

*The* RYERSON  
POETRY  
CHAP-BOOKS



The Thousand Islands

*By*

AGNES MAULE MACHAR



*This is Chap-book Number Seventy*

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### PREFATORY

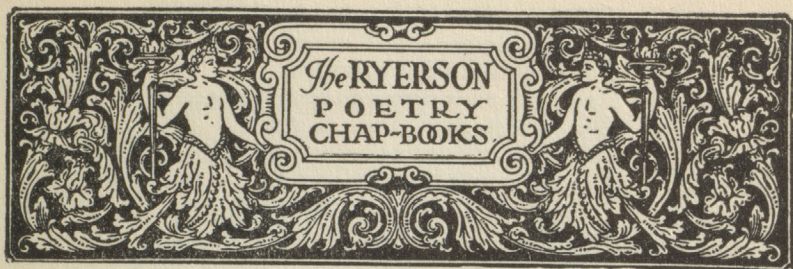
FOR over half a century Agnes Maule Machar (*Fidelis*) was one of the leading Canadian writers in both prose and verse. In the eighties, when the Little Englanders were suggesting the break-up of the Empire, and Canadian annexationists were advocating the severance of Canada from England, Miss Machar in season and out of season held high the torch of Imperialism and Canadian Nationalism. As a result she produced a body of patriotic poetry in volume and power greater than any other of our writers. She is entitled to rank as Canada's supreme patriotic poet, sane in outlook and free from extravagant jingoism. As she said of herself:

*Canadensis sum, et nihil Canadense alienum a me puto.*

As a poet Miss Machar excels as an interpreter of nature. One field she has made peculiarly her own, *The Thousand Islands*. In a simple, direct way, with charming lyrical insight, every aspect of this beauty-spot is revealed. She makes lake, river and woodland live, and this alone entitles her to an abiding place among Canadian poets.

T. G. Marquis.





# The Thousand Islands

*By Agnes Maule Machar*



## OUR CANADIAN FATHERLAND

### I

WHAT is our young Canadian land?  
Is it fair Norembega's strand?  
Or grey Cape Breton by the sea?  
Quebec? Ontario? Acadie?  
Or Manitoba's flower-decked plain?  
Or fair Columbia's mountain chain?  
Can any part, from strand to strand,  
Be a Canadian's Fatherland?  
Nay, for our young Canadian land  
Is greater, grander far than these;  
It stretches wide on either hand  
Between the world's two mighty seas.  
So let no hostile foot divide  
The fields our feet should freely roam;  
Gael, Norman, Saxon, side by side,  
And Canada our nation's home;  
From sea to sea, from strand to strand,  
Spreads our Canadian Fatherland.

### II

Where'er our country's banner spreads  
Its folds o'er free Canadian heads—  
Where'er our land's romantic story  
Enshrines the memory and the glory



Of heroes who with blood and toil  
Laid deep in our Canadian soil  
Foundations for the future age,  
And wrote their names on history's page—  
*Our* history—from strand to strand,  
Spreads our Canadian Fatherland!  
So each to each is firmly bound  
By ties all generous hearts should own;  
We cannot spare an inch of ground:  
No severed part can stand alone.  
So Nova Scotia and Quebec  
Shall meet in kinship real and true;  
New Brunswick's hills be mirrored back  
In fair Ontario's waters blue.  
From sea to sea, from strand to strand,  
Spreads our Canadian Fatherland!

### III

Where'er Canadian thought breathes free,  
Or strikes the lyre of poesy—  
Where'er Canadian hearts awake  
To sing a song for her dear sake,  
Or catch the echoes, spreading far,  
That wake us to the noblest war  
Against each lurking ill and strife  
That weakens now our growing life,  
No line keep hand from clasping hand—  
One is our young Canadian land.  
McGee and Howe she counts her own;  
Hers all her eastern singers' bays;  
Fréchette is hers, and in her crown  
Ontario every laurel lays:  
Let CANADA our watchword be,  
While lesser names we know no more;  
One nation spread from sea to sea,  
And fused by love from shore to shore;  
From sea to sea, from strand to strand,  
Spreads our Canadian Fatherland!



