

Mr. R. W. Douglas, Vancouver City Librarian

(By Robert Allison Hood.)

There is among booklovers a freemasonry greater probably than that found in any other avocation or pursuit. Mr. Clement K. Shorter, the editor of "The Sphere" bore testimony to this truth in an informal address delivered in Vancouver last year, after a tour of the United States, when he spoke of the pleasure it had given him to find the presentation of his card at any library was an 'open sesame' that secured him a hearty welcome wherever he went. The bookman is never at a loss with another bookman for something to talk about. They have hundreds of friends in common. It is true that as in freemasonry there are degrees of the craft, and the apprentice may not be able to follow the pastmaster with grip and password up through the higher steps, but there is always a common ground of sympathy on which both may meet. The appreciation of Captain Cuttle, Jean Valjean or Barrie's Babbie may be as keen with the one as with the other.

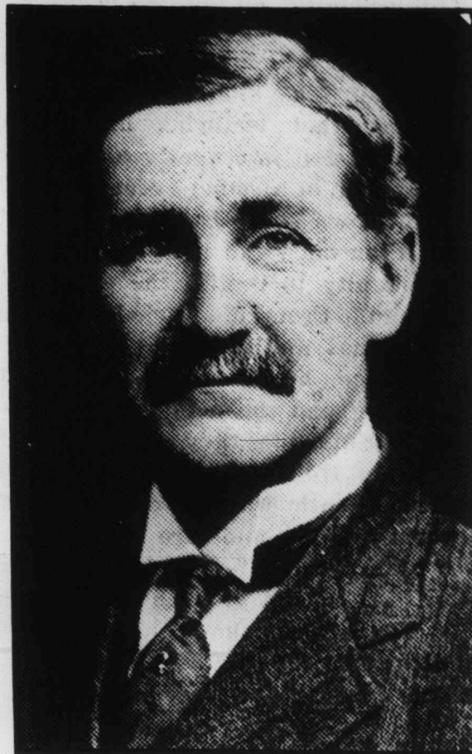
Mr. R. W. Douglas of the Carnegie Library is one who has climbed very high up in the mysteries and secrets of the gentle craft of the bookman and since his coming to Vancouver in 1911 to preside over the institution, his genial personality, and keen enthusiasm, as well as his wide knowledge and experience of books and library work, have done much to promote the love of learning and good literature, in the Terminal City.

Modest and unassuming as he is with regard to himself and his achievements, his career in his chosen line of endeavour has been much more extensive than many of his friends even are aware, and it has been all the more successful because of the fact that his energies have never been dissipated by excursions along other lines.

Even as a small lad in knickerbockers, after he had exhausted the family library, he used to take his gun and spend his spare time in shooting muskrats to sell their pelts for money to buy books. Mayne Reid, Ballantyne, Kingston, Dickens and Scott were his favourites in those days. More solid mental nutriment was supplied through the ordinary country school curriculum and the High School at Brant, through which he passed in due course. Here he came under the instruction and influence of Dr. Dion C. Sullivan and Charles B. Moore, two of the best teachers of their time in Eastern Canada.

After graduation, followed a course under private tutors, by which he prepared himself for matriculation at the University of Toronto. However, the fascinations of bookselling as an occupation were too strong for him to resist and instead of entering college he became engaged in a bookstore where he remained for several years. During this time, he was studying bibliography and reading extensively—science, religion, history, poetry and fiction and he completed a bibliography of Canadian books which circulated in the United States among the dealers in old and rare books. He also won the \$100 prize for the best short story offered by a Toronto periodical, "Truth," and contributed numerous stories and articles to "The Canadian Monthly" and various other magazines and papers.

In 1889, after an extended visit to England, Mr. Douglas went to New York to seek a larger field and entered the famous Brentano bookshop. Here he studied the American book world for several years, writing intermittently as his duties permitted. Leaving Brentano's, he essayed the publishers' domain and began to sell books to libraries. Here he had good opportunity to study the working of some of the largest libraries in America and to observe the different phases of the librarian's profession. Then he became literary adviser to a large New York publishing house. After reading manuscripts for them for some time, he was appointed editor of a



series of books published under the name of the "Commonwealth Library" to each of which he contributed an introduction. While engaged on this, he also brought out, "The Love Songs of Scotland," a book the production of which was a congenial task and which achieved considerable success.

This last venture resulted in a flattering offer to accept the position of editor and director in the publication of a remarkable and unique work, "Investigations and Studies in Jade." This had been designed and partially completed by Heber R. Bishop before his death. In his will, he had made provision for its publication, regardless of expense, and directed that it was to be the finest work of its kind in the world.

For three years, Mr. Douglas was engaged on this undertaking. Only one hundred copies of the book were to be made and these were to be distributed to heads of governments, a few great libraries and to the individual members of his family. The hundred copies cost just an even \$180,000 or \$1,800 each. Mr. Bishop had ordered his executors to destroy every scrap of material not used in the hundred copies and this was done. One can realise what a pleasure its editor must have taken in a task so congenial as this must have been.

On his completion of that work, Mr. Douglas accepted an offer from Messrs. Little, Brown & Company to become their Dominion agent and in this capacity he travelled periodically from Coast to Coast. It was on one of these trips that he made the acquaintance of certain members of the Vancouver Library Board, and later, in 1911, he was appointed City Librarian.

Since then under his direction, the library has grown greatly in size and usefulness and its circulation has been multiplied many times. It has fostered the love of good literature and provided the means for its enjoyment. The custom which Mr. Douglas started four years ago of having lectures on literary subjects every Saturday night during the winter months in the reference room has proved a boon to many. He himself delivers many of the lectures and outside speakers contribute to the course as well.

With an easy, fluent style and a genuine enthusiasm for his subject, he carries his audience along with him. The wide range of the poets and writers with whom he has dealt