

given boys. He has given up, very likely for good, his once-holy communion with the immortals. In fact, his Open Water book of verse indicates that he had got tired of the juvenile, high-sounding Homeric stuff and wanted his verses to do savage, intense things without any reference to music. Those poems just showed what years of criminal story-writing can do to a man's affairs with the Muses. I don't mean to say that Stringer's story-writing has made him a criminal. But he has created a lot of criminal characters, none of which in the least resembles himself. Had he stuck to poetry, he could have stayed away from the criminals. But I imagine he prefers the crooks. A man who has the Homeric sense of poetry in himself is sure to get weary of trying to decorate New York with it. That city of gamblers and skyscrapers, harlots and philanthropists, is enough to play hob with any man's love of pure poetry. Once you strike New York on a citizen you bid farewell to the simplicities of corn-cob land. No poet ever lived in New York who wrote great poems about that city. The thing can't be done. It would be easier in Chicago. Bliss Carman went from the Maritime Provinces to New York and remained a poet. But he had to declare himself a bankrupt and he didn't write poems about New York. Of course Carman is the kind of poet that couldn't possibly be lured away from poetry. Stringer is different. After he got rid of his first book, Silver Poppy, with the little verses at the heads of the chapters, he began to shuffle off the immortal coil of poetry. He may have been quietly sorry many a time. But even an author must live, it seems. Stringer preferred criminal stories and a good income to vast poems and a garret. Already in his early years of New York, when that city was much more like Montreal or Toronto than it is now, he had put in some apprenticeship at hand-cooked bachelor meals along with MacFarlane and Harvey O'Higgins. He had tried his hand at newspaper work—flimsy and religious editor—after leaving the Montreal Herald. Office work didn't suit him. Poetry deserted him. He became a literary New Yorker, one of the large army of five-cent-a-words—and upwards—who do their best to balance Wall Street and ran a rival show to the Metropolitan Opera. Had he remained in a garret it would have been the attic of a skyscraper; and that particular way of getting up in the clouds does not cause a man to write poetry.

The only reason we can give for preferring to see Stringer remain a poet is, that thereby he might have remained a Canadian. Poetry is the kind of thing that in its purest form carries a man perennially back to his boyhood. If a man hasn't felt the desire to be a poet before he begins to shave, he will probably never get it. Having once got the desire he may travel into the middle of nowhere and never escape the magic of the scene where first he learned to feel the thrill of nature craving for to make him a harp. If the first call of the great world of nature comes to a man in a Canadian slashing with frog-pools and burning log heaps all around him, he may go and spend his days, and his money in riotous living in New York—which is about as far from simple nature as any place we know about—but he will never forget that log slashing. And if he tries to write poetry that isn't just flubdub gathered from the street, he will be a Canadian no matter where he may be, even in the peaks of the Himalayas, or in the canyons of New York.

## Wanted--A Canadian Masefield

IF Canada were a dummy nation instead of a real one, there would be a lot of things improved. You could uncover it on your dining-room table at night and look it over—and stick a new railroad line in such-and-such a direction, and cut a canal or two wherever you liked, and if you got mad at the United States you could make a wall of plasticine and nip off all communications by a mere pinch of finger and thumb. A great many improvements in population might be made, too—Cabinets and Prime Ministers carved to order and moved or removed at will—and poets! We should have a Canadian Mase-

field and a Canadian Tennyson off-hand, and a Canadian John Galsworthy, who would NOT write pot-boilers for American magazines, but would live on air and write plays and odes.

Happily this isn't a dummy nation. Fortunately it is not the kind of thing we can spoil by hands. We have, I admit, a "Canadian Kipling"—in whose room and stead I would a great deal rather have Robert W. Service—himself and nobody else. But our equipment with replicas stops about there—so far as I can recall at the moment—and thank Heaven for it! A Canadian Masefield!—sighs somebody who has just finished reading Jompy! Rubbish! It will be a long time before we have any poets approaching Masefield, or if, by accident, they are born here, they will be driven by cruel starvation to earn their salt, like Bliss Carman, in New York, or London. Poets we have—some of them indigenous like the late poet Sabine, of Toronto, and some of them borrowed-blossoms, like Norwood, of London (q.v.). If they live in Canada it is by the grace of God or their own two fists, and not because Canada loves poetry. Canada has, or hopes it has, as much taste for good verse as any nation, but, like the youngster who would have fallen in love with the ribbon clerk, had he had time—Canada is too busy. Such poetry



No Masefield in Canada—yet.

as we have, and can expect for a long time to come, is incidental, accidental—sung, as it were, on snatched breaths between the more prosaic business of carrying hods and washing dishes.