## DRIFTING AMONG THE THOUSAND ISLANDS

NEVER a ripple on all the river,  
As it lies like a mirror beneath the moon,  
Only the shadows tremble and quiver  
'Neath the balmy breath of a night in June!  
All dark and silent, each shadowy island  
Like a silhouette lies on its silver ground,  
While just above us a rocky highland  
Towers grim and dusk, with its pine-trees crowned.

Never a sound but the waves' soft splashing,  
As the boat drifts idly the shore along,  
And the darting fireflies, silently flashing,  
Gleam—living diamonds—the woods among,  
And the night-hawk flits o'er the bay's deep bosom,  
And the loon's laugh breaks through the midnight calm,  
And the luscious breath of the wild vine's blossom  
Wafts from the rocks like a tide of balm!

Drifting—why may we not drift forever?  
Let all the world and its warfare go;  
Let us float and drift with the flowing river,  
Whither—we neither care nor know!  
Dreaming a dream—might we ne'er awaken!  
There's joy enough in this passive bliss,  
The wrestling crowd and its cares forsaking,  
Was ever Nirvana more blest than this?

Nay! but our hearts are ever lifting  
The veil of the present, however fair;  
Not long—not long can we go on drifting,  
Not long enjoy surcease from care!  
Ours is a nobler task and guerdon  
Than aimless drifting, however blest;  
Only the heart that can bear the burden  
Shall share the joy of the victor's rest!



## AN INDIAN SUMMER CAROL

ALL day the dreaming sunshine steeps  
In gold the yellowing beeches;  
In softest blue the river sleeps  
Among the island reaches.

Against the distant purple hills  
The autumn tints are glowing;  
With blood-red wine the sumach fills,  
Rich lines of carmine showing.

Upon the glassy stream the boat  
Glides softly like a vision;  
And, with its shadow, seems to float  
Among the isles Elysian.

About the plummy golden-rod  
The tireless bees are humming;  
The aster's clusters star the sod  
And wait the rover's coming.

The birch and maple glow with dyes  
Of scarlet, rose, and amber;  
And like a flame from sunset skies,  
Bright tangled creepers clamber.

The oaks in Tyrian purple dight  
Burn, where the sunlight presses;  
The birch stands like a Dryad bright  
Beneath her golden tresses.

So still the air, so like a dream,  
We hear the acorn falling;  
And o'er the scarcely rippled stream  
The loon's long quavered calling.

The robin<sup>1</sup> softly o'er the lea,  
His farewell song is trilling;  
The squirrel flits from tree to tree,  
His winter storehouse filling.



Like him we, too, may gather store  
From all this glorious nature.  
Then leave, my friend, dry bookish lore  
And dreary nomenclature;

Let logic wintry hours beguile;  
Leave weary mathematics;  
Let Aristotle rest awhile,  
And all the Eleatics.

O'er Plato we can talk and muse  
When wintry winds are blowing;  
Now Nature bids us not refuse  
The glory *she* is showing.

For she herself has better lore  
Than all man's cold dissections;  
Her hieroglyphs can teach us more  
Than volumes of reflections.

Leave the old thinkers to the dreams  
That have been dreamed for ages;  
Leave dry old scientific reams,  
And study Nature's pages.

Her poetry is sweeter far  
Than all men write about her;  
Old Homer, though his theme was war,  
Had scarcely sung without her!

Haste to the woods, throw books away:  
They'll wait the tardy comer;  
For *them* there's many a winter day,  
But brief's our Indian summer!

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<sup>1</sup>The Canadian robin, properly a species of thrush.



## A SUMMER SUNSET

COME, dear, lay down your book awhile to rest,  
While sinks the sun behind yon wooded crest;—  
Leave human lore for less enchanted hours,  
That dull the skies and steal away the flowers;  
Now Nature's face is too bewitching sweet,  
God's thoughts seem writ in beauty at our feet!

There, on the river, rose and opal seem  
To melt and mingle in the placid stream,  
Blent with ethereal tones of purple hue,  
With gleams of palest azure breaking through  
The softened double of those rose-flushed skies,  
Bathed in whose glamour all the landscape lies  
Like dreamland!—See how fair each mirrored isle  
Still fairer in its shadow seems to smile,  
While silently the light canoe glides o'er  
The enchanted river towards the farther shore!  
It seems that Nature's self stands still with us,  
While through her temple—rings her Angelus;  
Ev'n yon small bird has ceased his happy trill,  
On the high pine-top perched, all hushed and still,  
As if he listened to some sweeter strain  
He fain would catch and give to us again!

