

A New Novel by Robert Watson



Though Mr. Robert Watson is now stationed at Winnipeg in "the Middle West," there is no reason why it should be forgotten that initial literary success came to him as a resident of British Columbia. He has at different times during the past dozen years been among the valued contributors—in prose and verse—to the BRITISH COLUMBIA MONTHLY, and for that and other reasons we are among his friends in the farthest West who have an interest in anything published in his name.

"GORDON OF THE LOST LAGOON" is the title of his latest novel, just put on the market by Thomas Allen, Toronto. The least that should be said about it is that it is quite a readable story; and a good deal more might fairly be said. Written in autobiographical form, it is a record of a young soul breasting the blows of circumstance, and so facing life's responsibilities in untoward conditions as to "make good."

From the narrative many inferences might be drawn about Mr. Watson himself. That he himself is fond of out-of-door exercises, a strong swimmer, a keen fisher, a good boatman, and a man with an inborn love of the sea, are altogether reasonable assumptions—which friendly knowledge of him will confirm. But "Gordon of the Lost Lagoon" suggests, or rather proves, that the novelist has also been a student of the Waterfront of Vancouver city, and always of course interested in the different types of character to be met there and elsewhere.

Of this novel, as of all others read or reviewed, no doubt various opinions will be expressed, according to the condition or disposition of the reader. But if a first basis of attraction and recommendation in any Romance, read for mental relaxation, is its capacity to arrest the reader's attention and quietly arouse his interest, so that he is well-nigh finished with the book before he realises that he is much more than begun, then this reviewer at least has no hesitation in commending "Gordon of the Lost Lagoon."

As is usual in all Mr. Watson's stories, this record includes some fighting, and one fight in particular "to a finish." In connection with the "finish" there is something peculiar though not unreasonable, in a certain action by the "heroine" towards the "hero" of the story. As may be assumed however, even that indirectly contributes to the satisfying climax.

From the novelist's detailed descriptions of pugilistic encounters it is a safe assumption that Mr. Watson has himself been something more than a bit of a boxer, as, like R.L.S., he seems rather to love a bonnie fight as well as "a bonnie fighter." On the other hand the narrative contains many incidents and experiences relating to the quiet restful life that many folk live in the hope of enjoying more fully before they pass beyond this pilgrimage; and of course throughout the story there is the unfolding—wholesome and happy in spite of dangers and interruptions—of a relationship between a winsome woman and "Gordon," which, with other details in the book, will make its appeal as the author intended "to those who are not too young to have felt the glow of Romance, or too old to have forgotten it."

It is not usual for a reviewer to quote from novels, but we shall venture to reproduce a paragraph from about the middle of the book that specially arrested our attention. While it has no bearing on the attractive side of the Romance, it reveals the author of "Gordon of the Lost Lagoon" as a man of enlarging experience and reflective mind in a soliloquizing mood. The comparison he makes and the suggestion that comes to him from it, may not appeal with the same force to all readers alike; but some may hold, with the present reviewer, that this Scottish-born Canadian writer, still intellectually young or at least not yet in his intellectual prime, and not so old in years either,—is giving evidence that with all his fondness for "fechting" and ability in stirring narrative, he has in him or is acquiring, what the old divines called "the root of the matter."

The paragraph follows:—

"I stood for a long time, bewitched, as I watched the wonderful night picture. Then I thought of the busy freight sheds, the piles of sordid but necessary merchandise, the rumbling trucks, the creaking of winches and the jingle of chains; I thought of the glare of artificial lights strung from the rafters, of the coarse jests of rough men, the sweat and grime, the everlasting grind of the mills of gods and men in the chase for money, power, clothing, bread, even life itself; and though I loved most of these if only for the zest of the fight, I was filled with an immeasurable content in my present surroundings and I knew that I had chosen aright in breaking away, if it were merely to take stock of myself by myself, without rush, without coercion, without bias; if merely to fill up and renew from the great life-giving reservoir of God's glorious open. If I could have had my way that night, I would have made it possible, ay compulsory, for all city-bred and city-living men to spend at least one year in every five away from the suicidal shadow-ghosts of goods, fevered finance, exchange, barter and shady trickery, cent-per-cent and legalized robbery; for, after all, a hundred years hence and what matter these material things!"

Yes, we agree with the novelist, what matter these things THEN?—to the growing soul and still developing personality?

We believe this story will, in different ways, please young and old, and also those who may reckon themselves in between; and that those who welcome the book because of their interest in the author, will be glad to commend it for its own sake.

—D. A. C.

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