

sation. Here is a sample, taken from a recent appreciation of the author:

"All life moving to one measure—
Daily bread, daily bread—
Bread of life, and bread of labour,
Bread of bitterness and sorrow,
Hand-to-mouth, and no to-morrow,
Dearth for housemate, death for neighbour . . .
Yet, when all the babes are fed,
Love, are there not crumbs to treasure?"

Rev. John Holmes, in *The Survey* for January 6, talks eloquently of this realist poet. A ride on a London bus to the far East End, he says, a walk down a dirty slum street a-swarm with children, a three-flight climb up the stairs of a dingy tenement, entrance into a small back room, crowded with books, flooded with sunshine, adorned with a typical English tea-table, and picturesquely overlooking a wilderness of roofs and yards—it was thus on an August afternoon, 1913, in company with my friend, Rabbi Wise, that I found Wilfred Wilson Gibson, whose forthcoming visit to this country is an event not only for lovers of literature, but for social workers as well.

It was *Daily Bread*, published in 1912, which first made Gibson's name familiar. An unpretentious collection of seventeen dramatic sketches, all brief, all written in the simplest poetic style, this book yet constitutes one of the most impressive works in the field of social literature which has appeared in recent years.

Here in his little dramas are miners, fishers, steel-workers, firemen, tenement-dwellers, factory girls, slum waifs, rural labourers, fathers, mothers, children. Here are people whose lives from morning until night, year in and year out, are concerned with the bitter problem of getting enough bread to hold body and soul together. Here are people who have become so used to hunger, cold, nakedness, weariness, disease, death, that they have lost the habit of complaint, or revolt, or even inquiry, and accept their misery as passively as the flower takes the gust of the hurricane or the chill of the autumn rains. And here are people who, amid a thousand ills of fortune, preserve unimpaired their love for one another, their fidelity to duty, their faith in God.

Defending Story Writers

VARIOUS theories are afloat concerning the use made by writers of Canadian material. In our literary section for December a staff writer gave expression to certain views which brought a number of protests from Canadian writers in January. Now in the February book section, Mr. Alan Sullivan comes at the subject by the mathematical method. Being apparently mentioned by our staff contributor as a writer who neglects Canadian material in his stories. Having on hand all the files of his published productions and copies of all MSS. not yet in print. Mr. Sullivan does a few sums in arithmetic to prove a case in literature. He says in a letter to the Editor:

February 2nd, 1917.

Editor, Canadian Courier:

Dear Sir,—I notice that in Mr. Cooke's article on "Canadian Short Stories," which appeared in your Christmas issue, he apparently discovers a lack of work dealing with Canadian subjects, and goes on to express his belief that this is due to the better market for short stories in the United States and the fact that the American public prefers to read that which takes its local colour from within its own boundaries. Mr. Cooke mentions Mr. Arthur Stringer and myself as being Canadian short story writers who use very little Canadian material, because the greater part of our work is sold outside of Canada.

I would like to take courteous but decided exception to Mr. Cooke's statement. I, naturally, cannot speak as concerns Mr. Stringer, but as concerns myself I find that out of some forty short stories written within the last two years and a half, and divided equally between Canada and the United States, thirty-four of them were purely Canadian in action, locality and colour. Out of six novelettes

written during the same period, running from 40,000 to 60,000 words, five are essentially Canadian. The sixth (and I might state that this is the only one which has not been sold) was cast in Virginia, in a weak-kneed attempt at compromise. The result of the compromise served me right.

A novel, which appeared in 1915, was laid in Canada, and a further novel, which commences serially in the March issue of "Munsey's," is also entirely Canadian. To put the matter briefly, my personal experience is that the writer may cast his scene either in Alaska or Timbuctoo, and the market value of his product will not be affected provided only that he knows whereof he writes and can, consequently, express himself with the assurance that carries conviction.

There are, without doubt, periodicals which devote themselves principally to American subjects, but

these do not exist in any great number. I find that editors are out for one thing only, and that is quality and that particular element of human interest by which the written word creates a picture to the eye of the reader. I find, further, that there is very little ground for the somewhat widely held belief that certain magazines have their own particular circle of contributors and that it is very difficult to break through this circle. So far as one can judge to-day, the market for short stories is better than ever before, prices are higher, and the chief complaint of editors is that they must, in self-protection, wade through a great deal of stuff of questionable quality lest they should happen to miss something fresh and desirable. I know of no better field for the imaginative writer than is to be found in Canada.

Yours faithfully,

ALAN SULLIVAN.

The Short Story Problem Again

PURSUe the Canadian short story and you will achieve a wonderful appetite for something better. I don't mean that there aren't good Canadian short stories. I do mean that the average is very low. There are just enough good ones printed in a year to make one wish for more of them, and the best of those that ARE printed appear, not in Canadian, but in American publications.

