

Is Canadian Literature Encouraged?

It was a very timely and interesting controversy which Mr. Douglas started by his remarks in a recent lecture at the Carnegie Library on the lack of appreciation—financial and otherwise—which the Canadian reading public have shown to their own native authors in the past. Mr. Douglas is one of the best posted men in Canada on everything that pertains to the world of books, and has had a wide experience both from the standpoint of the bookbuyer and the publisher. Consequently his strictures on the lack of patriotism along this line shown by our reading public may well require our consideration and recur to our mind each time that we visit the bookstore, so that we may not always look outside our own country for our literary pabulum. It is a mild but pernicious form of artistic snobbery that brands everything local or native as necessarily amateurish or inferior.

Mr. Douglas' remarks were warmly called in question by "Lucian" in the Province, who took up the cudgels for the other side, and it was interesting to hear what could be said in the defence.

Strangely enough, in the February number of "The Canadian Magazine" the same subject is dealt with in an article by J. M. Gibbon, the author of "Hearts and Faces," entitled "Where is Canadian Literature?" The first answer that suggested itself to his own question the writer declares, was "On the road to New York," when he reviewed the lengthy list of those who had left Canada for the more profitable field in the United States. He had questioned the young lady in charge at one of the largest stores in Toronto as to the demand for Canadian literature, and was told that the public had no desire to read books by native authors; rather it was necessary to conceal the fact that a good book was by a Canadian or people would refuse to buy it. "Oh, give me something English or American," the customer would say, "I want something really good." This, of course, is exactly the attitude of mind that Mr. Douglas deplored in his incidental remarks at the library.

Mr. Gibbon's article, on the whole, however, took an optimistic tone as regards the future for Canadian literature, in view of the great influence which the war has exercised towards the promotion of a real national spirit, and the inevitable reaction that this would produce in the field of literature. He already sees signs of this renaissance in the crop of recent publications by native writers inspired by the war; and quotes from letters received from three Canadian publishers to show the greater interest that is being taken by the trade in native talent. One of these, Mr. McClelland, of McClelland, Goodchild and Stuart, which firm has specialized on works by Canadian writers, declared that in all their experience they had yet to lose a dollar on any Canadian book that they had ever published.

After the war, Mr. Gibbon looks for a far greater exploitation of the resources of our country for imaginative writing and sets forth with enthusiasm the richness of these along the line of distinctive character types, natural beauty of the scenery, and social and racial problems that furnish abundant material for drama and romance. It is to be hoped, therefore, that the reading public will do their share in fostering a national literature by taking a genuine pride in whatever is good that native writers may bring forth, and that it will not be necessary for them to seek in foreign lands that appreciation that has sometimes been denied them in their own.

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