So, let *us*, too, leave lower thoughts and things  
To catch the nobler strain that Nature sings.  
What boots it though we could, with curious eye,  
Thread all her hidden paths of mystery;  
See how she fashions in her inmost shrine  
Her myriad-featured beauty, line by line;  
Trace life's long growth from earliest dawn to day,  
And measure all the laws its forms obey—  
If in our searching we should miss the soul  
That animates, inspires, informs the whole?



## AN AUGUST MORNING

**I**N gleam of pale translucent amber woke  
The perfect August day;  
Through rose-flushed bars of pearl and amber broke  
The sunset's golden way.

The river seemed transfigured in its flow  
To tide of amethyst,  
Save where it rippled o'er the sands below,  
And granite boulders kissed.

The clouds of billowy woodland hung unstirred  
In languorous slumber deep,  
While, from its green recesses, one small bird  
Piped to its brood asleep.

The clustering lichens wore a tenderer tint,  
The rocks a warmer glow;  
The emerald dewdrops, in the sunbeam's glint,  
Gemed the rich moss below.

Our birchen shallop idly stranded lay  
Half mirrored in the stream,  
Wild roses drooped, glassed in the tiny bay,  
Ethereal as a dream!

You sat upon your rock, enthroned a queen,  
As on a granite throne,  
And all that world of loveliness serene  
Held but us twain alone.

Nay! but we felt another presence there,  
Around, below, above;  
It breathed a poem through the fragrant air—  
Its name was LOVE.



SEPTEMBER AMONG THE THOUSAND  
ISLANDS

THE long pine branches lightly bend  
Above grey rocks with moss o'ergrown,  
And rays of golden light descend  
Aslant on twisted root and stone;  
All still and silent at our feet  
Lies the broad river's glassy sheet.

So calm, so tranquil its expanse;  
No ripple on its peaceful breast;  
It might be sea of fairyland  
By some strange magic laid to rest;  
And the grey, hazy islands seem  
The vision of a passing dream.

In such soft tints their shores extend,  
So dim their winding outlines lie;—  
They do not separate, but blend  
The melting hues of lake and sky,  
Save where some light-tower's snowy gleam  
Is mirrored in the placid stream.

No sounds the dreamy stillness break;  
No echo o'er the lake is heard,  
Save that the leaping fishes make,  
Or twitter of a lonely bird;  
And summer sweetness seems to stray,  
Confused, through the September day!

We watch the swift receding boat,  
And long we bend our patient gaze,  
And strive to trace it, far afloat,  
Through the soft mist's uncertain haze,  
To catch the latest glimpse we may  
Of friends beloved it bears away.

So, often, through the misty veil  
That hides from us the spiritland,  
We gaze and gaze, till gazing fail,  
As on its outer verge we stand,  
On cherished forms receding far  
To realms that undiscovered are!



## THE HAPPY ISLANDS

PAST the Rocks in Deep Water,<sup>1</sup> winding its way to the sea,  
Sweeps our mighty St. Lawrence, grand, majestic and free;  
Yet methinks he tarries, as glad to linger awhile  
Amid the mazy channels where the happy islands smile.  
Fair do they seem as Eden, when Eden was newly made,  
To the wearied city toilers who seek their grateful shade;  
Far from the hurry and clamour, far from the bustle and din,  
See the cool and shady recesses that lure the wanderer in!

Soft in the haze of morning, their shadowy masses seem  
To rest on the calm blue water like the phantasm of a dream;  
Dark in the glare of noonday their bowers of foliage stand,  
Spreading their deep, cool shadow like rocks in a weary land;  
But when at close of his journey the sun rides down the west,  
Trailing his crimson and purple o'er the river's opal breast,  
Then, like isles of the blessed, bathed in celestial light,  
They float between earth and heaven like a mystic vision bright.

Happy the careless paddler who steers his light canoe  
O'er the mingling ruby and topaz, the purple shadows through,  
While the stroke of the ashen paddle beneath the skilful arm  
Scarce clouds the magic mirror, or breaks the wondrous charm;  
And when the mystic moonlight, with its white unearthly spell,  
Like a vision of enchantment clothes river and rock and dell,  
How the lights and shadows tremble with a hidden mystery,  
And the silhouettes of the islands lie dark on the silver sea!