I say these things with knowledge aforethought, for I have only recently finished going through certain bound volumes of the Canadian Magazine, Maclean's Magazine, the Courier, a few ragged copies of "The Canadian Century"—Sir Max Aitken's little fivver of some years past—and sundry other publications in this country. I have examined page after page in the hope of finding a good story and I have found acres and acres of twaddle supporting a few, very few, literary flowers. I don't mean twaddle in the sense that much of the Saturday Evening Post's fiction is twaddle. In that journal there must be admitted to be a semblance of skill in the writing of the tales. There is at least invention and more or less sincere and shrewd observation of human nature. But in our stories—except those written from Canada for American editors, there are seldom even these points to recommend them.

In the first place, Canadian publications use a surprising amount of "syndicate stories," tales made in England or in New York fourth-story-rears, and fed out by the mile like telephone wire from a reel. These stories are bought because they are cheap and because the average Canadian editor finds no happy medium between buying cheap stories and the fabulous cost of buying really good stories in competition with American magazines. Sifting out the syndicate stories from the Canadian stories, I find that the syndicate stuff, bad as it is, shows a certain superiority to the average Canadian story in the way it is handled, technically. The observation of life may not have been as accurate, nor the plot as sin-

cere, but the syndicate story tends to run more smoothly. It has to, having been "ironed out" by the hacks in the employ of the syndicate.

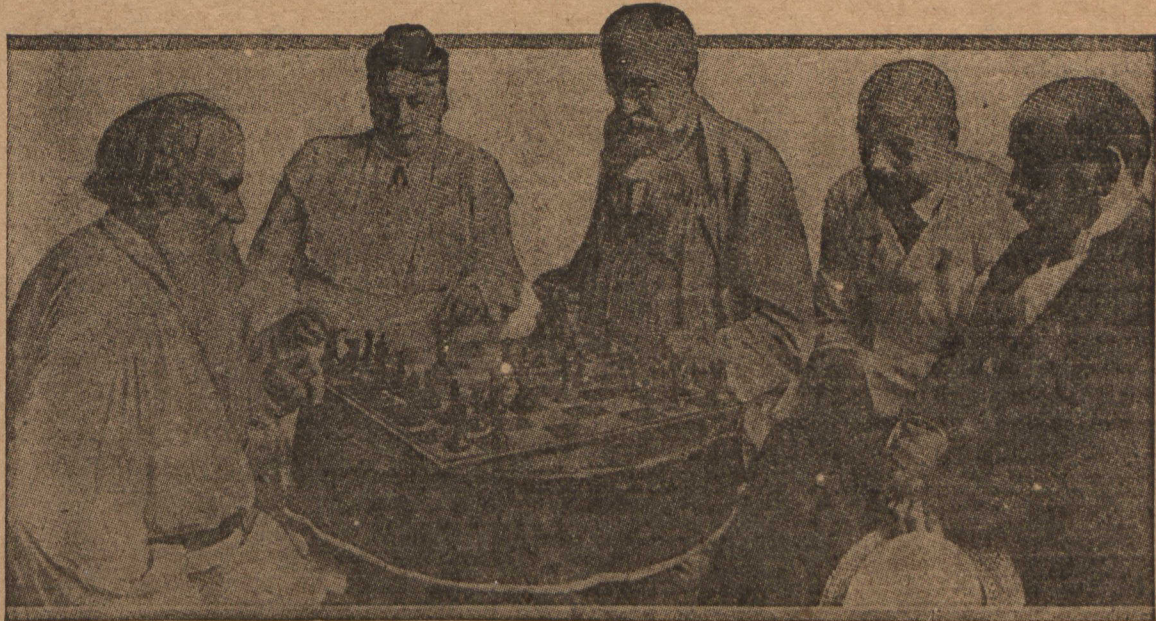
Now, then, to take the Canadian stories written for Canadian publications, this is the sort of thing I find: A story of somebody's summer holiday in the north country in which the chief episode is a rescue from a rapid. Stale! A woman writer here tells the brave story of a young Canadian soldier who goes to the Front and does something heroic (the author is careful not to give details) and rehabilitates himself in the eyes of his own home town. Obvious! Here is a story of a trapper in the far north who hears about the war and after much hesitation decides to give all his life's savings, except enough to grub-stake him for next year, to a machine gun fund, down in civilization. We are asked to believe that he trudges several hundred miles to the office where subscriptions are being taken, and then turns right around and trudges straight back to his traps—without even getting drunk, a most unusual oversight. At least that man would have taken a day off to see the town. At least he would have bought a picture post-card and scrawled something on it for some distant friend.

Then I come to a tale called "The Waters of Strife" (by a Canadian woman who has, I think, great ability if she could only apply it intensively instead of with such a prolific pen). I try to read it, but how can anyone continue in the face of dialogue like this: "This awful, awful war!" sighed Mrs. B., "I daren't trust myself alone with John for fear I'd ask him not to go." And then: "Oh, poor Mrs. B.! She is so brave and it is her only son."

That sort of dialogue is true enough in a way—but so true that it goes without saying.

Most of the stories lack plot. They seem to turn on some single episode, usually an accident. One story, with a near plot, is based on the idea that

(Concluded on page 22.)



The Game of Life as revealed to Count Tolstoy in a game of chess. Next the great novelist is Countess Tolstoy. His two sons are at the right. What would this pacifist philosopher's view of the life-game be now if he were living to contemplate the map of Europe.