

Literary Notes

A NEW YORK editor makes a criticism which applies so neatly to Canada that its quotation may be of practical benefit: "Many people still watch confidently for the appearance of 'the great American novel,' the idea of which some foolish publisher first gave expression to a few years ago. The notion still seems to prevail that when the time is ripe some novelist of continental magnitude will appear, who will put all that is worth while in American life into a single story, which will be accepted as the authoritative report of what men and women are, and are doing, on this continent."

Certain Canadian authorities seem to have borrowed the idea and are talking largely of "the" Canadian novel. Every new story by a Canadian author is gravely read in the light of this great hope. Mr. H. W. Mabie's declaration, "No such novel has ever been written anywhere," is worth remembering. Literature is wider than the Dominion of Canada, the Republic of the United States or the British Empire. "When Valmond Came to Pontiac" and "The Sky Pilot" are both Canadian yarns but are as far apart as the Laurentian Hills and the Rockies. Most of us prefer the former, some swear by the latter; but no one will deny their Canadianism. Neither Sir Gilbert nor the Reverend Ralph is going to write the great Canadian novel. Nor will Mr. W. A. Fraser, however straight be his fiction furrow. Mr. Mabie's conclusion comes home to us: "The great American novel will be a composite work, written by many hands, in many styles, during a long period of time. It will probably never be finished and it has already dozens of volumes."

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A reader of the "Canadian Courier" has asked for the words of Mr. Theodore Roberts' poem, "The Vagrant's Epitaph," and for the date of its appearance. It was published, we believe, in "Scribner's Magazine" for August, 1904 or 1905.

Change was his mistress, Chance his counsellor.

Love could not keep him. Duty forged no chain.

The wide seas and the mountains called to him,

And gray dawns saw his camp-fires in the rain!

Sweet hands must tremble!—Ay, but he must go.

Revel might hold him for a little space, But turning, past the laughter and the lamps,

His eyes must ever catch the luring face.

Dear eyes might question!—Yea, and melt again,

Rare lips, a-quiver, silently implore, But ever he must turn his furtive head

And hear the other summons at the door.

Change was his mistress, Chance his counsellor.

The dark firs knew his whistle up the trail.

Why tarries he to-day?—And yesternight Adventure lit her stars without avail!

* *

It is significant how this lure of the wild has appealed to most of our Canadian poets. The women writers also feel the gypsy charm of the open road and sing of its wayside beauty with a truly lyric note. In the "American Magazine" Isabel Ecclestone Mackay has a poem, "Wanderlust," which is a veritable pioneer song.

The highways and the byways, the kind sky folding all,
And never a care to drag me back and never a voice to call;
Only the call of the long white road to the far horizon's wall.

The glad seas and the mad seas, the seas on a night of June,
And never a hand to beckon back from the path of the new-lit moon;
Never a night that lasts too long or a dawn that breaks too soon!

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