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## Do Canadians Care for Canadian Literature in Any Form?

I. *Some Plain Words* by Mr. Percy Gomery, Chairman of B. C. Branch,  
Canadian Authors' Association.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: The Editor of the "British Columbia Monthly" is alone responsible for the title and sub-titles given to Mr. Gomery's article. The Editor not only thinks the question in the main title is well-warranted by comparison, but, influenced by experiences in connection with magazine literature and its Community Service, extending over fifteen years, he believes that it is more than time that all Canadians—whether "Native Sons" or the surely not less serviceable Sons of other parts of the British Empire, who

are Canadians by choice—were thoroughly awakened to the fact that if Canada is to have "National Consciousness" or "National Spirit," and to take the place of a "Nation" in the World, its people will have to do more than speak about their country, and cease to let their reading, and much else, be regulated from outside Canada and outside the British Empire. In reading, as in other things, we must learn to be Canadians first!]

I hope that nobody will be disappointed in that I do not propose to discuss any current Canadian books. Rather I shall present to you a business argument to influence you from the fulness of my own conviction that—for some reason nobody has tried to explain,—Canadians are not giving a fair opportunity to Canadian books.

I became aware of this only a few years ago when I read a letter from Robert Barr, the world-famous novelist, in answer to one addressed to him asking whether he was or was not a Canadian. Mr. Barr said that he and his brother James (also a well known writer and sculptor) had been born, or at least had spent their youth in Wallaceburg, Ontario, but that, on achieving manhood the reception of Canadian editors and publishers had been so cold and disinterested that they had removed across the line, where their success was completed. Mr. Barr, I remember, was quite bitter in his letter, saying that not only did he feel that he owed nothing to Canada, but that he would bear a feeling of resentment for this country as long as he lived.

### *A Canadian's Experience Abroad*

Things are not as bad as that today. Nevertheless, last year, in the city of Christiania, Norway, was held a convention of Women's University Clubs of the world. Canada was represented by a prominent woman from an eastern city, the president of the combined Women's University Clubs of Canada. On her return she told a friend of mine that she had never been so humiliated in her life as when, not once, but more than once, Norwegian ladies had approached her with words of congratulation and approval on certain Canadian works of literature which—on world standards—had been

translated and published in the Scandinavian language. The representative of Canada had never heard of the books. As she herself remarked, she had apparently been so busy reading English essays and American novels that it had not occurred to her that there was a Canadian literature.

### *A Revelation at Home*

Some time ago I attended an evening party. Each guest was given a type-written sheet with the names of fifty Canadian books of the day—naturally the better known ones. The winner was able to write the author's name opposite forty-four of the fifty, and the scores ranged from that downwards. We had with us a B. C. school-teacher. Not only that but a woman of a cultured and traveled past, a member of a family well known in artistic endeavor and foremost in matters Imperial. I had the curiosity to look up the score of this young woman and found that she had been able to identify one of the books. . . . Think of that! This cultured Canadian educator, in whose hands is the education of our Canadian children, was familiar at least with the title of one of the fifty Canadian books of the day! She told me that evening that she had just finished reading Kipling for the third time.

### *Reminds of the Old Story About "A Prophet"*

After that I was not so surprised as I might have been when visiting one of Vancouver's great stores, in connection with my Book Week duties as an officer of the C. A. A. "Don't you find," I asked the manager of the book department, "that when you set aside a table for books by Canadian writers, this collection is popular?" What he answered was, "About as popular as if each volume was labelled 'Smallpox'."

Then he called his assistant and said, "I want you to say whether this is an experience we have every day. Persons come in, looking for a book, for a gift or otherwise. They look for an attractive title, then skim through a chapter or two, evidently like it. Finally they turn back to the title page, see the imprint of a Canadian publishing house and then—lay the book down and turn to another."

### *Remarkable Record from Dr. Roberts' London Publishers*

Some time ago I spoke to the Women's Canadian Club and used some of the incidents I am now using. Dr. Chas. G. D. Roberts was on the platform with me, and, although he was not slated for a speech, he said that he was inspired to make one, and went on to say that, year ago, he had given up even thinking that his fellow-Canadians would read his books. He got friendship and appreciation in

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