

A Poet-Scholar's Stroll from Sombra to Wilkesport in the Year 1857

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THE WEST OF CANADA.

Mr. Editor, -- Just another word about Western Canada. I was struck in passing down the river St. Clair from Port Sarnia, with the improvement that had been made on the British side in the course of a few months; but I could see in my imagination the doings of future years, on a scale far exceeding anything hitherto accomplished in these parts. It was my lot to see on this river what I had never witnessed before in all my travels: two men, veritable Yankees, in a boat, with a drag fishing for anchors; and I was informed by those on board our steamer, that they made it pay. Well may the Americans succeed in securing material wealth, for their ingenuity and their enterprize (sic) knows no bounds.

I put into Newport [now Marine City], and thence by ferry, crossed over to Sombra. Here I found the nucleus of a town, a cluster of houses, several stores of various kinds, a post-office, a respectable hotel, a blacksmith's shop, &c, and last, but not least, a school house and a "House of Prayer". The prospect from this place is quite picturesque, with the thriving town of Newport exactly opposite, and all sorts of craft enlivening the limpid waters of the "soft-flowing" river.

I went down one of the concessions right into the midst of a dense forest. O, the solemn stillness of a woody solitude in its primitive and unbroken massiveness. I have been in retirement amid the stony mountains of South Wales, where for miles no trace of cultivation could be discovered, and no memorial of man, except dreary heaps of stones raised by the ancient Druids, for occasion of bloody ceremony; and upon the mighty waters, extending in every direction to the circling horizon of the vast over-arching sky, with not a sail to disturb the solitary scene; but never yet was I in a more sequestered position for suggestive meditation, than walking down this concession, walled in on either hand by the serried ranks of gigantic trees, planted by God's own hands in the wild profusion of his infinite prolificness. For miles I could hear the scream of the steamboats plying upon the river St. Clair, which was nearly the only sound to be heard, except the whistle of the birds -- little songsters that seemed to have it all their own way. At length I reached the habitation of man, who seemed almost an intruder there; but his little log-hut, his patch of "clearing", the column of white smoke mounting up among the maple trees -- the coy children more timid than the birds -- the modest matron, true to her confiding nature, pursuing her lonely task, seemed all to make their requisite apology, if apology was necessary. The master of the whole, working in his unpretending homestead, seemed to say, by his honest bearing and contented expression of countenance, in the language of Nature's bard: --

"How use doth breed a habit in man!
This shadowy desert, unfrequented woods,
I better brook than flourishing peopled towns."

After a walk of six or eight miles, I came to a place of the name of Wilksport (sic), where I found quite a settlement, another log school-house, a post office, a store, and even vessels on the creek. The

creek, I believe, is called Bear Creek, a somewhat ominous name, but suitable to the sombre character of the name of the township itself.

“O, be some other name!
What’s in a name? That which we call a rose,
By any other name would smell as sweet.”

But maugre name, or no name, this part of the country is destined to become a flourishing farming district. The superstratum of the soil is formed of an alluvial deposit, doubtless from the lakes at some far-gone period; the substrata, of a gray glutinous marl, and clay of the first quality for mixing with the upper mould, or for building purposes, when formed into brick. If the projected canal from [Lake] St. Clair to Lake Erie, should ever become a reality, villages and flourishing towns, and it may be, a city like Detroit itself, will grace the neighbourhood of this now wild but strong-textured country of heavy lands. But I am pushing my remarks too far.

Yours, very truly,

W. H. B. [Mr. Burr?]

Swanton, Vermont, April 22nd, 1857.

* *The Christian Guardian* was the periodical of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Canada.

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