

***E. PAULINE
JOHNSON***



***THE MOCCASIN
MAKER***

E. Pauline Johnson

The Moccasin Maker

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INTRODUCTION

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The inducement to be sympathetic in writing a preface to a book like this is naturally very great. The authoress was of Indian blood, and lived the life of the Indian on the Iroquois Reserve with her chieftain father and her white mother for many years; and though she had white blood in her veins was insistent and determinedly Indian to the end. She had the full pride of the aboriginal of pure blood, and she was possessed of a vital joy in the legends, history and language of the Indian race from which she came, crossed by good white stock. But though the inducement to be sympathetic in the case of so chivalrous a being who stood by the Indian blood rather than by the white blood in her is great, there is, happily, no necessity for generosity or magnanimity in the case of Pauline Johnson. She was not great, but her work in verse is sure and sincere; and it is alive with the true spirit of poetry. Her skill in mere technique is good, her handling of narrative is notable, and if there is no striking individuality—which might have been expected from her Indian origin—if she was often reminiscent in her manner, metre, form and expression, it only proves her a minor poet and not a Tennyson or a Browning. That she should have done what she did do, devotedly, with an astonishing charm and the delight of inspired labour, makes her life memorable, as it certainly made both life and work

beautiful. The pain and suffering which attended the latter part of her life never found its way into her work save through increased sweetness and pensiveness. No shadow of death fell upon her pages. To the last the soul ruled the body to its will. Phenomenon Pauline Johnson was, though to call her a genius would be to place her among the immortals, and no one was more conscious of her limitations than herself. Therefore, it would do her memory poor service to give her a crown instead of a coronet.

Poet she was, lyric and singing and happy, bright-
visioned, high-hearted, and with the Indian's passionate love of nature thrilling in all she did, even when from the hunting-grounds of poesy she brought back now and then a poor day's capture. She was never without charm in her writing; indeed, mere charm was too often her undoing. She could not be impersonal enough, and therefore could not be great; but she could get very near to human sympathies, to domestic natures, to those who care for pleasant, happy things, to the lovers of the wild.

This is what she has done in this book called "The Moccasin Maker." Here is a good deal that is biographical and autobiographical in its nature; here is the story of her mother's life told with rare graciousness and affection, in language which is never without eloquence; and even when the dialogue makes you feel that the real characters never talked as they do in this monograph, it is still unstilted and somehow really convincing. Touching to a degree is the first chapter, "My Mother," and it, with all the rest of the book, makes one feel that Canadian literature would have been poorer, that something would have been missed from this

story of Indian life if this volume had not been written. It is no argument against the book that Pauline Johnson had not learnt the art of short-story writing; she was a poetess, not a writer of fiction; but the incidents described in many of these chapters show that, had she chosen to write fiction instead of verse, and had begun at an early stage in her career to do so, she would have succeeded. Her style is always picturesque, she has a good sense of the salient incident that makes a story, she could give to it the touch of drama, and she is always interesting, even when there is discursiveness, occasional weakness, and when the picture is not well pulled together. The book had to be written; she knew it, and she did it. The book will be read, not for patriotic reasons, not from admiration of work achieved by one of the Indian race; but because it is intrinsically human, interesting and often compelling in narrative and event.

May it be permitted to add one word of personal comment? I never saw Pauline Johnson in her own land, at her own hearthstone, but only in my house in London and at other houses in London, where she brought a breath of the wild; not because she dressed in Indian costume, but because its atmosphere was round her. The feeling of the wild looked out of her eyes, stirred in her gesture, moved in her footstep. I am glad to have known this rare creature who had the courage to be glad of her origin, without defiance, but with an unchanging, if unspoken, insistence. Her native land and the Empire should be glad of her for what she was and for what she stood; her native land and the Empire should be glad of her for the work, interesting, vivid and human, which she has done. It will preserve her memory. In

an age growing sordid such fresh spirits as she should be welcomed for what they are, for what they do. This book by Pauline Johnson should be welcomed for what she was and for what it is.

Gilbert Parker.

PAULINE JOHNSON: AN APPRECIATION.

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By Charles Mair.