Rises now some irate person in the audience and throws me a verse of Lampman, or Bliss Carman, or one of Scott's or Campbell's or Stringer's or Service. Or—horrible dictu—sends me a copy of a recent Anthology of Canadian verse, or quotes dear old Doc Logan, who discovers a new renaissance in Canadian poetry with every leap-year. Rubbish! These things prove nothing but the "incidental and accidental" part of my main thesis, and the anthologies and perennial (hardy) renaissances indicate only that somebody had nothing better to do than diddle this stuff together with some smug "culture" for binding paste. Father Dollard ebullates in the editorial page of the Globe, and the editor of the anthology above referred to—name mislaid—burbles like a he-hen about some new poetess he's found in London. Of course there are poets and poetesses in the country, and of course it's a decent and charitable thing to drag them out of their privacy like crocuses before they are ready to burst the mould. We are so unpoetic that we positively hew our poets out of themselves, making them self-conscious and perhaps self-satisfied long before their time. Lampman is forgotten already, save by a precious few lamp-tenders. Not two thousand Canadians know there is such a man as Wilfrid Campbell. Canada

as a nation is too busy and too practical for poetry. Our standards are, and must be for a long time, outside standards. Our poets in the long run must measure up against British and American poets. In so far as their work is true art and universal—well and good. In so far as it expresses some local edition of Canadian thought or feeling—ditto. But just as it is too early to look for a homogeneous Canadian social fabric. So also is it foolish to look for real Canadian poets and poetry—as yet.

## The Poet and the Editor

LOOK through the Ottawa Blue books from beginning to end and you will find no record of the output of poetry in Canada. Everything else is listed—somewhere or other—even to the annual yield of babies in the various provinces. It is possible to find with very little trouble, the record number of barrel staves, saw logs, or patent medicines, and yet the yield of poetry—perhaps the largest crop in the country outside of wheat and oats—hasn't even a column to itself in exports.

You, reader, may not believe there is this large yield of poetry in Canada. You may even go so far as to look me straight in the eye and say you yourself have never written any, never toyed with rhymes nor thought how sick you might make Tennyson look if you ever made up your mind to take poetry seriously and give up the hardware business. Be that as it may; your modesty and untruth be upon your own head. If you are not an embryo poet, and if you don't know the enormousness—so to speak—of the output, you have obviously never worked in a newspaper office, or graced an editorial chair. Judging by what the post office delivers to this desk every day in the year, except Sundays and Holidays, there is a poet in every city, town, village and hamlet in Canada.

We once received in this office a very good piece of verse from a new poet. We examined it carefully to make sure it hadn't been picked in the Golden Treasury of Verse—whence a good many of our would-be singers take more than inspiration—and we sent the MS over to the printers to be set up by our foreman, who is also a poet and composes right on his "stick." Weeks passed, but with no opportunity of fitting the poem into the paper. It was spoken of in the editorial rooms frequently. The tenderness, softly glowing beauty and quiet music of the composition had impressed everyone, and we speculated as to the kind of a person who had written the thing. The writing, a bit tremulous and old-fashioned, might have been committed by either sex.

But one day, before we had used the poem, a member of the staff was stranded 'tween trains in this town, and to while away the time he sought "B. T. Dothert" (that is not the real name). It seemed to him worth while looking up the person who had written the poem—and it wast B. T. Dothert was the livery stable keeper in that town. There was no other Dothert, and no other B. T. When the first shock had passed our representative approached the livery stable keeper and stated his name and business.

"W-we rather like that little poem of yours," he said, "and I thought I'd take the opportunity of calling on you and—"

"Poem!" retorted the poet, in his best git-to-blazes-out-of-this-Dan tone. "Don't know anything about any—any poem."

"Aren't you B. T. Dothert?"

"That's my name."

"Didn't you send a poem on autumn to the Canadian Courier about three months ago?"

"Me—say—" But he saw skepticism in the eye of our representative and softened. Glancing back into the stable to make sure no one was listening, he whispered: "Say, maybe I DID write a little thing 'bout Autumn—but don't talk about it round here."

"B-but why not?"

"Well—well if y' do," returned B. T. Dothert, with a snarl in his tone once more, "I'll have to say you're crazy, that's all. Why, man! If I was t' admit that I'd written poetry there wouldn't be the life of a dog left for me in this town. It'd ruin my business—besides—" he looked contrite, "I don't do it often."