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<sup>1</sup> Gananoque.



## THE WHIP-POOR-WILL

OH, Whip-poor-Will! oh, Whip-poor-Will!  
When all the joyous day is still,  
When from the sky's fast deepening blue  
Fades out the sunset's rosy hue,  
We hear thy steady, measured trill  
From woodland shade, oh, Whip-poor-Will!

In the soft dusk of dewy May,  
At pensive close of autumn day,  
All other birds may silent be,  
Or flood the air with minstrelsy:  
Thou carest not—eve brings us still  
Thy plaintive burden, "Whip-poor-Will!"

When moonlight floods the summer night  
With a soft vision of delight,  
We listen till we fain would ask  
For thee, some respite from thy task.  
At dawn we wake, and hear it still,  
Thy plaintive song—oh, Whip-poor-Will!

We hear thy voice, but see not thee;  
Thou seemest but a voice to be,  
A wandering spirit, breathing yet  
For parted joys a vain regret;  
So plaintive thine untiring trill  
At dawn or dusk—oh, Whip-poor-Will!

So faithful to thy strange refrain,  
Is it the voice of joy or pain?  
We cannot know—thou wilt not tell  
The secret kept so long and well,  
What moves thee thus to warble still  
Thine endless plaint—oh, Whip-poor-Will!



## SPRING'S UNDERTONE

**T**HIS is no day for sadness;—let me breathe  
The sweet, pure air beneath the clear blue sky,  
While visions, lovely in their vagueness, wreath  
Their misty forms before the dreaming eye,  
Entranced to look upon their witchery!

This is no day for sadness! When the sun  
Is draped in weeping clouds of sullen gray,  
Or when the tranquil autumn day is done,  
And early twilight sleeps upon the bay—  
Then may we sigh for blessings passed away!

And yet, why is it that on days like these,  
When Nature wears her sweetest, sunniest face,  
When all the air is sweet with budding trees,  
And flowers bloom softly in each sunny place,  
And clothe the waking earth with tender grace,

And joyous birds their merry carols sing,  
Our hearts can never rise to notes like theirs—  
A strain of sadness wanders through the spring—  
The very perfectness of Nature bears  
A spell that weighs our hearts down unawares?

Is it that budding woods and opening flowers,  
All the fresh life that gladdens our dull earth,  
Seem but to flout this fleeting life of ours,  
That here, at least, knows no new vernal birth,  
And seemeth oft to us so little worth?

Or is it that fair Nature's unstained face  
Wakes yearnings for the purity we prize  
And cannot reach?—that Spring's fresh, undimmed grace  
Wakes sadness in us most when to the skies,  
In unchecked gladness, all her anthems rise?

Yet may our restless souls in this rejoice,  
That every unchecked aspiration here,  
Each vague, half-conscious yearning is a voice  
Calling us onward—if we will but hear—  
To higher life and growth in nobler sphere!



## IN THE FOREST

MID the cloistered forest arches,  
    'Neath the quivering hemlock shade,  
Where the tassels of the larches  
    Toss their incense through the glade,  
Where the bracken's clustered masses  
    Wave beneath the sheltering pines,  
And the sumach interlaces  
    With a tangle of wild vines,

There—like touch of fairy fingers,  
    Parting light the leafy screen—  
Every ray of sunlight lingers  
    Mid the mystery of green,  
Many a web of shadow tracing  
    O'er green stones and mosses bright,  
Through the beechen covert threading  
    Quivering skeins of golden light.

Low amid the bending beeches  
    Many a wilding blossom blows;  
Scarce its tiny life outreaches  
    The safe covert where it grows.  
Waxen-pure or tender-tinted,  
    In the solitude they bloom;  
Scarcely is their presence hinted  
    By their subtle, faint perfume.

Through the boughs light forms are winging,  
    And—unseen but sweetly heard—  
In a burst of low, sweet singing  
    Comes the carol of a bird.  
So, amid the silence dreaming,  
    Many a vagrant fancy wakes,  
Like the blossoms shyly gleaming  
    Mid the tangled forest brakes;

And we listen to the murmur  
    Of the wandering summer breeze,  
Till we feel our kinship firmer  
    With the birds, and flowers, and trees;  
Till we reach its living centre—  
    Till to us its heart is bare,  
And the souls that reverent enter  
    Meet God in His temple there!