The writer, having contributed a brief "Appreciation" of the late Miss E. Pauline Johnson to the July number of The Canadian Magazine, has been asked by the editor of this collection of her hitherto unpublished writings to allow it to be used as a Preface, with such additions or omissions as might seem desirable. He has not yet seen any portion of the book, but quite apart from its merits it is eagerly looked for by Miss Johnson's many friends and admirers as a final memorial of her literary life. It will now be read with an added interest, begot of her painfully sad and untimely end.

In the death of Miss Johnson a poet passed away of undoubted genius; one who wrote with passion, but without extravagance, and upon themes foreign, perhaps, to some of her readers, but, to herself, familiar as the air she breathed.

When her racial poetry first appeared, its effect upon the reader was as that of something abnormal, something new and strange, and certainly unexampled in Canadian verse. For here was a girl whose blood and sympathies were largely drawn from the greatest tribe of the most advanced nation of Indians on the continent, who spoke out, "loud and bold," not for it alone, but for the whole red race, and sang of its glories and its wrongs in strains of poetic fire.

However aloof the sympathies of the ordinary business world may be from the red man's record, even it is moved at times by his fate, and stirred by his persistent, his inevitable romance. For the Indian's record is the background, and not seldom the foreground, of American history, in which his endless contests with the invader were but a counterpart of the unwritten, or recorded, struggles of all primitive time.

In that long strife the bitterest charge against him is his barbarity, which, if all that is alleged is to be believed—and much of it is authentic—constitutes in the annals of pioneer settlement and aggression a chapter of horrors.

But equally vindictive was his enemy, the American frontiersman. Burnings at the stake, scalping, and other savageries, were not confined to the red man. But whilst his are depicted by the interested writers of the time in the most lurid colours, those of the frontiersman, equally barbarous, are too often palliated, or entirely passed by. It is manifestly unjust to characterize a whole people by its worst members. Of such, amongst both Indians and whites, there were not a few; but it is equally unfair to ascribe to a naturally cruel disposition the infuriated red man's reprisals for intolerable wrongs. As a matter of fact, impartial history

not seldom leans to the red man's side; for, in his ordinary and peaceful intercourse with the whites, he was, as a rule, both helpful and humane. In the records of early explorers we are told of savages who possessed estimable qualities lamentably lacking in many so-called civilized men. The Illinois, an inland tribe, exhibited such tact, courtesy and self-restraint, in a word, such good manners, that the Jesuit Fathers described them as a community of gentlemen. Such traits, indeed, were natural to the primitive Indian, and gave rise, no doubt, to the much-derided phrase—"The Noble Red Man."

There may be some readers of these lines old enough to remember the great Indians of the plains in times past, who will bear the writer out in saying that such traits were not uncommon down to comparatively recent years. Tatonkanazin the Dahcota, Sapo-Maxika the Blackfoot, Atakakoop the Cree, not to speak of Yellow Quill and others, were noted in their day for their noble features and dignified deportment.

In our history the Indians hold an honoured place, and the average reader need not be told that, at one time, their services were essential to Canada. They appreciated British justice, and their greatest nations produced great men, who, in the hour of need, helped materially to preserve our independence. They failed, however, for manifest reasons, to maintain their own. They had to yield; but, before quitting the stage, they left behind them an abiding memory, and an undying tradition. And, thus, "Romanticism," which will hold its own despite its hostile critics, is their debtor. Their closeness to nature, their picturesque life in the past, their

mythical religion, social system and fateful history have begot one of the wide world's "legends," an ideal not wholly imaginary, which, as a counterpoise to Realism, our literature needs, and probably never shall outgrow.

These references to the Indian character may seem too extended for their place, yet they are genre to the writer's subject. For Miss Johnson's mentality was moulded by descent, by ample knowledge of her people's history, admiration of their character, and profound interest in their fate.

Hence the oncoming into the field of letters of a real Indian poet had a significance which, aided by its novelty, was immediately appreciated by all that was best in Canadian culture. Hence, too, and by reason of its strength, her work at once took its fitting place without jar or hindrance; for there are few educated Canadians who do not possess, in some measure, that aboriginal, historic sense which was the very atmosphere of Pauline Johnson's being.

But while "the Indian" was never far from her thoughts, she was a poet, and therefore inevitably winged her way into the world of art, into the realm common to all countries, and to all peoples. Here there was room for her imaginings, endowed, as she was, with power to appeal to the heart, with refinement, delicacy, pathos, and, above all, sincerity; an Idealist who fused the inner and the outer world, and revelled in the unification of scenery and mind.

