



Life, Literature and Education.



Ralph Connor

(Rev. C. W. Gordon, Winnipeg).

Some months ago, a commercial traveller halted at Winnipeg to secure orders for the novel which has not yet shaped itself in Ralph Connor's brain. That he booked over a thousand copies makes another exception to the old proverb; and, if a thousand copies in Winnipeg, how many in Canada and the United States? When an author reaches the million and a half mark, with translations in five or six languages, the public wants to know all about him, and has a right to know so much and no more. There is a side of every man's life that belongs to himself, and those he honors and loves, at least until he is a generation dead.

The genesis of Ralph Connor's pseudonym may not be generally known. When the editor of the "Westminster" was printing the first "Tale of the Selkirk," called "Christmas Eve in a Lumber Camp," he telegraphed Mr. Gordon for a nom de plume. When Mr. Gordon opened the telegram and read the message, his eye fell upon the stamp on his official letter paper, "Secretary Canadian Northwest Missions," and on the spur of the moment he chose the first syllables of the words, "Canadian North." It happened that the operator blundered, and the Editor, reading "Connor" instead of "Cannor," thought he might as well couple that Irish name with a good English one, and so Mr. Gordon was surprised, but not displeased, to read at the head of his first idyll, "Ralph Connor." Now that he has worn that pseudonym so long, it fits as if the Scotchman had been melted and poured into it. I said Scotchman, but, although every drop of his blood is Scottish, Mr. Gordon is Canadian to the heart's core. His father, a beautiful old man, and every inch a chieftain, who, at eighty-four years, is taking the Atlantic voyage as if it were a ferry outing, is one of a Highland family in Perthshire. He came to Canada in the forties to preach to a Gaelic colony from "the Islands and High-

lands." Here he married Mary Robertson, daughter of a Lowland minister, who preached the Gospel for sixty years and was long known in the Province of Quebec as "Bishop Robertson." Mr. Gordon's mother taught philosophy in Mt. Holyoke Seminary at the age of nineteen, and at twenty-one refused the principalship to marry the Rev. Daniel Gordon in the backwoods of Canada. Mrs. Murray, of "The Man from Glengarry," is a transcript from the life of this noble woman. Her sister, M. M. Robertson, is still widely read, as the author of "Christie Redfern's Troubles," "Alison Bain," and other stories. The famous Oriental scholar and forerunner of modern Old Testament criticism, Robertson Smith, was a cousin. Andrew Murray, the mystic writer and that family of eleven missionaries in South Africa, are also cousins, and, if I am not misinformed, Robertson Nicoll is a connection. It is plain that Ralph Connor owes very much to his rich heritage. He was born in the heart of the Glengarry forests, and lived his early boyhood there. That revival in "The Man from Glengarry" is a real memory and no figment of the brain; and while the action of the book is in Glengarry, everything is practically true. It is thus plain, too, that Ralph Connor had great advantages in his early natural environment. I never can help pitying the man or woman city born and city bred. Nothing can atone for country influence during the first plastic years of life.

Young Gordon received his collegiate training in St. Mary's High School. It is worth noting how, in the holidays, he worked in the hay and wheat fields, and would not be outstripped by grown men in the day's work achieved, the sensitive skin of the "tenderfoot" smarting with pain and bleeding from sharp contact with the wheat. After his university course at Toronto, where he figured prominently in college life, he taught classics for one year, and entered Knox College, graduating in 1887. One summer, during the Knox course, was spent as a Home Missionary at Cook's Creek in Manitoba. With the Canadian Quintette, he then spent a year in Edinburgh and on the Continent, going to Banff about six months after his return. It was here, in the heart of the Canadian Alps, that Mr. Gordon first saw the vision of the West, and grasped the great Home Mission problem facing the Church. It was here he formed a close friendship with that churchman and prophet of the West, Dr. Jas. Robertson, whose biography he is now preparing. It was here he ministered to the villages on the railway line and to the passing tourist, and received in turn the ministry of the mountains. "Black Rock" grew out of his Banff experiences, and the "Sky Pilot" for he was in close touch with Dr. Herdman and all the foothill country. After Banff, came another visit to Scotland and the Continent, although the visit meant the refusal of more than one call from important churches. While in Scotland, he presented the claims of the Northwest so successfully as to obtain "fifty thousand dollars" for Presbyterian Home Missions. His recent years have been spent with St. Stephen's, Winnipeg during

