MILLER’S PROPHECY FULFILLED

By Major John Richardson

Introduction

The following work was composed by Major John Richardson (1796-1852), a Canadian by birth and by sentiment. It is a satire, but it has no pretensions to poetic excellence. Richardson was merely indulging his sense of humour, and a whimsical affection for his friend and political rival Stewart Derbshire (1797?-1863), a plump, sandy-haired, industrious man who made a rather minor place for himself in Canadian history. Richardson chose a four-foot iambic couplet form for his poetry, with a varying number of lines to each stanza. It is reproduced below as transcribed from the February 1, 1844, issue of Richardson’s own newspaper, Canadian Loyalist & Spirit of 1812 (Kingston, Ontario), its first and hitherto only appearance in print. The journal was published weekly in four pages of four columns each, and the poem occupies two and a half columns. It is interesting as an expression of Richardson’s wit, and of political rivalry in nineteenth-century Canada.

John Richardson was born October 4, 1796, at Queenston, in what is now Ontario, where his father was surgeon with the Queen’s Rangers. When only fifteen years of age he was appointed a Gentleman Volunteer in the 41st Regiment, to fight in the War of 1812. In 1813 he was taken prisoner by the Americans, but upon his release he sailed with his regiment to Europe to join Wellington’s forces, only to find that Waterloo had ended the war during his ocean passage. He spent most of the following years till 1837 in London on half-pay, with intervals in Paris and the West Indies, and also in Spain as an officer with the British Legion, where in 1836 he first met Stewart Derbshire. The latter had been sent to Spain as a correspondent for the London Morning Post, to report on the Carlist War, in which the British Auxiliary Legion was engaged on the side of Queen Christina. Richardson published an account of his experiences in northern Spain under the title Movements of the British Legion (London, two editions, 1836 and 1837), while Derbshire covered the war in the midland provinces. George Borrow, in his The Bible in Spain (1843), was amused by Derbshire’s resourcefulness in his quest for news when he encountered him in Madrid; and, as only Borrow can do, he used this meeting as a point of departure for lauding the pluck of English journalists in general. Both Richardson and Derbshire were decorated by Queen Christina for their services in her cause against the Carlists.

Early in 1838 Richardson returned to Canada as correspondent for the Times of London, to report on the Canadian Rebellion. Derbshire arrived here shortly afterwards, as a special agent to Lord Durham, Governor-in-Chief of British North America. His assignment was to travel among the people of Lower Canada and report on their sentiments. Richardson was representing a Tory newspaper, and had been involved on the Tory side in the British House of Commons in the acid debate over the fiasco of the British Legion’s failures in
Spain; but he was actually a liberal Conservative, and he became completely convinced of the rightness of Durham's views on responsible government for Canada after his first long conversation with the earl. Richardson's reports to The Times were therefore in support of Durham's views, and as a result he was dismissed from the paper for not following its Conservative policies. The correspondence between Richardson and Durham discloses the helpful advice Richardson gave to the Governor-in-Chief. When Durham was abruptly recalled, he promised Richardson his influence in finding a government post. It became apparent, however, that Richardson had made too many political enemies in England to allow his friends an opportunity to procure him an appointment.

Meanwhile Derbishire was strongly supported by Lord Sydénham, Durham's successor as Governor-in-Chief, for election to the Canadian Parliament from the riding of Bytown (now Ottawa). In spite of some questionable election procedures, Derbishire joined his colleagues in the Reform Party now in power and met Richardson in Kingston, the new seat of government. Here Richardson had begun publishing his Canadian Loyalist, with the aim of throwing the Baldwin-Lafontaine Reform ministry out of power. He was becoming disillusioned at the turn of political events. Men who had been rebels were benefitting from responsible government by appointment to government offices, whereas he, Richardson, who had lost his lucrative newspaper position for supporting the principle of responsible government, was so disregarded that he had fallen into debt. Moreover, Sydénham had appointed Derbishire as Queen's Printer, the position Richardson had eagerly sought for himself.

