

# RALPH CONNOR: THE MAN AND HIS WORK

By Cherrington Brown.

## Student Days.

In an estimation of Ralph Connor there is a decided tendency to regard him merely as a writer of fascinating fiction. Other elements of his strength have been overshadowed by the growth and later development of his gift as a writer. But Mr. Gordon has no reason to be ashamed of his achievements in the intellectual realm. After a common and high school course, he entered Toronto University. Like many distinguished men, he did not tie himself very fast to the college curriculum. He never became a book worm in the strictest sense of the term, or an expert in any branch of study. On the other hand he was not an idler. He gave free play to an alert and comprehensive mind, and allowed his poetic taste to grow by browsing in many literary fields. Yet he did not altogether neglect study. He graduated with classical honors in 1883.

In all that pertained to the life of the University he took a lively interest. He was passionately fond of sports. He played football; trained in the gymnasium and sang tenor in the College Glee Club.

At the close of the year, he decided to devote himself to the work of the Christian Ministry. He entered Knox College, Toronto, where he remained for three years. During these years his health was indifferent; but in spite of this drawback, he carried off valuable prizes and an unusual number of scholarships. Leaving Knox College, he spent a year in Edinburgh and on the Continent in search of education and health. The change was beneficial, and on his return he applied to the Presbyterian Board of Missions for a station. He was sent to Banff, where for two years he lived and worked as a missionary amid the scenes which he has so vividly portrayed.

## The Religious Outlook.

Mr. Gordon brought to the West a thoroughly trained mind with which to cope with the questions which continually confront the religious worker.

Knowing how deeply he feels upon church matters and confident that he has given much attention to the religious future of the Great Northwest, I asked him for an opinion.

"The religious outlook of Western Canada is undoubtedly very bright," he said. "Never had a nation so auspicious a beginning, religiously. We have a people trained in a religious atmosphere and nourished upon religious teaching; we have in our institutions the crystallization of all that is best and wisest in the history of the greatest nations that have been."

"Do you think climate has anything to do with the moral tone of a people, Mr. Gordon?"

"Emphatically I do. Our climate is unfriendly to the indolent and luxurious; but stimulating to the energetic and industrious. These are the things that give one hope for the religious and moral future of our country."

"Granted, Mr. Gordon, that energy and industry make moral fibre, but surely there must be other agencies at work to make a people religious."

"You are quite right. Among these other agencies, our hope for the religious future lies in the intelligent, fervent, spiritual preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and in united efforts of the Christians who compose the various churches, to preserve the high ideals of the Kingdom of Heaven and to realize them in actual life."

## The Political Future.

Ministers are often accused of being ignorant of municipal and political matters. In fact, seldom does a preacher lift up his voice against flagrant wrongs, but he regrets it. The most spiritually minded where he is not preaching the gospel, and the worldly charge him with ignorance of his way to discuss themes which he is profoundly ignorant. Influence of civic or national

politics cannot be laid at the door of the minister of St. Stephens. He has the West at his finger ends, and when he speaks of corrupt practices, he does so because he is well informed as to his facts.

"Have you turned your horoscope upon the political future of the West?" I asked.

He laughed. "Ministers are not supposed, you know, to forecast political futures, or to deal in any but one kind of future. Still, I have a few ideas."

"I believe that Great States will lie West of the lakes, great in resources and greater in their peoples. The rapidity of development, and the growth in wealth will bring with them serious danger to political purity and integrity. The best men will be busy in the making of wealth. The men disinclined to the drudgery of daily toil, endowed with inordinate personal ambition, and the trick of a 'swivel tongue,' will offer themselves as political leaders to the great detriment of our political life. We may have to pass through our period of folly and corruption, but we shall at last win out. The honest hearted, sober minded people of the Canadian West will grow intolerant of self-seeking schemers and

vades the whole church life. The preacher appeals strongly to young manhood, he has the faculty of finding the soul and with the experienced skill of a moral physician, ministering to its needs.

