



One Reason Why Paper is so High

## OUR FICTION MARKET

BY THE MONOCLE MAN

THE Editor of this great family journal so seldom vouchsafes me a subject that I feel it only fair to give him credit for it when he does. This week is one of the times when he does. The subject he proposes for the few remarks which it is my duty to inflict upon you, gentle reader, is "The Fiction Market in Canada." Or, if I don't like that, I can have "The Fiction Supply" in the same place. I feel just as much at home with one subject as the other. I do not know anything about either. What I am is a truth-teller. I do not write fiction. And one of the reasons for my devotion to the slim maid, usually clad in her own purity and said to dwell at the bottom of a well—possibly because of her costume, though why she should feel that way, when young ladies are compelled by the exigencies of fashion to shave their arm-pits, I cannot imagine—is just because I was unable to find the location of the said "Fiction Market in Canada."

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OR, perhaps, it was my "fiction supply" that was wrong. I can hardly believe that, however, because I was always the favourite author of the literary critic in whose judgment I have the greatest faith. In fact, I buy all my fiction on his recommendation. His name is to be found at the bottom of the cheques with which I pay for this fiction. Moreover, I am buoyed up by the circumstance that I deceived a number of American editors into buying it. And I might have gone on playing this bunko game if I had not discovered—what I am sure certain other Canadian fictionists, whose stories are really interesting, have discovered—that it is handicapping one's self very greatly to try to live in one country and write for the market of another. When I deliberately endeavoured to write a story in the American atmosphere, I found that it took very little return postage to sell it—though I felt constantly that my atmosphere was faked and unreal and very thin. I did not really know American life. But when I set myself to a story of Canadian life, I found that New York was supremely uninterested. I had to sell it in Boston—or Toronto. Boston was no more interested in the theme than was New York; but Boston will buy a bad story because it is well written. New York will not. And when Toronto bought in those good old days—I do not know how it is to-day—I always expected the bank to ask me why I bothered them with cheques for small change.

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SO the choice came between moving over to the United States or taking the shilling of journalism. I am quite confident that that is really

why our authors go to New York. It is not that they are nearer to the editors and can bother them more persistently. Most authors I know anything about—except Arthur Stringer—look better at a distance. They had far better send in their contributions by mail and enclose somebody else's photograph. But an author ought to live in the atmosphere which is daily shaping the judgment and taste of the editor on whose judgment and taste his suc-



The Tom Hood of 1917.

cess must depend. It is not only, or chiefly, that he may want to write stories of that atmosphere—it is to a far greater degree that he must see other atmospheres through the eyes of the men who live in the New York atmosphere.

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I FIND this latter condition to apply to Canadian editors regarding work I sometimes do—sketches of European travel and experiences. They like my sketches much better when I write them in Canada after my return than when I write them abroad. You would think the opposite would be the fact. I once thought it ought to be. But I know better now.

And the reason is plain. When I am in Europe, I am looking at things through a mental eye affected somewhat by my European surroundings. I can't help choosing my incidents and the objects which I will describe with some reference to whether they would be interesting to the people with whom I am constantly in contact—both natives and experienced travellers. I forget the attitude of mind of the untravelled Canadian for whom I am in a large measure writing. I fail to tell him the things he wants to know, and tend to tell him things he neither understands nor cares about. But when I am once back in Canada, soaked in our own atmosphere, I can then take my Canadian readers down a street in Cairo and show them the things which would most clamorously attract their attention.

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THE most successful book of travel ever written—Mark Twain's "Innocents Abroad"—owed its success to the faculty which Mark Twain had at that time of looking at every thing through a typical American eye—ignorant, arrogantly sure of its own superiority, convinced that wherever Europe or Asia differed from the U. S. A., it was either wrong or ridiculous or both. By the time Mark wrote his "Tramp Abroad," he knew more about Europe—he was more in the European atmosphere—and his book would have been a failure if it had not travelled on the reputation of its predecessors.

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HOWEVER, we are getting off our text. A market for fiction in Canada will be supplied precisely in proportion to the ability of Canadian editors to get writers who will write—not necessarily Canadian stories—but stories from all the range of human activity written to suit Canadian mental conditions. These writers must be able enough to overcome the handicap of American competition which flows in upon us, cheap and often nasty, but written by the cream of our fictionists on this continent for mental conditions not so radically different from our own. The big prizes of the American market will continue to attract our best men—as a rule. Sometimes we produce a man who had rather have a thousand a year in Canada than ten thousand in New York. Archibald Lampman was such a man; but he was a poet and not a fiction-writer. My old friend, Henri Julien was such a man, but he was an artist and not a fictionist. It is a difficult choice to make. Only rare souls will stay with us. And every year our distinctive market is becoming less distinctive and more American. It can hardly fail to be so when nine out of ten of the magazines and weeklies which our people read are American. A man's reading-table tends to make his mental atmosphere. The best influence in our direction is just what you are supplying—that is, an intelligent effort by a genuinely Canadian mind to pick out the class of writing that you think your fellow Canadians would like to read. If I were in your shoes, I would not dream of confining myself to Canadian subjects—I would seek rather to meet and maintain Canadian taste as you know it by bringing the wide world in fee to its table.

## Another Slum Poet

HE is called the poet of the tenement and the slum; such a slum as Stepney, in the East End of London, vividly described in the current issue of the Contemporary Review. William Wilfred Gibson is his name; a sort of literary second cousin to Masfield in style; that directly simple method of writing that may be called talk-poetry. Gibson is coming to America shortly to give readings. Why do they insist on a poet reading from his own works? Why exploit Noyes, Masfield and Yeats, who should always remain simple souls, knowing nothing of the fluffy shirt front and the post-prandial speech? Why exploit this plain soul Gibson, who seems to be as sincere a delineator of poverty and its attendant tragedies as Tom Hood was in his day?

The question is worth asking when you consider the nature of the man's ungarnished message to mankind, which is as simple and direct as a conver-