The delight of genius in the act of composition has been called the keenest of intellectual pleasures; and this was the poet's almost sole reward in Canada a generation ago, when nothing seemed to catch the popular ear but burlesque, or

trivial verse. In strange contrast this with a remoter age! In old Upper Canada, in its primitive days, there was no lack of educated men and women, of cultivated pioneers who appreciated art and good literature in all its forms. Even the average immigrant brought his favourite books with him from the Old Land, and cherished a love of reading, which unfortunately was not always inherited by his sons. It was a fit audience, no doubt; but in a period when all alike were engrossed in a stern struggle for existence, the poets, and we know there were some, were forced, like other people, to earn, by labour of hand, their daily bread. Thackeray's "dapper" George is credited with the saying, that, "If beebles will be boets they must starve." If in England their struggle was severe, in Canada it was unrelenting; a bald prospect, certainly, which lasted, one is sorry to say, far down in our literary history.

Probably owing to this, and partly through advice, and partly by inclination, Miss Johnson took to the public platform for a living, and certainly justified her choice of a vocation by her admirable performances. They were not sensational, and therefore not over-attractive to the groundling; but to discerners, who thought highly of her art, they seemed the perfection of monologue, graced by a musical voice, and by gesture at once simple and dignified.

As this is an appreciation and a tribute to Miss Johnson's memory rather than a criticism, the writer will touch but lightly upon the more prominent features of her productions. Without being obtrusive, not the least of these is her national pride, for nothing worthier, she thought, could be said of a man than

"That he was born in Canada, beneath the British flag."

In her political creed wavering and uncertainty had no place. She saw our national life from its most salient angles, and, in current phrase, she saw it whole. In common, therefore, with every Canadian poet of eminence, she had no fears for Canada, if she be but true to herself.

Another opinion is not likely to be challenged, viz., that much of her poetry is unique, not only in subject, but also in the sincerity of her treatment of themes so far removed from the common range. Intense feeling distinguishes her Indian poems from all others; they flow from her very veins, and are stamped with the seal of heredity. This strikes one at every reading, and not less their truth to fact, however idealized. Indeed the wildest of them, "Ojistoh" (The White Wampum), is based upon an actual occurrence, though the incident took place on the Western plains, and the heroine was not a Mohawk. The same intensity marks "The Cattle Thief," and "A Cry From an Indian Wife." Begot of her knowledge of the long-suffering of her race, of iniquities in the past and present, they poured red-hot from her inmost heart.

One turns, however, with a sense of relief from those fierce dithyrambics to the beauty and pathos of her other poems. Take, for example, that exquisite piece of music, "The Lullaby of the Iroquois," simple, yet entrancing! Could anything of its kind be more perfect in structure and expression? Or the sweet idyll, "Shadow River," a transmutation of fancy and fact, which ends with her own philosophy:

"O! pathless world of seeming!
O! pathless life of mine whose deep ideal
Is more my own than ever was the real.
For others fame
And Love's red flame,
And yellow gold: I only claim
The shadows and the dreaming."

And this ideality, the hall-mark of her poetry, has a character of its own, a quality which distinguishes it from the general run of subjective verse. Though of the Christian faith, there is yet an almost pagan yearning manifest in her work, which she indubitably drew from her Indian ancestry. That is, she was in constant contact with nature, and saw herself, her every thought and feeling, reflected in the mysterious world around her.

This sense of harmony is indeed the prime motive of her poetry, and therein we discern a brightness, a gleam, however fleeting, of mystic light—

"The light that never was on sea or land,
The consecration and the poet's dream."

A suggestion of her attitude and sense of interpenetration lurks in this stanza:

"There's a spirit on the river, there's a ghost upon the shore,
And they sing of love and loving through the starlight evermore,
As they steal amid the silence and the shadows of the shore."

And in the following verses this "correspondence" is more distinctly drawn:

"O! soft responsive voices of the night
I join your minstrelsy,
And call across the fading silver light
As something calls to me;
I may not all your meaning understand,
But I have touched your soul in Shadow Land."