Mr. Gordon's style of preaching is distinct. The combination of humor and moral earnestness which characterize his books, are to be found in his preaching. Both are natural. He never strains for thought. One never expects "padding" from the pulpit of St. Stephens. The preacher is thoughtful, devout; and possesses in a marked degree the sense of the fitness of things. There is no "slurring" of "introductory parts of the service." Mr. Gordon knows no introductory part of worship. The prayers are offered, the hymns announced, the offering taken, in the spirit of worship. The sermons are never slipshod. That the preacher is wide-awake to current philosophical and theological thought, one soon feels, as he listens to the author of "The Prospector." Mr. Gordon has a charm of manner which is given to few; but it is not a charming personality which crowds St. Stephen's Church. It is a man with convictions, who loves that strange thing, the soul of man. To the pastor of St. Stephen's, the soul is a priceless jewel, to be reclaimed from life's dusty roadides—a gem to be polished for his Master's crown.

## Ralph Connor's New Vision.

"Mr. Gordon, you have been in the

Shock, and Gwen of the Canyon fame. Aren't you a little bit too optimistic—even for a novelist?"

"Not at all. Population means arts and manufactures. We who are alive now in Western Canada are gazing upon the beginnings of truly great things. An empire is being outlined under our eyes. It should be the concern of all true Canadians that the lines should be drawn straight and true, and the foundations laid in righteousness."

"That sounds a little like preaching, Mr. Gordon. Isn't it a little too abstract? What is necessary to combat the flood of evil which you say threatens our national life?"

"Resolution. Against every foe of industry, simplicity, honor and self-control, all true Canadians should resolutely set themselves."

## Personal Charm.

Ralph Connor in the seclusion of private life has made a host of friends. His faculty for attracting and attaching people to himself amounts to genius. He loves children and they in turn hand up to him the key to the door of their young hearts. In the early pioneer missionary days, it was his success with his children which gave him an entrance into the hearts and homes of the parents. His power over children is the secret of his tremendous popularity as a writer, for people of all ages respond quickly and unreservedly to his simple ingenuousness; and follow with confidence the lead of one who is truth "in the inward parts."

Ralph Connor has not exhausted his literary possibilities. He is still a young man; his critics think they see in his later work a distinct growth—an earnest of greater things to come.

## Why He Does Not Give up the Ministry.

The question which many have asked was in my mind—Whether, with the great success which has fallen to him as a writer, he should not give up the ministry as a profession and adopt a literary calling. I asked him the question.

"No," he said. "I shall not give up the ministry. My books have arisen out of my ministerial work, in fact, they are wrapped up in it. If my strength endures, I shall continue my pastoral duties. As you say I could make a lot of money by devoting myself entirely to writing, how much, it would stagger you to hear; but I love to preach the Everlasting Gospel. I make no apology for the dominance of the religious element in my books. They are written to show that men cannot live without Christ, and that He is able to make them the men they ought to be."

I came away charmed with the winsomeness of the great author, and persuaded that behind the charm are the elements of character, and truly noble ideas which feed the fires of a great conviction.

Eighteen million, seven hundred and fifty thousand people visited the St. Louis Exposition.

"To err is human," 'tis said, but the "human" considers it beastly hard luck to be compelled to pay the penalty for the error.

