

for Canada, and spent several years drifting around before reverting to his old job of bank clerk, first in Victoria, then in Whitehorse and finally in Dawson.

Had he stayed in Scotland, it is doubtful whether his verse would have brought him fame and financial reward, because one of the main things that sells Service is his subject matter—the rough, tough life in the Yukon. His verse is so successful in capturing the spirit of the pioneer days that some of his admirers still find it difficult to believe that it was as a very English-looking bank teller that Service spent most of his life here, not as a grizzly prospector.

The Dan McGrew ballad was written after a 20-minute stroll in the woods. Service had been asked to write something suitable for a recitation at a church social. He took a walk one evening after work: the poem took shape in his mind and he wrote it down when he got home. However, it was considered too red-blooded for the church affair. Other poems were dashed off with equal facility and when Service had written about 30 he decided to have them printed for distribution among his friends. He sent them to a publisher with a check for \$100. A few weeks later back came the check—and a contract, for the publisher thought they were worth more than private distribution.

That was in 1907, and the sale of that book of verse and nine others left him free of financial worries.

Service was never particular where he got names for his characters. The heroine of his novel about the Gold Rush, **The Trail of '98**, got her name of Berna from the label of a brand of condensed milk that Service used in the Yukon. For his early poems Service chose names from the ledgers of the Whitehorse bank. He wrote a now-famous poem about a man from the Southern States of America who could never get used to the cold of the Yukon and eventually died from it. His partner found that taking the body back to civilization was too much of a burden, so when he came upon a wrecked lake boat he lit a fire in the boiler. "The flames just soared, and the furnace roared—such a blaze you seldom see. And I burrowed a hole in the glowing coal and I stuffed in Sam McGee." When he looked in to see how the cremation was coming along, Sam was sitting up with a smile on his face and re-

marked that it was the first time he'd been warm since coming to the Yukon.

The name Sam McGee had been taken from the ledgers and soon after publication of the poem Mr. McGee, taking a very poor view of the whole thing, withdrew all his money from the bank. Until the day he died, his life was made miserable by all and sundry asking him: "It is warm enough for you?"

Service was always careful to describe himself as a writer of verse or a rhymster, never as a poet. These rhymes gain new popularity as each new generation discovers him. **Songs of a Sourdough**, his first book, has sold millions of copies in English and North American edition. No other living English versifier—or poet—approaches anywhere near the number of copies sold or the income of Service. He was able to retire before he was 40, and his accumulated wealth was in the six-figure class for many years.

Since saying good-bye in 1912 to Dawson, where the cabin he lived in is now a tourist attraction, Service spent his life in France. Handsomely gray-haired, he was proud of his erect figure and said he kept fit by eating copious quantities of potatoes (22,000 a year, he claimed) and chewing every mouthful 30 times.

At Monte Carlo, any flutter Service had at the gambling tables was limited to using his secret system to win enough money to pay for his lunch, then he stopped.

Life in the Klondike centred in the saloons. Fortunes were lost and won by the turn of a roulette wheel.