"Sweetness and light" met in Miss Johnson's nature, but free from sentimentality; and even a carping critic will find little to cavil at in her productions. If fault should be found with any of them it would probably be with such a narrative as "Wolverine." It "bites," like all her Indian pieces, and conveys a definite meaning. But, written in the conventional slang of the frontier, it jars with her other work, and seems out of form, if not out of place.

However, no poet escapes a break at times, and Miss Johnson's work is not to be judged, like a chain, by its weakest links. Its beauty, its strength, its originality are unmistakable, and although, had she lived, we might have looked for still higher flights of her genius, yet what we possess is beyond price, and fully justifies the feeling, everywhere expressed, that Canada has lost a true poet.

Such a loss may not be thought a serious one by the sordid man who decries poetry as the useless product of an art already in its decay. Should this ever be the case, it would be a monstrous symptom, a symptom that the noblest impulses of the human heart are decaying also. The truth is, as the greatest of English critics, Hazlitt, has told us, that "poetry is an interesting study, for this reason, that it relates to whatever is most interesting in human life.

Whoever, therefore, has a contempt for poetry, has a contempt for himself and humanity."

Turning from Miss Johnson's verse to her prose, there is ample evidence that, had she applied herself, she would have taken high rank as a writer of fiction. Her "Legends of Vancouver" is a remarkable book, in which she relates a number of Coast-Indian myths and traditions with unerring insight and literary skill. These legends had a main source in the person of the famous old Chief, Capilano, who, for the first time, revealed them to her in Chinook, or in broken English, and, as reproduced in her rich and harmonious prose, belong emphatically to what has been called "The literature of power." Bound together, so to speak, in the retentive memory of the old Chief, they are authentic legends of his people, and true to the Indian nature. But we find in them, also, something that transcends history. Indefinable forms, earthly and unearthly, pass before us in mystical procession, in a world beyond ordinary conception, in which nothing seems impossible.

The origin of the Indian's myths, East or West, cannot be traced, and must ever remain a mystery. But, from his immemorial ceremonies and intense conservatism, we may reasonably infer that many of them have been handed down from father to son, unchanged, from the prehistoric past to the present day; a past contemporary, perhaps, with the mastodon, but certainly far back in the mists of antiquity. The importance of rescuing them from oblivion is plain enough, and therefore the untimely death of Miss Johnson, who was evidently turning with congenial fitness to the task, is doubly to be regretted. For as Mr. Bernard McEnvoy

well says in his preface to her "Vancouver Legends," she "has linked the vivid present with the immemorial past.... In the imaginative power that she has brought to these semi-historical Sagas, and in the liquid flow of her rhythmical prose she has shown herself to be a literary worker of whom we may well be proud."

It is believed to be the general wish of Miss Johnson's friends that some tribute of a national and permanent character should be paid to her memory; not indeed to preserve it—her own works will do that—but as a visible mark of public esteem. In this regard, what could be better than a bronze statue of life-size, with such accompanying symbols as would naturally suggest themselves to a competent artist? Vancouver, in which she spent her latter years, the city she loved, and in which she died, is its proper home; and, as to its site, the spot in Stanley Park where she wished her ashes to be laid is surely, of all places, the most appropriate.

But whatever shape, in the opinion of her friends, the memorial should take, it is important, in any case, that it should be worthy of her genius, and a fitting memento of her services to Canadian letters.

Fort Steele, B.C., September, 1913.

My Mother

The Story of a Life of Unusual Experiences

[Author's Note.—This is the story of my mother's life, every incident of which she related to me herself. I have

neither exaggerated nor curtailed a single circumstance in relating this story. I have supplied nothing through imagination, nor have I heightened the coloring of her unusual experiences. Had I done so I could not possibly feel as sure of her approval as I now do, for she is as near to me to-day as she was before she left me to join her husband, my beloved father, whose feet have long since wandered to the "Happy Hunting Grounds" of my dear Red Ancestors.]

PART I.

It was a very lonely little girl that stood on the deck of a huge sailing vessel while the shores of England slipped down into the horizon and the great, grey Atlantic yawned desolately westward. She was leaving so much behind her, taking so little with her, for the child was grave and old even at the age of eight, and realized that this day meant the updragging of all the tiny roots that clung to the home soil of the older land. Her father was taking his wife and family, his household goods, his fortune and his future to America, which, in the days of 1829, was indeed a venturesome step, for America was regarded as remote as the North Pole, and good-byes were, alas! very real good-byes, when travellers set sail for the New World in those times before steam and telegraph brought the two continents hand almost touching hand.