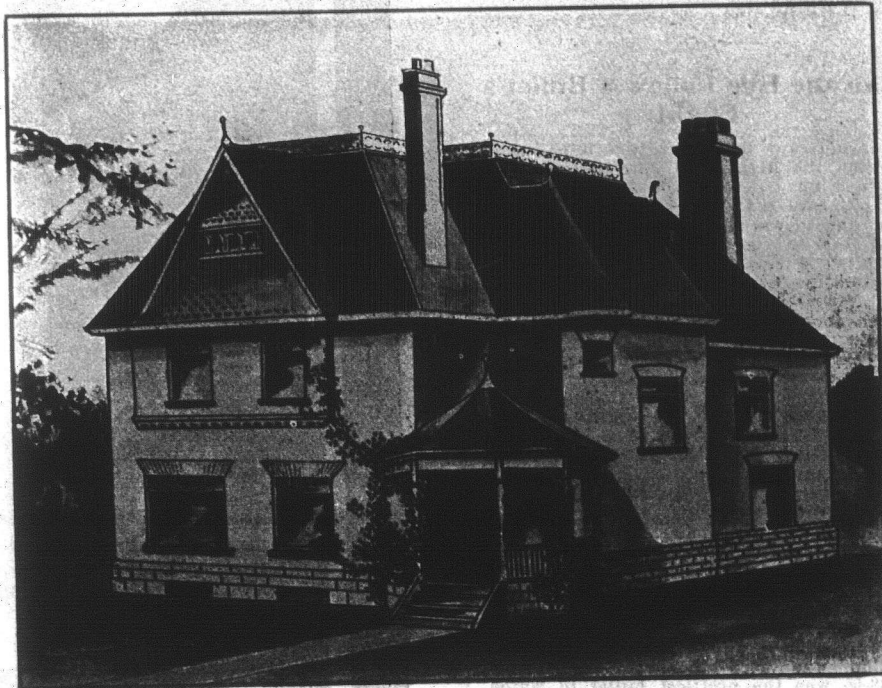
The man who always does his best is always improving. It's the man who holds back his best effort for a grand-stand play that never has the grand-stand to play to. One million, eight hundred thousand rivets were used in the construction of the new Cunard Line steamship Caronia, the largest vessel ever built in Great Britain. The weight of metal thus used was about 600 tons.

The new machine which is said to be capable of turning out 10,000,000 matches a day, requiring the employment of but three or four operatives to run it at that pace, is another reminder of the way labor saving machinery is getting in its lively work in these modern days.

## They Spread Disease.

House flies and mosquitos are now known to be the means of spreading infectious diseases such as small pox and typhoid fever. No successful plan for killing mosquitos in large quantities has yet been devised, but all the flies in any room can be killed in a few hours by using Wilson's Fly Pads.

Do not accept disappointing substitutes; there are no other fly-killers that compare with Wilson's Fly Pads.



Home of Rev. C. W. Gordon, (Ralph Connor), Broadway, Winnipeg.

trick talkers, and choose for their leaders men honest and wise."

"Mr. Gordon, you are a very optimistic man. After all you seem to deal much in 'futures'?"

"Well, if you had come here when I did, you would believe in them, too. I have seen towns and cities spring up with the rapidity of the proverbial mushroom."

"I believe, Mr. Gordon, that you are one of the best advertising agents the West has."

"I hope I am," he replied, "not of course, for selfish purposes, but on truly patriotic grounds. No man can be truly patriotic who has not seen Western Canada. He may have a kind of local enthusiasm for province or country, but he is not a Canadian in the broad magnificent sense of the word until he has traversed the reaches and breathed the airs of the wide, free West."

## Ralph Connor and St. Stephen's.

The new St. Stephen's church and the crowds which flock to it every Sunday evening are unmistakable evidences of Mr. Gordon's success as a minister of the gospel. St. Stephen Church is situated in one of Winnipeg's best residential districts. It was a mission church when Mr. Gordon took charge; its prosperity has been continuous and solid. It is the centre of a wide-spreading religious influence. Young men from the old land seek the genuine hospitality which it extends, and are captivated by the fine courtesy which per-

habit of seeing heroes in people who appear very ordinary to most of us commonplace mortals, have you seen any new ones lately?"

"Ah, you are trying to find out the name of my next book. That's a secret," he said with a merry twinkle.

"Oh, no," I replied, "I do not wish to pry open the literary secret cells of your teeming mind. I thought there might be a vision, dream or prediction floating before the eyes of your imagination. You authors are always seeing things, you know."

"I have," he said, "a vision which never leaves me."

"Please tell me of it," I answered.

"It is of the West."

"The future of Canada will be determined largely by the future of the West. If the Dominion is ever to be great among the nations it will be because the West has made her great. At the foundation of the greatness of all nations lies the land, its enterprises, its products, its workers, and great as are the sources of Western Canada in mines, in water powers, in forests, in fish, its supreme potentiality lies in its acres of wheat growing land. The country that can feed millions will some day have millions to feed, and so it is no vain imagination to dream of the day when Canada shall have her hundred millions and more."

"Stop! Mr. Gordon, I cannot follow you. Surely you are among your books. You are the author again. You are out upon the vast plains, or up among the everlasting Rockies, in the Land of