

But whatever he is Canada regards Leacock as a real contribution to the gayety of nations and the sanity of being insane. Leacock as a sheer political economist might have been intolerable. Leacock as a mere humorist might have been merely a literary figure. With the two combined we have Leacock the man and the Canadian, who we hope will never get his wires crossed.

Dr. Briggs and His Books

SHORTLY after nine o'clock every business morning of the year an electric bell sends its quivering summons throughout the two million dollar institution known to the public as "The Methodist Book Room." Every morning, in response to that bell, the heads of all the departments in that great Canadian publishing house make their way to a magnificent office where an extraordinary old man sits on a shabby chair at a shabby desk behind heaps of freshly opened mail. That man is William Briggs, D.D., an Irish Methodist preacher and business man—chiefly business man in the last forty years. He hands out the mail according to departments, discussing important parts of it the while. Then his managers depart and he settles down—he is eighty-one years old—to work until twelve noon, when he goes home for lunch and forty winks. At three he is back again and at work until five-thirty. He takes no holidays. He seldom misses even so much as a day a month from the office. Such is the remarkable head of a remarkable organization.

The Methodist Book Room is in itself work enough for wonder. If you should ask: To whom does it belong? You could get no real answer. It has no owner. If you should ask: Who is the "boss"—the answer is Dr. Briggs, and yet Briggs owns not one tittle of it, and draws no profit. You might ask if the institution did not belong to the Methodist Church in Canada, and in part the answer would be "Yes." Yet legally that would not be true. The Methodist Book Room belongs to nobody but to its own history.

The sum of eighteen hundred dollars was the first money and the last money ever invested in this remarkable institution (except, of course, for a bond issue covering part of the cost of the recently completed plant.) That original \$1,800 was paid back to those who advanced it within a few years, and yet was the only monetary foundation of one of the most successful business organizations in the country.

The story which is none too well known in this country, begins with a meeting of a few Methodist ministers at Ancaster, Ontario, in the year 1829. These men agreed that it was desirable to start a church paper in Canada and twenty of them pledged themselves to advance \$100 each to start such a paper. They even agreed that the paper was to be sold at 12 shillings and 6 pence, paid in advance, per annum, or if not paid in advance, fifteen shillings. They agreed that every minister who secured fifteen subscriptions to the new paper was to receive a copy free.

With these starting conditions, one of their number, Egerton Ryerson, collected eighteen hundred dollars out of the two thousand pledged and set off on horse back for New York, where he bought primitive printing machinery of those days. Bringing this machinery back to Toronto he set it up in a little building on "March Street, in front of the new Court House" (that is now Court Street and the "new court house" is the shabby old structure known to the police reporters of the Toronto papers as "No. 1 Police Station.")

Here the first copies of the Christian Guardian were printed—it is, by the way, one of the oldest papers in the Dominion. Next year, 1830, the Guardian moved to the shop of Mr. J. S. Armstrong, on King Street, just a few doors from the present office of the Toronto Street Railway Company. From this place it moved to its well-known quarters on Richmond Street, and then, within the last few years, to the handsome structure on the corner of Queen and John Streets.

The Book Room publishes to-day no less than sixteen church and Sunday-school papers, to say nothing of its important output of books. It is the only pub-

lishing house in Canada that can do all the work from reading a new manuscript to printing, binding and packing the book—without leaving the shelter of the one roof.

In a few years after the Guardian was founded, the men who had advanced the eighteen hundred dollars had been paid back out of the profits of the concern. It had been found desirable, too, to open a book shop for supplying Methodist clergymen with necessary books, at cost. This feature of the work grew and still continues.

Meantime William Briggs, born in County Down, Ireland, in 1836—when the Guardian and the Methodist Book Room were seven years old—came to Canada. He had been in business in Ireland, but shortly after coming to Canada he was accepted by the Methodist authorities "on trial" at Durham, Quebec, and was ordained a minister in 1863. He had preached in Toronto, Montreal, Hamilton, London, Cobourg and other centres when called upon to become a managing member of the Book Room Board—the body which has general authority over the



Eighty-one years old and still at his desk.

policy of the Methodist Book Room, and which consists of preachers appointed by the General Conference. Since 1877 William Briggs has managed the institution. Not only have all the publications under his care flourished, but the Book Room has brought out important volumes—it discovered Robert W. Service, for one thing.