## UNTRODDEN WAYS; OR, TWO VISIONS

WHERE close the curving mountains drew  
To clasp the stream in their embrace,  
With every outline, shade and hue  
Reflected in its placid face,

The ploughman stops his team to watch  
The train, as swift it thunders by;  
Some distant glimpse of life to catch,  
He strains his eager, wistful eye.

His waiting horses patient stand  
With wonder in their gentle eyes,  
As through the tranquil mountain land  
The snorting engine onward flies.

The morning freshness is on him,  
Just wakened from his balmy dreams;  
The wayfarers, all soiled and dim,  
Think longingly of mountain streams.

Oh, for the joyous mountain air,  
The long, delightful autumn day  
Among the hills!—the ploughman there  
Must have perpetual holiday!

And he, as all day long he guides  
His steady plough with patient hand,  
Thinks of the train that onward glides  
Into some new enchanted land,

Where, day by day, no plodding round  
Wearies the frame and dulls the mind,  
Where life thrills keen to sight and sound,  
With ploughs and furrows left behind.



## A BURNS ANNIVERSARY

(Lines suggested by a lecture on the poet by Principal G. M. Grant  
at a birthday celebration.)

WITHOUT, the "blast of Janwar' wind"  
Seemed in our ears and hearts to linger,  
That on a wintry night lang syne  
Blew hansel in on Scotland's singer.

Within we listened, all intent  
On words inspired by tenderest feeling;  
The music of the poet's soul  
Seemed softly o'er our pulses stealing.

We saw the eager ploughman lad,  
As by the banks of Ayr he wandered,  
With burning eyes and swelling heart,  
And first on song and Scotland pondered,

And thought of Bruce and Wallace Wight,  
Who freed his land from tyrant's fetter,  
And longed to make, for her dear sake,  
A "sang" at least, if nothing better!

We saw him, as from Nature's hand  
His own drew draughts of joy o'erflowing;—  
The plover's voice, the briar-rose,  
The tiny harebell lightly growing,

The blue sky o'er the gowan'd lea,  
The foxglove's bell, the hawthorn blossom  
Unsealed the fount of love that rose  
So strongly in his youthful bosom.

The wounded hare that "hirpled past,"  
The "tim'rous mousie's" ruined dwelling,  
The cattle cowering 'neath the blast,  
The dying sheep her sorrows telling—

All touched the heart that kept so strong  
Its kinship with all sentient being,  
And saw in simplest things of life  
The poetry that waits the seeing.



We saw him 'mid the golden grain,  
Conning the oldest of romances,  
As, first, his boyish pulses stirred  
A bonnie lassie's gentle glances.

We saw the birk and hawthorn shade  
Droop o'er the tiny rippling river,  
Where he and his dear Highland maid  
Sobbed their farewell, alas! for ever!

There he the poet's wish fulfilled,  
That "simmer ever langest tarry";  
For all who love the poet's song  
Must love his gentle "Highland Mary."

Alas! that other things than these  
Were written on the later pages,  
Which made that tortured soul of his  
A byword to the coming ages.

For many see the marring sins  
They lightly judge on slight acquaintance;  
But not the agony of grief  
That proved his passionate repentance.

'Twas his to feel the anguish keen  
Of noblest powers to mortals given,  
While tyrant passions chained to earth  
The soul that might have soared to heaven.

'Twas his to feel in one poor heart  
Such war of strong conflicting feeling  
As makes this life of ours too deep  
A mystery for our unsealing:

The longing for the nobler course,  
The doing of the thing abhorrent,  
Because the lower impulse rose  
Resistless as a mountain torrent—

Resistless to a human will,  
But not to that which had been given  
Had he but grasped the anchor true  
Of "correspondence fixed wi' heaven."



Ah well! he failed; but let us look  
Through tears upon our sinning brother,  
As thankful that we are not called  
To hold the balance for each other.

And never lips than his have pled  
More tenderly and pitifully  
To leave the erring heart with Him  
Who loves it, and will judge it truly.

And yet, it is not all a dream  
That we have heard a voice from heaven:  
"Behold this heart hath lovèd much,  
And much to it shall be forgiven!"



# The Ryerson Poetry Chap-Books

Lorne Pierce—Editor

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