

Unwritten Books and Unexpressed Art

THERE were two incidents in my experience as an editor that have given me much food for speculation and a new point of view regarding art and letters. One morning a writer came in to tell me a good story.

"Have you seen Bobbie—lately?" he asked.

"Not since last Tuesday. I bought a couple of comics from him."

Seeing that my visitor was grinning joyously, though I could not imagine what was amusing him, I went on.

"Bobbie has been doing splendidly. He is getting



Robert Service the Once Bank Clerk in Dawson, now the Yukon Poet, and the Jack London of Verse, has Written Another Book of Poems. He is now Hovering on the Flank of the Bulgarian Army.

texture into his drawing and before long he will be one of our best illustrators. I have raised his scale of prices."

My visitor roared with laughter and then spluttered:

"Say, have you any idea who Bobbie is?"

I had known Bobbie only as a young art student who took a portfolio under his arm once a week and made a round of the art departments trying to sell pictures. He differed in no way from a score of other bright young fellows who were living in studios and having a hard time to make ends meet. I confessed that I knew nothing more about him.

"Let me tell you who he is," said my visitor. "Last night Bobbie came to me and asked me if I could lend him fifty dollars. I had the money but didn't feel much like lending it without being fairly sure that I would get it back, so I said: 'I can lend it to you, Bobbie, but how are you going to pay me again. You don't sell many pictures and you don't get very much for the ones you do sell.' Then Bobbie opened up. He took a bundle of letters out of his pocket to show me who he is and to prove that I would be fairly safe in lending him fifty dollars. He is the only son of —, the multi-millionaire lumberman, and the prospective heir of a bachelor uncle who is worth about ten millions. His father did not want him to study art and Bobbie had the spunk to want to show him that he could make his living at it. He has been living on what he could earn and your new scale of prices has put him on easy street. What he wanted the extra fifty for was to celebrate his victory with his fiancée, who is coming to New York to-day."

Bobbie never came back to sell pictures and I have not seen him since, but I have heard that he is now the managing member of the firm which was built up by his father and his uncle. Every year his mother sees to it that his old friends have a good Christmas by buying from each his best picture at a fancy price.

ON another occasion a young man came to my office with a couple of poems that he wished to sell. I read them, and finding them good asked for his address so that I could send him a check. He gave me an address in Chicago and went away as pleased as any young poet it has been my pleasure to meet. When the poems were printed they were so well received that I wrote and asked him for more, but got no answer. Some time later I wrote to him again and offered him twice the previous rate if he would send me some more, but he did not

By **PETER McARTHUR**

reply. About that time I saw a paragraph in a paper which told of the wrath of one of the kings of the Chicago stock yards on finding that his son, who had been educated at Heidelberg, was ambitious to become an author.

"He has something more important to do than writing books!" snorted the old pork packer. "If he wants to have books written let him hire someone to write them for him." The name of the plutocrat and the poet were the same, with the exception that the young man wrote Jr. after his name. I have no doubt that he was the erring son referred to and that he is now one of the meat barons of Chicago, for I have never since come across anything in the papers or magazines bearing his signature.

THESE incidents have convinced me that there are places where art and literature are not so highly regarded as they are in what we are pleased to call cultivated circles. Moreover, they have given me positive proof that there are men in the world, doing the world's work, who are as competent to make names for themselves in art or literature as any whose achievements we acclaim. I no longer doubt the existence of "Mute inglorious Miltons," though the ease with which men who are far from Milton's class manage to get their books printed makes their existence seem somewhat incredible.

As a matter of fact, it is only within the past few centuries that books and the writers of books became so prominent in the world. A great man might employ a minstrel to sing his achievements or a historian to record them, but few, like Caesar, stooped to authorship themselves. This feudal aristocratic contempt for learning and letters was well expressed by Angus Bell-the-Cat, whom Scott fables as exclaiming,

