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CANADIAN BOOKS OF THE YEAR

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(This Reference Paper is based on a list of Canadian books of the year appearing in the "Royal Bank of Canada Monthly Letter" of October, 1948. The Royal Bank acknowledges the assistance of 23 English-language and 18 French-language publishers; of the National Convener for Canadian Book Week; and of the chief of the cataloguing department of the Bibliothèque Municipale of Montreal, upon whose advice the selection was made.)

According to William Arthur Deacon, former president of the Canadian Authors Association, in an address last November, "every important Canadian book has been written within the past 70 years, the great majority within the past 25 years. A single year's production now outweighs, in volume and merit, that of any decade before 1920."

Canadian literature, says Mr. Deacon, "has commenced to express the soul of a people just awakened to the fact that it has a soul to express - a distinct and unique soul - and that it must solve its own problems on its own terms."

For many years Canadian Writers have been climbing a long uphill path to recognition, and in some cases to fame. In 1927, when Mazo de la Roche won the \$10,000 Atlantic Monthly Prize with her novel Jalna, the achievement was so sensational for a Canadian writer that the city of Toronto gave her a public banquet. In later years, honours were more usual. The first edition of Franklin Davey McDowell's The Champlain Road ran out in two weeks. Gwethalyn Graham's Earth and High Heaven is circulating in 10 languages other than English. Bruce Hutchison's The Unknown Country and Hugh MacLennan's Two Solitudes entered the best-seller list at home and received acclaim abroad.

In the field of French-Canadian literature great advances have been made. Mason Wade, in French-Canadian Outlook, published in 1946, notes that, until recently, most French-Canadian books were devoted to "glorifying the good old days of the French regime, and the obsolescent, patriarchal, rural world, untouched by alien influences." This, he says, was inevitable, as their authors were the privileged élite. The revolution in French-Canadian literature is shown in Ringuelet's Thirty Acres, a realistic picture of rural life, and in Roger Lemelin's The Town Below, a satire of city life and industrial workers. The latter won for the young author the French Academy's French-Language Prize, the David Award, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. Gabrielle Roy, a native of St. Boniface, Manitoba, was elected a member of the Royal Society of Canada, and her novel The Tin Flute, won the Prix Femina Vie Heureuse (Paris) for the year's most distinguished novel by a woman.

Canadians of the new generation who write in the French language are making an effort to throw off the bonds of traditionalism and to produce a literature which is essentially Canadian.