In Kingston, Derbishire and the fiery Reformer Francis Hincks (1807-1885), a deadly enemy of Richardson's who eventually became Prime Minister of Canada, joined secretly to publish the Kingston Chronicle and Gazette; secretly, because it was unethical for Members of Parliament to own a political newspaper. Richardson promptly engaged in journalistic war with Derbishire and Hincks, which at times became extremely personal, with caustic references to public inebriety and name-calling on both sides ("Captain Bobadil" for Richardson, and "the Hyena and the Jackal" for Derbishire and Hincks). The war broke all bounds when Richardson accused Derbishire of acting as a go-between for the Reformers, in the cause célèbre of a Catholic Irishman awaiting trial for the murder of a Protestant Irish boy during a Kingston riot which was believed to have been provoked by Hincks's supporters. Derbishire challenged Richardson to a duel in which he shot wide, and Richardson, a veteran duellist, calmly placed a bullet by Derbishire's foot so that the mud spattered his clothes.

Hincks and Derbishire were obliged to sell the Chronicle, ostensibly because the Legislative Council was suspended by the Governor-in-Chief, though actually this political defeat for the Reformers was in part attributable to the activities of Conservative newspapers such as Richardson's. The post of Queen's Printer was now made subject to permanent appointment rather than election, and this effectively killed Richardson's hopes of obtaining it; in fact the change was made, according to Richardson, to save it for Derbishire who had no chance of being re-elected by his Bytown constituents.

This is the background of events and circumstances against which Richard-
son's *Miller's Prophecy Fulfilled* appeared on February 1, 1844. The immediate occasion of the poem was the destruction by fire of the Globe Hotel in Kingston, during the evening of January 27, 1844. According to an account in the Kingston *British Whig* for January 30, the fire began about 7 p.m. and was not subdued till midnight, leaving only four walls standing. Great credit is accorded to Captain Daley's Fire Company in stemming the spread of the flames, in spite of bitter cold weather, and a Mr. Jubien is given as the unfortunate hotel keeper. Many others involved in the fire are named in the *British Whig* report, but these two are clearly recognized in the poem; “There Daly on his Engine stood” at line 226, and Jubien in lines 121 and 133.

Political allusions abound throughout, and historians of nineteenth-century Canada may enjoy spotting them. For the general reader, a few identifications are attempted. The changed spelling of Captain Daley's name suggests a reference to Dominick Daly, mentioned on the title-page of Richardson's *Correspondence (Submitted to Parliament)* (Montreal, 1846). At this time Daly was constitutional advisor to Governor Metcalfe, but he vacillated between Tory and Reformer and was excluded from the second Baldwin-Lafontaine ministry in 1848. “Darby”, line 17 and throughout, is Stewart Derbishire, and “He who flounder'd in the mire” at Bytown (line 3) refers to Derbishire's questionable election practices in what is now Ottawa, then notorious for its swamps. “And when we think we've in our grasp, What most we've coveted” (line 31 ff.) expresses the author's disappointed expectations—a minor theme of despair which was entering into Richardson's writings at this time. “This was the host -- the lib'ral host” (line 103) is a punning reference to Derbishire's political allegiance. Hincks, Baldwin, Robert Sullivan and John Small, all members of the Baldwin-Lafontaine cabinet, are mentioned in lines 140-42, and Sir James Alexander (1803-1855) in line 247 was the aide-de-camp to General Sir William Rowan, and no doubt one of those from the Kingston garrison who, as the *British Whig* reported, were “soon on the scene of desolation” under the direction of Major-General Sir Richardson Armstrong. The picture of flowing wine, feasting and “sportive revels through the night” (line 48) which occupies the first half of the work, conveys the intent of the satire to cast Reformers in the role of Bacchanalians, living in luxurious splendour from the spoils of government office.

