



Canadian Drama—and Life

THE visit of the Irish Players to Canada—a company of Irish actors playing native Irish drama—and the coming return visit of the Horniman Manchester Company, which plays typical English drama, cannot fail to raise the question in the thoughtful Canadian mind—What of Canadian drama? The plays which these companies favour are supposed to represent either studies of modern conditions in their countries which cry aloud, for remedy, or to voice national aspirations which give to us the spirit of their people. We, in Canada, have our conditions with which we are discontented, and we have our national aspirations; but, so far, we have given very little voice to either. It is not necessary, of course, that that voice—when it comes—shall speak through the drama. The drama calls for a peculiar genius—a condensed genius, as it were—a much more vivid and swift-moving genius than that required to ramble through the loose construction of a novel. Then the drama requires, as well, artists in representation; and we export our sons and daughters, who betray the possession of this capacity, to the bedazzening and coarsening and commercializing atmosphere of Broadway.

BUT we have printing presses, and we have the novel, and we have some fugitive flights of poetry; but yet have we expressed ourselves? What is there is Canadian literature which answers—even in purpose and aim—with Masfield, Wells, Galsworthy, Shaw, Synge, Yeats, Lady Gregory or any of that school? The mention of Wells recalls to my mind a passage in one of his novels in which a character desires to be told "what life means." He looks about, and sees grocers grocerying and omnibus drivers driving, and druggists drugging; and he wants to know why they do it. How is it that each of them does the thing he does; and nothing else? I presume he wonders why the grocer is not drugging or the omnibus driver selling cotton over a counter. They are all intensely earnest in what they are doing; yet mighty few of them would pretend that they had a "call" to their particular "calling." It is this earnest haphazardness which puzzles Mr. Wells' philosophic observer.

IT appears to me—and this is one of the points which the dramatist or novelist who tries to "express" Canada might work out—that these microscopic social analysts forget the great driving force of humanity—indeed, of the animal kingdom—that is, hunger. Primarily, ninety-nine out of every hundred of us are trying to find a place where the grass is long and luscious, and then a shady spot in which to lie down and "chew the cud." We do not do these various things for top-lofty or transcendental reasons. We work on precisely the same principle as does the dog who first finds a bone in the garbage, and then hides it carefully in the garden. The grocer does not "groce" because he feels that, from the dawn of time, some infinite intelligence has fore-ordained him to supply wilted apples and powdered tea to the people of a certain area. Not a bit of it. He "groces" because, when he was a young fellow looking for a job, it seemed easier to get a berth behind a codfish-and-coal-oil counter than anywhere else. Perhaps he knew a grocer—or he may have begun by running errands for him—or he may have been smart in doing up parcels. And, having begun, he just kept on "grocing" because he knew the business. He would have preferred to be the young minister or a law clerk; but the immediate necessity of getting a pay envelope on Saturday night Fixed his Destiny.

I HOPE that the Canadian novelist or dramatist will in this regard get down to "brass tacks." What we want is a literature which deals with the problems of the people—not the airy and even foggy puzzlings of the philosophers. We want to study life—not as it is imagined—but as it is. Life is, in reality, very simple—far too simple. With the most of us, it is merely a matter of getting food and eating it, and then getting more food. We may improve and extend and complicate our taste in foods. But chiefly our business, from the cradle to the grave, is satisfying our appetites. The man

who has an appetite for a Massenet opera feels very superior to the man who has an appetite for pork-and-beans; and there is one angle of vision from which he looks very superior. But, after all, it is the superiority of the cat, who enjoys being stroked, to that same cat when it catches a mouse.

HOWEVER, what I wanted to say was that the writer of the Canadian play or novel should—if he be honest—put this "hunger" motive prominently in the foreground. You get together one hundred young fellows secured by any cross-section of life in Canada; and ninety-five of them will be thinking chiefly of how they are going to earn their livings. The other five are mostly dreamers who still imagine that they may have "missions" in the world. Wait ten years and get your hundred together again, and the percentage who have come to regard "earning a living" as the first business of life will have risen to ninety-nine. As for the "callings" they choose, that is very largely accident. Later in life, it becomes less an accident. Round pegs tend to find round holes, if given a fair chance. But the first selection of

"jobs" made by Young Canada is a question of propinquity. If our novelist dodges this slipshod and unromantic fact in his effort to achieve a great work of introspection, he will be treating his readers dishonestly. We just set out to find a dollar, and pick up the most likely one that offers. Commonly, it is the only dollar we can reach at the time.