So little Lydia Bestman stood drearily watching with sorrow-filled eyes the England of her babyhood fade slowly into the distance—eyes that were fated never to see again the royal old land of her birth. Already the deepest grief that

life could hold had touched her young heart. She had lost her own gentle, London-bred mother when she was but two years old. Her father had married again, and on her sixth birthday little Lydia, the youngest of a large family, had been sent away to boarding-school with an elder sister, and her home knew her no more. She was taken from school to the sailing ship; little stepbrothers and sisters had arrived and she was no longer the baby. Years afterwards she told her own little children that her one vivid recollection of England was the exquisite music of the church chimes as the ship weighed anchor in Bristol harbor—chimes that were ringing for evensong from the towers of the quaint old English churches. Thirteen weeks later that sailing vessel entered New York harbor, and life in the New World began.

Like most transplanted Englishmen, Mr. Bestman cut himself completely off from the land of his fathers; his interests and his friends henceforth were all in the country of his adoption, and he chose Ohio as a site for his new home. He was a man of vast peculiarities, prejudices and extreme ideas—a man of contradictions so glaring that even his own children never understood him. He was a very narrow religionist, of the type that say many prayers and quote much Scripture, but he beat his children—both girls and boys—so severely that outsiders were at times compelled to interfere. For years these unfortunate children carried the scars left on their backs by the thongs of cat-o'-nine-tails when he punished them for some slight misdemeanor. They were all terrified at him, all obeyed him like soldiers, but none escaped his severity. The two elder ones, a boy and a girl, had married before they left England.

The next girl married in Ohio, and the boys drifted away, glad to escape from a parental tyranny that made home anything but a desirable abiding-place. Finally but two remained of the first family—Lydia and her sister Elizabeth, a most lovable girl of seventeen, whose beauty of character and self-sacrificing heart made the one bright memory that remained with these scattered fledglings throughout their entire lives.

The lady who occupied the undesirable position of stepmother to these unfortunate children was of the very cold and chilling type of Englishwoman, more frequently met with two generations ago than in this age. She simply let her husband's first family alone. She took no interest in them, neglected them absolutely, but in her neglect was far kinder and more humane than their own father. Yet she saw that all the money, all the pretty clothes, all the dainties, went to her own children.

Perhaps the reader will think these unpleasant characteristics of a harsh father and a self-centred stepmother might better be omitted from this narrative, particularly as death claimed these two many years ago; but in the light of after events, it is necessary to reveal what the home environment of these children had been, how little of companionship or kindness or spoken love had entered their baby lives. The absence of mother kisses, of father comradeship, of endeavor to understand them individually, to probe their separate and various dispositions—things so essential to the development of all that is best in a child—went far towards governing their later actions in life. It drove the unselfish, sweet-hearted Elizabeth to a loveless

marriage; it flung poor, little love-hungry Lydia into alien but, fortunately, loyal and noble arms. Outsiders said, "What strange marriages!" But Lydia, at least, married where the first real kindness she had ever known called to her, and not one day of regret for that marriage ever entered into her life.

It came about so strangely, so inevitably, from such a tiny source, that it is almost incredible.

One day the stepmother, contrary to her usual custom, went into the kitchen and baked a number of little cakelets, probably what we would call cookies. For what sinister reason no one could divine, but she counted these cakes as she took them from the baking-pans and placed them in the pantry. There were forty-nine, all told. That evening she counted them again; there were forty-eight. Then she complained to her husband that one of the children had evidently stolen a cake. (In her mind the two negro servants employed in the house did not merit the suspicion.) Mr. Bestman inquired which child was fond of the cakes. Mrs. Bestman replied that she did not know, unless it was Lydia, who always liked them.

Lydia was called. Her father, frowning, asked if she had taken the cake. The child said no.

"You are not telling the truth," Mr. Bestman shouted, as the poor little downtrodden girl stood half terrified, consequently half guilty-mannered, before him.

"But I am truthful," she said. "I know nothing of the cake."

"You are not truthful. You stole it—you know you did. You shall be punished for this falsehood," he stormed, and