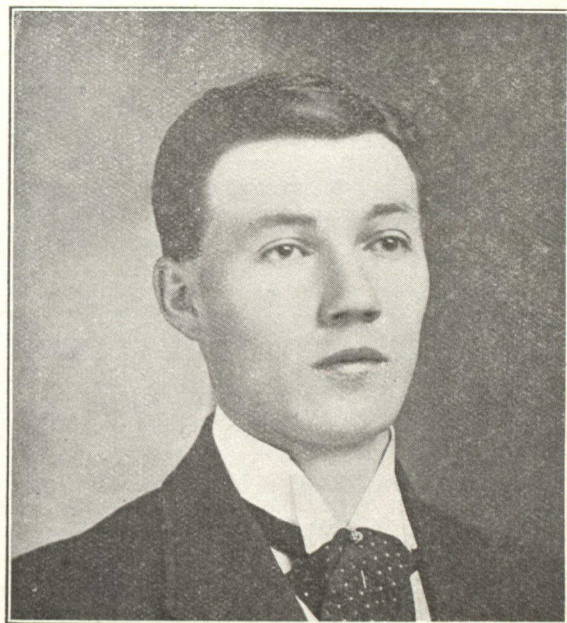
"Thanks to Saint Bothan, son of mine,
Save Gawain, ne'er could pen a line!"

Like the Chicago pork packer, the stern Douglas thought there were more important things in the world than reading and writing. It would really be interesting if someone with sufficient historical knowledge were to compile a list of the great men "Kings and Counsellors of the earth which built desolate places for themselves" who were entirely unlettered. It would doubtless be found that many of the men whose work has made them immortal as rulers and statesmen could not possibly have written of their own achievements. They accomplished mighty works, but the matter of making records and writing books was left to clerly persons who were seldom held in much esteem. Even to-day, when authorship is an applauded and petted profession, there are many vigorous men who regard "writing fellers" as men who are too lazy to earn their livings by decent work. Still the prejudice of the great mass of the people is in favour of authorship, and if Horace Walpole were alive he could add many distinguished names to his "Catalogue of Royal and Noble Authors." Authorship has received the approval of the highest society and no man or woman need be ashamed of the profession.

WITH the popularity of writing we seem to have lost something of the veneration in which

books were once held. Milton said, "A good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life."

A study of literature shows us that when books of this character are being written it takes an age to produce the author, and it takes the author a lifetime to produce the book. Nowadays we do things differently. Everyone who feels like writing, writes and rushes into print, and many others, like the pork packer, when they want a book written hire someone to write it for them. In this connec-



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tion there is a good story about Forrest Crissey, the well-known American magazine writer. On one occasion he wrote a book which was signed by a Chicago millionaire, and when the publisher sent the great man the customary half dozen copies he presented a copy to Mr. Crissey, and wrote on the fly leaf, "With the compliments of the Author."

But though the world is flooded with books—I see that the collection in the British Museum has now passed the four million mark—I am still convinced that many great books are still unwritten. The divine impulse that goes to the writing of a true book or the painting of a great picture may find expression in other ways. The man who has a message for the world can express it in action or conduct as truly as in even prose or triumphant song, and it is well for the world that this is so. We learn more from example than we do from precept, and the men who set us examples of great or kindly deeds are as truly adding to the thought of the world as those who write books. To emphasize this point and then leave the matter to the thoughtful reader, I shall quote what has always seemed to me one of the most wonderful texts in the Bible:

"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."

Are College Men Well Read?

By **DONALD B. SINCLAIR**

A COUPLE of years ago, a prominent and acute Canadian journalist was writing an editorial about the annual production of books in the Dominion. He was moved to a reflection something like this: "Our college graduates number hundreds every spring. In the last decade, how many B.A.'s in Canada have written books?" B.A.'s of universities in other countries write novels and become famous litterateurs. Mr. James M. Barrie published a novel when he was still an undergraduate. In Canada, men like Mr. Stringer and Mr. O'Higgins have occasionally left college because they wished to write, and found the academic curriculum irksome and confining.

But this article has as its subject the reading of books, and not the writing. The above facts are

cited only to point out that reading and writing books may be cause and effect where the creation of literature is concerned. The future literature of Canada will be the work of men of sound and wide reading if it is to be permanent.

The question arises, if our college men are not doing much literary work, are they reading seriously? Logically, the college man should be the best read man in the community. Every facility seems his to assist him in the acquaintance of books. The State pays men for guiding his faltering and hesitating feet in the mysterious and formidable ways of history, science and philosophy. Priceless volumes are his to fondle for the asking. The business of the college man is the perusal of books.

What a radically different role books must play