The 'Miller' of the title is William Miller (1782-1849), the American sectarian, founder of the Adventist Church. Born in upper New York State, he served as a captain in the War of 1812. He predicted, from his study of the Scriptures, that the Day of Judgement would arrive in 1843, and when this did not occur he set another date in 1844, the year of the Globe Hotel fire. More prophetic than this humorous reference, is Richardson's description of Derbishire’s concern for the books in his library (lines 171 ff.). A few years later, in 1849, when the Parliament Buildings in Montreal were set ablaze by Loyalists angry over the Rebellion Losses Bill, Derbishire risked his life to “preserve this treasure” by running in and out through the flames carrying armloads of books from the library.

Though Derbishire and Richardson remained journalistic rivals for some years
after the poem was written, they were never again at the same level of familiarity: as Derbyshire’s fortunes enlarged under the aegis of respectable government, Richardson’s worsened as he struggled for a livelihood, until his death eight years later in a condition of poverty and starvation. The satire here is the last token of Richardson’s happy spirits before he was engulfed.

The authors of this introduction wish to acknowledge the assistance of Mr. Peter Greig, for checking the only known surviving original of the poem in the Public Archives of Canada; of Mrs. Nancy Leitch, for her discovery of the contemporary description of the fire in the British Whig; and of Mrs. Patricia Wood, for her valuable work in the transcription and typing of the poem, from poor copies of an indifferent original.

David R. Beasley
William F.E. Morley

MILLER’S PROPHECY FULFILLED

In the destruction of the Globe

Prythee go hence; or I shall shew the cinders of my spirits through the ashes of my chance.

Ant & Cleop.

Tell us what has chanc’d to day, that Darby looks so sad.

Julius Caesar.

One only step there is, quoth Time,
Twixt the ridiculous and sublime;
And he who flound [e] r’d in the mire*
Had near been bacon’d by a fire.

Yet, Ah! how shall my muse proclaim
Its theme of fire, its lay of flame?
How tell the danger which assail’d
The Globe itself — which duck’d and quail’d
Beneath the gutting hand, and fell,

[10]
Like some strong Tower or Citadel,
Burying in its vast domain,
Whole seas of Claret and Champagne?

Twas on a cold and dreary eve,
(The glass at zero, I believe,
Or many more d[e] grees below,
As some affirm who better know)
That Darby and his guests sat down
In rosy wine the chill to drown,
And all was mirth, hilarity.
Abundant joy, and gaiety.
Each had resolved that night to sit,
And banish care with mull’d and wit —
Nay oft — ‘We won’t go home till morning,’
Was humm’d from lips rich smiles adorning,
And many a placid glance was turn’d
Upon the blazing hearth where burn’d
The crackling log that warm’d the wine
Which sparkled with a hue divine.

Yet ah! how oft, twixt cup and lip,
Occurs the most provoking slip;
And when we think we’re in our grasp
What most we’ve coveted to clasp,
Some chance malignant interferes
To turn enjoyment into tears,
And make us loathe the dev’lish guile
That lur’d to ruin with a smile.

Say, was there then no warning voice
To bid the joyous group beware?
To whisper ‘Feast not, nor rejoice,
These viands are the Fire-God’s share.
Soon will the flame that warms yon wine
And treach’rous lends a lambent light,
Steal from thy lips the juice divine,
And with its fumes grow wildly bright.
Ah! no — nor elf nor fairy Queen,
That trips along the snowy scene,
And in Lucina’s chaste, cold light,
Holds sportive revels through the night,
Spinning webs for Lover’s brains,

Soft and silken as the chains
Which bind the rosy God of pleasure,
When lull’d with wine in deepest measure,
Nor Mab herself the charioteer,
Who guides her coursers o’er the sphere
Of highest heaven’s broad expanse —
When moon beams on the waters dance,
And nature, hushed to solemn calm,
Enjoys soft evening’s grateful balm:
When lovers lisp their midnight tales,

And candor o’er reserve prevails,
Raising all the maiden’s blushes
As to her heart the warm blood rushes,
Quickening every pulse with madness,
And thrilling all her frame with gladness —
Not one of these on whirring wing,
Flew by, the warning note to ring.