which time a handsome new church has been erected on Portage Avenue. So far he has resisted all inducements to retire from the ministry and devote himself to literature. He possesses, in a rare degree, some faculties that go to make a successful ministry. He has the qualities that make pastoral visitation so valuable a factor in the work of a minister: sympathy, interest, the love of human kind, especially of little children. In preaching, he has the gift of spontaneous expression; and, if he comes into the pulpit with his sermon well thought out, it is fine homiletic literature as it falls from his lips. Then he is awake to new ideas for church and congregation. Both as author and minister, his great purpose is to show that the spiritual, the Unseen, is the real thing in life. No doubt, it is the subtle spiritual element in his books responding to the unuttered cry in the heart of men, that is the great secret of their popularity. No doubt, he will some time attempt a psychological novel, and we may be sure of one character in it—the superintendent; and another, his mother, because Ralph Connor could not write a book and keep his mother out. It was during his Banff ministry that Gladstone wrote the critical review of "Mrs. Humphrey Ward's Robert Elsmere," and gave that novel its immense circulation. Mr. Gordon read the book, but not the review; and he used occasionally to say: "I am going to write a novel to confute all that rubbish in 'Robert Elsmere.'" And this is his message: Christ, not a shadowy man of loveliest ethics, but Christ a real Man among men and the second Person of the Trinity, without Whom no man can fulfil his high destiny. Mr. Gordon attempted a mild novel of Northwest life during the later Red Rebellion, but it never materialized. It was at the request of T. Nelson & Sons, during his last visit to Edinburgh. When he did accomplish his first stories that made up "Black Rock," it was by urgent request. "A picture of life in the West—a series of pictures will do more for Home Missions than many addresses," he was told; and for the sake of the West, he wrote his first idylls. The little idyll, "Beyond the Marshes," was a sudden inspiration born of a profound impression made upon him by a sick girl in a little clearing beyond the marshes at Beausejour. It is a simple record of a visit, a record with the touch of genius upon it, and something more, a recognition of reverence of the nobleness of human toil and human suffering. "Beyond the Marshes" was Ralph Connor's first printed "book," and was published in Winnipeg. Of that popular book, "The Glengarry School Days," and his latest publication, "The Prospector," your readers are, doubtless, familiar.

R. R.

In a fight among the river men, Le Noir, a Frenchman, had thrown, brutally kicked and seriously injured Black Hugh Macdonald and his brother. Macdonald Bham takes up the quarrel.

"Now, the Lord be praised," he cried, joy breaking out in his face. "He has delivered mine enemy into my hand. For it is the third time he has smitten me, and that is his

yond the limit appointed by Himself."

Le Noir stood up against his antagonist. He had beaten men as big as Macdonald, but he knew that his hope lay in keeping out of the enemy's reach. Le Noir opened with a swift and savage reach for Macdonald's neck, but failed to break the guard and danced out again. Again and again he rushed, but the guard was impregnable, and steadily Macdonald advanced. That steady relentless advance began to tell on the Frenchman; the sweat gathered in big drops on his forehead and ran down his face. He prepared for a supreme effort. Swiftly retreating, he lured Macdonald to a more rapid advance, then with a yell he doubled himself into a ball and delivered himself, head, hands, and feet, into Macdonald's stomach. But Macdonald had been waiting for that trick. Stopping short, he leaned over to one side, and stooping slightly, caught Le Noir low and tossed him clear over his head. Le Noir fell with a terrible thud, but was on his feet again like a cat. That unbreakable guard, the smiling face, with the gleaming, unsmiling eyes, that awful unwavering advance, were too much for him. Feigning a greater distress than he felt, he yielded weakly to Macdonald's advance; then suddenly gathering his full strength he sprang into the air, and lashed out backward at that hated smiling face. His boot found its mark, not on Macdonald's face, but fair on his neck. At the yell that went up from Murphy's men, the big Highlander's face lost its smile, and became keen and cruel, and he came forward once more with a quick light tread. There was something terrifying in that swift, cat-like movement. In vain the Frenchman backed and dodged. Once, twice, Macdonald's fists fell. Le Noir's right arm hung limp by his side, and he staggered back to the wall helpless. Without an instant's delay, Macdonald had him by the throat, and gripping him fiercely, began to slowly bend him backward over his knee. "Le Noir," he said, solemnly, "the days of your boasting are over. You will no longer glory in your strength, for now I will break your back to you."

"Tonald," Black Hugh's voice sounded faint, but clear in the awful silence—"Tonald—you will not—be killing him. Remember that now, I will—never—forgive you—if you will—take that—from my hands."

But Black Hugh, the helpless cripple, before his death learns the lesson of forgiveness, and makes his son, Ranald, also promise to forgive the man who had crippled him. Louis Le Noir, the Ottawa River driver, is surrounded in the city streets by a Gatineau crowd, and is being helped by two of Ranald's friends. They are having much the worst of it, when relief appears, headed by Ranald.

"Glengarry!" cried Ranald, and like a lion he leaped upon the Gatineaus. Right and left he hurled the crowd aside, and seizing Le Noir, brought him out to his own men.

"Who are you?" gasped Le Noir.

"Why, no, it is not possible."

"Who are you?" he said again.

"Never mind," said Ranald, shortly. "let us get away now, quick."

That night, as Ranald and his