to rob,
> She used to stan' around and boss the job."

Carleton also insisted in using "ne'er" and " 'neath" and "o'er" in his dialect poems. Such forms are less and less used in the best poetry, but such a line as—

> "And now I'm mostly done; my story's o'er."

seems not to have disturbed Carleton's sense of taste in the least.

In the use of dialect he was equally his own guide. With none of that precision which characterized the "Biglow Papers" Carleton yet employed a more natural vernacular than Bret Harte, whose colloquialism was anything but typical of California. "The great mistake of many writers," says Carleton in his preface of "City Festivals," "is that they out-dialect dialect." He rather was remiss in not carrying his dialect far enough as, for example, when he allows the same person to alternate in the use of "And" and "An' " in "The New Church Organ." Or when he changes in new editions the word service to sarvice, see to seed, concerning to consarning. In point of fact, as Mr. A. B. Brag-

don, our poet's life-long friend has said, "Carleton's farmer patois was a trifle more grammatical, but supremely representative in quaintness and subject." In scanning, when a trochee, in place of a single syllable was required to complete a line, he would not hesitate to employ a word such as "unto," thus sacrificing that precision of provincialism which of course is contrary to true art. That his pages are somewhat carelessly sprinkled with lapses of this character is easily seen. Nor could one stop here with adverse criticism.

In the principle of rhyme Carleton was not over fastidious. There was no searching in his non-dialect poems for what the French would call "rich rhymes"; those into which a number of consonants occur: he would also in couplets rhyme a syllable with itself, not to detail other faults, of more or less importance. But granting that Carleton's poetry suffers because of his artistic deficiencies; and that when not elevated "by the inspiring influence of his theme," as John Townsend Trowbridge observes, he is apt to become doggerel, there is that depth of feeling in Carleton's verse, the soundness and wholesomeness of which affects not only the universal heart, but also the individual heart. In this he is unlike many poets; and because of this he was in all verisimilitude a truer poet than many other bards whose gifts do not lie in translating the human feelings into suggestive speech.

It is fruitless to conjecture the heights to which Carleton might have climbed along other lines if he had been a little less miscellaneous in his interests, and a little more given to concentrated thought. Yet the very inequality of his poetic work, prolific as it was, remains to show the versatility of his mind. Writing in a natural vein he per-

haps was less influenced by other poets. Yet one may detect a Tennysonian strain in "Death Doomed," so suggestive is it in a sense of "The May Queen." Trowbridge sees in the initial lines of "The First Settler's Story" something of the influence of Lowell; and another critic avers that he observes in "Rob the Pauper" the semblance of Trowbridge's "Vagabonds."

Signs of imitation, however, are always looked for in the work of writers. Carleton himself cautioned against reading any one author or poet too much or too often. "One," he says, "should find by reflection and experience wherein lies his own strength, and should bring to that hive all the honey that he gathers, and impress upon it his own individuality."

To sum up: Carleton lacked range; his imagination was limited; and he often disregarded the laws of prosody. But in his work there were no morbid fancies, no sensual overtures, no straining for effect. The heart-element was pre-eminent; the sentiment sincere; the humor quaint. He looked at life wholesomely, and in treating it was natural, sympathetic, picturesque. But in delineating the life of the farm he was the most effective; and as that life which he so sympathetically portrayed in his numerous ballads becomes less and less a type, his verses will be cherished as true etchings of an earlier civilization which in all of its realism formed so characteristic a part of our crude but rapidly developing nation. He was fortunate then in his choice of subject, but still more favored with a gift that enabled him to popularize rural domestic life: in this innovation lies Will Carleton's contribution to American letters.

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