Scarce had the unsuspicuous group
Swallow’d the warm and soothing soup,
[Fair earnest of as rich a feast]

[70] As e’er was eat by parish priest,
When lo! just as the wine had pass’d,
A waiter enters, all aghast,
Not with the luscious meats they crave,
But trembling like a galley slave
And shouting Fire! — the Globe’s on fire —
The roast is spoil’d, oh! Pray retire:
Unless this room is quick forsaken,
You’ll all be done as brown as bacon.

Great was the tumult, and indeed
’Twas hard, with earnest of such feed,
To quit a table where had clung
Each bon vivant, both old and young,
Determin’d that no change should tear
Them from the wines which mantled there —
But scathing fire has such fierce sway,
That few its warin’g[s] disobey
Those men who’d face the very devil,
To an[gl]ry fire, are somewhat civil.
And those who, e’en by midnight, rest not,
Scarce care to be a roasted chestnut.
But to our tale— each left his chair —
Some bounded down the smoking stair,
While others gulp’d a glass of wine,
And caught new courage from the vine,
Regretting only that they should
Have swallow’d nought but soup for food,
And that on such a pinching night,
When solid condiments delight.

[90] I’ve said they all, in haste, withdrew
A frighten’d helter-skelter crew —
But this is wrong — one yet remain’d
Who calmly grave his place retain’d:
This was the host — the lib’ral host,
Who knew not yet ‘that all was lost’
Nay, from the time the row began
He was throughout, the coolest man.
And why? The moment that the soup
Was gone, his head began to droop, #
And he fell into a brown-study
Which well became his visage ruddy.
He thought of Sullivan, and all
Who once had access to that hall,
And mourn’d to think they could not grace
His festive board, or take their place
Where once it was there wont to be
In glorious festivity.
At length he started, with a sigh,
And looked around — no one was nigh —
‘Where is the second course,’ he roar’d

[120]‘Where are my guests — already floor’d?
Here, Jubien, quick, you lazy dog,
Place on the fire another log.
And, that my guests may not complain,
Bring from the vaults my choice champagne.
But ha! this smoke — what mean those cries
Which seem to rend the very skies,
And why that ding dong of a bell
Which rings as t’were my festive knell?’

Ding, ding, dong indeed was the sound,
And louder grew the cries around,
Till Demons seem’d eager, that night
To revel in the cold moon-light

‘Jubien, you slave, what is the matter?
What means this most infernal clatter?
Is’t a wake or a charivari?
Are my guests dead, or is’t for me?
Has the macaroni burnt black?
Or is the town giv’n up t[o] o sack?
Is Moore come with the glorious news

[140]‘That Hincks shall still ‘stand in his shoes’—
That Sullivan and Baldwin — all —
Remain in office, down to Small?
And are these bells and shouts a sign
That we shall still our strength combine?
But faugh! whence comes this filthy smoke?

# This is the bottom line of the first column of the poem. Under this is a rule across the column, and beneath the rule there is an asterisk followed by the words “At Bytown”. This footnote refers to line 3 of the poem, which ends with an asterisk.
Egad the thing is past a joke.
No one answers — and yet a roar
Of wild sounds I hear, as before —
Ha! what a stench, what burning smell!

It surely is the bechamel—.
‘For God’s sake, Darby,’ cried a voice
[*] Escape, or roast — quick make your choice.
The upper story is in flames,
E’en now the fire consumes the frames;
Shake off this dreaming reverie,
(Too seeming wise by far for me,)
And let us see if, with our ‘chaps,
We can’t contrive to save your traps.’
Outrush’d pale Darby from the hall,

No longer one of festival;
And as he mov’d towards the stair
Beheld, by the distorting glare
Of the quiv’ring and burning roof,
(Its rafters wrought in checker’d woof.)
A Catering friend, who with much zeal
Had fled from his shadowy meal,—
A meal like what, says quaint research,
Was spread once in St. Alban’s church —
To summon earth’s artillery

To save the choicest Burgundy.

His books to wine, the sage prefers,
Nor here a diff’rent course occurs.
To save his library from fire
Became now Darby’s chief desire.
‘Preserve this treasure,’ he exclaim’d
‘These books and prints so richly fram’d
And tho’ the wine be lost above
There’s lots within the cellar, cove,
Let[*]s save the books and then the traps,

And deeply at my choicest taps,
Each man shall have his quantum suff.
Of most delicious vinous stuff.