Dr. Briggs has one hobby—work! For Saturday afternoons he may allow himself a little cricket, but that is all. He rides to and from his work on the street cars—a true democrat.

The Gentle Art of Slang

ONCE upon a time, in a small western Ontario town, there was a parchment-faced, ravenlocked old land surveyor whose amiable and perpetual hobby was to evolve a dictionary of slang. Wherever Sherman Malcolm, P.L.S., of Blenheim, Ont., went among the ditches and bridges and concession lines of Kent county, he habitually kept his ears open for any new form of picturesque language not either vulgar nor profane.

"Pardon me," he would say taking out his notebook as he accosted a farmer. "Now where did you learn that very striking expression you have just used?"

There is no record that Malcolm's Dictionary of Slang was ever published. Which is a pity. Such a work would have been an invaluable contribution to the literature of Canada. We mention it here only because the editor of this paper is accused of slang-whanging. The accuser is one "P. S." who book-reviewing in the University Monthly says con-

cerning a work called "Sons of Canada," alleges that the author "uses journalese bordering on slang."

This is a serious indictment. Since we have no literary cousinship to George Ade we cannot glory in our slang. The reviewer does not quote examples. Since reading his critique we have been searching the volume in question to find examples for ourselves. We have failed.

Something is wrong here. We are so addicted to slang that we fail to recognize it. Will the reviewer give us his university definition of slang? We have none ourselves. A great university should have this. It is just as important a branch of research as investigating a disease. Tarry a bit. We are not granting that slang is a disease. We do not cognize even "Journalese" the varioloid form of it as a real malady. But slang is evidently a form of speech. It is either organic or excrement. Which?

Some writer not long ago—I have forgotten his name—alleged that slang is a living form of language. To his way of thinking it was as necessary to evolve slang in speech as for science to construct new words in order to express new phenomena. Without the constant evolution of slang a language dies. A dead language has no slang. There is a vitality about slang that keeps a language fresh. Baseball jargon is one example. That language is understood only by "fans." But it is perfectly understood. The stock exchange vernacular is another. A classic example of this is "watering stock," the derivation of which is aptly given in the autobiography of Daniel Drew, the father of Wall Street, who described how when he was in the cattle-droving business he used to drive herds of cattle from the West into New York. Before weighing the cattle they were first heavily salted to make them thirsty; afterwards kept without water until the morning of weighing, when they were suddenly let out to the trough. But the expression, "stock watering," is perfectly understood by the "talent," just as Congress always knows what is meant by "the pork barrel."

We might go further and say that most vernaculars are built upon slang. Even poetry abounds with such unusual idioms of expression. In fact, every time you indulge in a figure of speech you are in danger of getting near the slang idiom. The phrase, "sour grapes," epitomizes a fable. Is it slang? If not, what is it? Somewhere the Bible says: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge." Here is a whole hereditary philosophy capable of being condensed into a phrase; and the phrase would be a form of slang. Take the axiom "gets my goat." This has been traced to various origins, one of which is the well-known goat that frequents racing stables, and which when removed by a jealous rival the evening before the race, makes the horse so nervous that he loses.

When a man goes "up in the air" he is not necessarily in an airship. Getting on a high horse does not mean riding. "Come off the perch" is easily understood. College wits might paraphrase it into "descend from the pedestal." One is slang; the other a figure of speech. "Hit the pike" is a picturesque form of "going the road." "Hit the hay" expresses more than going to sleep; it connotes also a high degree of dog-tiredness. "Beat it" is probably compounded of two ideas—the policeman's beat and hitting the pike. "A jag" is a perfectly legitimized form of expression, even though the thing itself is becoming illegal. A jag is a small load and that sort of load is more than any man should expect to carry and get away with it.

So we might proceed ad lib. without approximating to a definition. We merely cite these few instances to show that there may be a philosophy of slang respectable enough to enunciate even in the University Monthly. And on behalf of the readers of this paper who like the picturesque, but prefer it to be respectable, we should be grateful if the "P. S." would favour us with a definition of what slang really is from his angle of literary appreciation. Then when we are character-sketching any more academics we may unflatteringly "beat it" to "the well of English undefiled."

We do not advocate the printing or the teaching of slang. Slang is essentially a spoken, not a written form of speech. It requires to be vocalized in order to be effective. When a slang phrase has run its course it may either pass out along with the popular songs, or be incorporated as a written idiom.