LUCKY is the young man who succeeds in getting himself paid for what he likes to do. Lucky even is the old man who either succeeds in moving about until he reaches this desirable position, or who achieves a tolerance for the task into which chance has pitch-forked him. Luckier still is he who finds a way of escape from the treadmill. There is one way of escape which is open to not a few; but which is employed by hardly any. That is the way of making the purchase of one's liberty the first business of life. When a man had rather be free than fat he has taken a long step toward freedom. But the trouble is that most of us, the moment we begin to gain a little on our task—to get a little "slack" in the rope that binds us—immediately want to buy additional comforts with that "gain," and so sell ourselves back into slavery again. A man who makes a thousand a year, and lives on it, can, when he begins to make two thousand a year, either live up to his good fortune or lay a thousand by for the purchase of his freedom. Most of us live up to our good fortune, and remain all our lives in slavery.

THE MONOCLE MAN.



WHEN Theodore Roosevelt, lover of the limelight and apostle of the strenuous life, was campaigning for the regular Republican nomination at Chicago last summer, Senator Dixon, of Montana, protested his granting audience to the representatives of certain newspapers bitterly hostile to his candidature, and furnishing them with material with which they spurred their lances against him. "The fellow who whistles you is a friend in disguise," quoth the former President of the United States. "Better be anathemized than ignored."

So thinks also the young Hotspur from the constituency of North Ontario, who occupies a somewhat remote seat among the Government benches. Samuel Simpson Sharpe got tired of being merely an alliteration in Canada's Parliament. A man's name in politics, he reasoned, is only worth while if he can inscribe it upon the newspapers and get it occasionally in the headlines. True, Samuel is a Major in the Militia, but of his "belligerent service in field and camp the Muse of History sings no song." It didn't even get him the job of Minister of Militia—yet. But Samuel is more than a militiaman; he is a politician, "some politician," as they say down in his parts. Whenever the public—his public—climb into the band-waggon and start to head somewhere, Samuel is on the job as postillion, astride the foremost horse and equipped with the loudest trumpet. Samuel knows the value of the limelight at home and chafed for it at Ottawa. In the midst of his meditations the Roosevelt idea came to him. Suppose the Ant annoyed the Elephant, and made the giant roar? Just think what attention would be focussed on the midget! Samuel forthwith tackled the elephant.

When the thrills which circulated as a result of Cockshutt's declarations in favour of permanent contribution had subsided, and the naval debate was again coming close to the borderline of boredom, Major Samuel Simpson Sharpe clambered to his feet, and, like a warrior bold, poured a scalding broadside into the whole United States navy. Just wherein the explosion illuminated the consideration of the Canadian naval policy the intrepid Major didn't explain; probably he didn't care. But he raked the Yankees fore and aft. He spat ridicule and calumny upon their vaunted bluecoats. He breathed brimstone on their whole naval organization. He called it a sort of home for destitute and moral degenerates and deserters from foreign ships

—and then some. He scorched Hansard with lurid adjectives and stinging epithet.

Having done all this, he sat back contentedly, and listened. He had not long to wait. It began with a murmur at the border; it developed into hysteria as it rumbled on over "the land of the free." New York newspapers gave him headlines, and editorial writers tore their hair in the conception of indignant periods. Washington woke up, and its gold-laced commodores and admirals and whatnot issued official statements by the carlot. Canadian newspapers responded—some seriously; some satirically. But the stormy petrel about which it all bubbled and seethed was the hitherto unknown member from North Ontario.

Samuel came into his own. He subscribed to a clipping bureau and bought a scrapbook. His mail tripled. They spoke his name from one end of the continent to the other. It was worth while. Samuel liked the sensation so well that some days later he tried the experiment again. He went after the Minister of Finance and the Bank act—a piece of insurgency that once more made him a centre of attraction—and for no less than four days he ran amuck before the Government clamped down on him. But for those four days Samuel was a popular idol with the bank-harnessing proletariat.

The Man from North Ontario has tasted the Rooseveltian prescription and found it good. In future Samuel Simpson Sharpe will be no non-entity in Parliament. He will be a limelight-seeking force which must always be reckoned with.

HOW well these legal men understand one another. When the Public Accounts committee organized for work this session it was found that the Government had inaugurated a new feature. It had engaged a lawyer—one, Stewart, K.C.—to act as guide, counsellor and friend to the members of the committee. Party spirit runs high during deliberations on public accounts, and Mr. Stewart has had his troubles. Carvell, the pugnacious, has told him his place; "Billy" Bennett and "Doc" Edwards have rallied to his aid, and Middlebro, the dilettante, from the chairman's dias, has pleaded and expostulated all in vain. But it fell to D. D. Mackenzie, the canny Scot and man of peace from Cape Breton, a former judge, by the way, to administer the effectual coup.

Stewart had just promulgated the excellent