Thus brib’d the party quickly ran
Into his rooms, when straight began
The most disastrous rout that e’er
Tried patience of philosopher.
Up went the windows — out the books —
Some caught by hands and some by hooks;
Rich prints with frames went slashing
With such a devil of a crashing
That one had thought, what with the bawling,
The walls themselves were outward falling,
Both china, glass, cold cream and paste,
Sharp razors, boots, night caps well lac’d,
Soap, silver shaving pots and straps,
In fact all manner of man-traps
Were bundled out into the street,
As tho’ they’d been so much dogs’ meat
And then what breaking, blundering,

What pilfering and plundering!
Some stragglers helped themselves to pins,
Some, larger trifles for their sins

And how look’d Darby all this while?
With purs’d up lip, and vacant smile
He watch’d unmov’d the overthrow
Of all his household gods below;
And, with his hands thrust in his breeches,
Saw fellows, ravaging his riches,
With faces all besmear’d with dirt,

And scarcely cover’d with a shirt.
Still only for his books he sigh’d
Which justly were his chiefest pride,
As some fond lover for his bride.

Sick of the sight — he gain’d the street,
Where rested hosts of human feet,
And human eyes, were looking on,
As if their careless glance alone
Could stay the havoc of the fire
Which rose at every instant higher.

Some human hands there were, tis true,
That work’d with spirit to subdue
The ardor of the element,
Which now on ev’ry hand[sic], had vent.
And hiss’d, and fizz’d and wildly roar’d
Destruction to his gutted board.

There Daly on his Engine stood,
Like fierce Achille, the demi-god,
Dipp’d to the heel in icy flood,
Wielding his pipe, as ’twere a lance,

And ever in his troop’s advance,
Here Smith with long and dripping hose

26
Play'd on the fire that warm'd his nose.
There Travers, like a "great gun", bore
His chief attack upon the door,
And, mounted on a ladder-frame,
Threw shower's of water on the flame,
'Till sous'd, he tumbled to the ground,
By rival water-pipe half drown'd!
Here Corbett saunter'd up and down,

[240]
As tho' his presence could put down
The naughty fire which thus had flar'd,
And Sheriffs from their beds ensnar'd!
There, too, were martial looking men,
Who swore, and stamp'd and swore again —
Some doing "service to the state,"
And checking fast the work of fate,
('Mong these was Sir James Alexander,
Who work'd thro' fire like Salamander,)
Some making much "more noise than wool[?]",
And using arms when but a pull
With ru[?]d er hands had done as well,
And left no wrong on which to dwell.

Flash, flash, flash,
The floors have fallen in:
Crash, crash, crash,
What a horrible din.

Ding, ding, dong,
Still peal the stunning bells:
Fire, fire, fire,
[260]
Is shouted in wild yells.

* * * * * *

Twas nearly dawn, the flames were quench'd,
The active firemen, chill'd and drench'd
Had put away their pipes and hose,
And now indulg'd in sweet repose.
One only group stood mourning there,
The dull dark image of despair.
Twas hapless Darby and his friends,
Who'd hop'd to make [t] hem some amends
For loss of all their dinner wine,

[270]
Upon a vintage more divine, —
But ah! their anguish, who shall tell
When, on their noses came a smell
Of Burgundy and brisk Champagne
Strong from a tub us'd for a drain.
They sniff'd and star'd and sniff'd again,
But ah! the sacrilege was plain —
Some wicked rogues had seized the treasure,
And mix'd both wines in this foul measure,
Full Champagne baskets they'd purloin'd
And Burgundy with "slush" was join'd —
Then in this mess their mouths they dipp'd
And like brave soldiers deeply sipp'd
Until they reel'd replete with arrack
And hiccupp'd back unto their barrack.

* * * * * *

Foil'd in their search, the friends withdrew
To "soak their skins" in mountain dew
And swore when next they went to dine
They'd take good care to bolt the wine.