

Someone has said that "great men lose somewhat of their greatness by being near us," and there is no doubt that we are prone to throw a halo of romance round a man whom we know only from his books, imagining him to be great in all other spheres just as he is in that of a writer, and to possess certain characteristic features that indelibly stamp him especially favoured by the gods. But how often we are disappointed! Very few *litterateurs* have attained success as public speakers. Within the past few years we have had visit us Conan Doyle, Robert Burdette, Henry M. Stanley, Frederick Villiers, D. Christie Murray, Hall Caine, and some lesser lights; and with the exception of probably the two last, all have disappointed us. Hall Caine delivered no public lectures while in Canada, but those who had the pleasure of hearing him speak at banquets felt that he would make a great success as a platform orator, as he possesses the essential requisites for a good speaker, having a beautiful mellow voice, great wealth of language, extraordinary ability as a *raconteur*, and elocutionary powers of a high order. In view of so many failures it was quite natural for admirers of "Ian Maclaren" to feel apprehensive for his success as a lecturer. However, many of them were quite confident that he would be successful as a platform orator inasmuch that he had achieved eminence as a preacher long before he became known as a writer. It is said that as a preacher he is a pronounced success, and that his church is always filled with worshippers, among whom are large numbers of young men. He has solved "the young man and the Church" problem, and the ministers of Toronto and elsewhere would do well to ascertain, if possible, the secret of his success in bringing young men into touch with the Church. Although Mr. Watson writes his sermons, he does not read them, but delivers them from memory. He does not believe in the lengthy sermon, and only once has he been a transgressor in this respect. On that occasion he was reproved by one of his congregation in an amusing manner. At the conclusion of the service he asked a member of his flock if he had enjoyed the sermon. "There was one thing in it that I did not like and which I hope never to hear again," replied the gentleman. "Indeed, and what was that?" asked Mr. Watson. "I heard the clock strike twice."

It may disappoint some of Mr. Watson's admirers, especially the Scotch ones, to learn that he is not a Scotchman by birth, although of pure Scotch blood, his father and mother being Gaelic, and the Gaels, he himself says, are Scotchmen raised to the highest degree. The little town of Manningtree, Essex county, England, has the honour of being the birthplace of the illustrious preacher and author. His father, who was an excise officer, was stationed there for a few years and was then moved back to Scotland; and it was in Perth and Stirling that the greater part of Mr. Watson's childhood was spent. Just here it may be mentioned that his mother's maiden name was Maclaren; hence the *nom de plume*—"Ian," of course, being the Gaelic for "John." It is said that his mother and father were of a strong religious temperament, the latter especially so, and that it was in accordance with the wish of his father that he studied for the ministry. In the year 1866, when only sixteen years of age, he entered the University of Edinburgh, and graduated in due time after a distinguished career. While attending the university he had as fellow-students R. L. Stevenson and (Prof.) Henry Drummond. These two, however, did not distinguish themselves in their studies as did Mr. Watson. That grand old man, Prof. John Stuart Blackie, than whom no more lovable man ever lived, whose name will be remembered always with gratitude by those young men who have read his little book, "Self-Culture," exerted a great influence in directing the lives of these students who were to become so celebrated in after years. It may not be generally known that this trio are credited with being the perpetrators of the now famous (recalcitrant) practical joke on Prof. Blackie. A notice was posted one morning, to the effect that Prof. Blackie would meet his classes in the afternoon. One of the students, probably Watson, more likely Stevenson, erased the letter "c" in the word "classes," making the notice read: "Prof. Blackie will meet his 'lasses' this afternoon." Coming in shortly afterwards the Professor perceived that his notice had been tampered with, but instead of making any comments he went to the board and rubbed out the letter "l" in the same word, so

that the sentence now read: "Prof. Blackie will meet his 'asses' this afternoon."

After graduating from the Theological Hall of Edinburgh, which he entered after leaving the University, Mr. Watson served for a short time as assistant to the Rev. J. H. Wilson in Edinburgh, and then accepted a call to the Free Church of Logiealmond in Perthshire, which place is now better known as Drumtochty. Logiealmond is merely a small country district, and previous to 1805 the estate of Logiealmond belonged to the Dales of Athol. The only village within its bounds is the "Fens," known to the postal authorities as "Harrietfield Post-office." It was during his residence in Logiealmond, a period of about two and one-half years, that Mr. Watson was enabled to study the lives and characters of those whole-souled but humble people who were to make him famous one day. It is said by Dr. W. Robertson Nicholl, and he should know, that it was here that Mr. Watson formed the literary plans which were not carried out until twenty years later, owing to lack of self-confidence. From Logiealmond he went to St. Matthew's Church, Glasgow, as the colleague of Dr. Samuel Miller. Three years later he accepted a call to Sefton Park Presbyterian Church, Liverpool, where he still has charge.

A sketch of "Ian Maclaren" would be incomplete without mentioning the name of Dr. W. Robertson Nicholl, editor of *The British Weekly*, and *The Bookman*, for to him the reading public owe a great debt of gratitude for bringing from their hiding places men such as Crockett, Barrie, and Watson. Dr. Nicholl knew of Mr. Watson's ability to write on Scotch life and character from having heard him at different times relate incidents in connection with his ministry at Logiealmond. He tried again and again to induce him to write for the *British Weekly*, and finally Mr. Watson sent him an article, but it did not suit the Doctor, and he returned it with the curt note, "You can do better." Mr. Watson then set to work in earnest and wrote the series of articles now known as "The Bonnie Brier Bush." These idylls met with almost instantaneous success. However, had it not been that Barrie had cleared the way by cultivating a taste for this style of literature, it is doubtful if their success would have been so speedy. Indeed, at the time, most people thought that Barrie was writing under a new name. There is a great similarity in the style of these two writers. Mr. Watson, however, is generally credited with having more sympathy than Mr. Barrie. But few there are, as yet, who will acknowledge the pupil to be as great a writer as his teacher.

Within two years the sales of Mr. Watson's books have approximated half a million copies, and the demand remains undiminished. Besides "The Bonnie Brier Bush" and "In the Days of Auld Lang Syne," he has written a selection of sermons appropriate to the communion season, entitled "The Upper Room," also a series of practical sermons, which he has called "The Mind of the Master." His first novel, "Kate Carnegie," has been appearing in serial form, and is now being issued complete in one volume. It is said that he is about to write a Life of Christ and that it will be published shortly. Hall Caine and S. R. Crockett are also engaged in writing on the same subject, the former is treating it from an imaginative point of view; this method of treatment he claims to be entirely new.

The question has often been asked, "What is the secret of Mr. Watson's almost phenomenal success?" and probably the best answer that can be given is the one offered by a critic in the *Saturday Review*, viz., that he appeals to the great heart of the people.

Let it not be thought that Mr. Watson has escaped scathless from the critics. One critic says that he fails to give us anything like human beings, that there is neither imagination nor humour in his book, that his style is ambiguous, and his characterization superfluous, that the book is never witty and never intentionally funny. He evidently acknowledges that the book is funny, but accidentally so. It would be interesting to know the critic's idea of what constitutes humour; perhaps he has been brought up solely on Punch's jokes! If Jamie Soutar is not a humorous character, there is, I think, no humour in anybody. You remember where "Weellum Maclure" is desirous of learning from Jamie the cause of all the kindness he is receiving from the people, that Jamie evades the issue in his sly, humorous way, "Ye a'll explain that in a meenut, for a' ken the Glen weel."