

CANADIAN LITERATURE AT THE
QUINQUENNIAL CONGRESS

By DONALD B. SINCLAIR

THE Quinquennial Congress was just a great big school — an advanced ladies' college, if you will. The literary section was one of its classes. Very few lectures were "sloped" there. Day after day, the same eager faces gathered in room No. 8 of University College to hear what the speakers had to say about folk-lore, or the public library question, or the tendencies of modern literature and journalism. The instructors, who discussed for them these subjects, were not dry-as-dust pedagogues with musty academic offerings beyond the ken of the ordinary wife and mother; but practical men and women, the life-blood of the pen's activity to-day — from the humblest of them, pounding a typewriter for a living in the offices of the big dailies, to writers whose names grace a dozen volumes.

The vigour and idealism of the Canadian spirit in letters was impressed upon the foreign visitors by the papers read by Canadian authors. The chief of them were: "Constructive Work for Women," Miss Agnes C. Laut; "How Editors Affect Communities," Mr. Arthur Stringer; "Literature and the Home," Miss Jean Graham; "Every Woman's Responsibility with Regard to Journalism," Miss Lily Dougall; "Canadian Writers," Katharine Hale; and "Public Libraries in Canada," E. A. S. Hardy.

The contributions of Miss Laut and Mr. Stringer stirred up no little flurry of excitement. Both dealt with the modern press and they handled it without gloves.

Miss Laut considered that there was room for constructive work among women in reforming the press. That institution was invading woman's sanctum, the home, with filth that should be barred like smallpox.

"You would not buy tainted butter, then why buy tainted news?"

The newspapers of to-day had become so demoralized that "to hit the loafer who spat tobacco juice upon the street, they would throw a rotten egg at the spotless reputation of a woman." They published inaccurate news, knowing it to be false. The Roosevelt interviews to-day being forced upon the public as authenticated stories of the great American's hunting tour, she designated as faked-up lies. "Terrible Teddy" had no war correspondents with him and he was miles from the nearest telegraph station.

How should women face the situation? They could effect a cure for the evils if they would make the business office of the newspaper the object of their attack. The commercial end of the newspaper was cramping the ideals of the editors. They could refuse to buy of the advertisers, or cancel their subscriptions, until the policy of the paper was in accordance with what they demanded.

"We could clean up the news of America inside of a year if twenty women in each city and town were to cancel their subscriptions to papers that insist on sensation and false news. . . . Don't think the editor will not welcome the change. When an offensive thing is published there is none more sorry than the editor. The business end can make more money by vicious methods, and if you keep silent, there is nothing left for the editor to do. When you pay five cents for true news and do not get it, it is your own fault."

Mr. Arthur Stringer dealt mostly with the magazine editor. The same destructive currents were undermining this branch of journalism. The advertising manager was drawing the

big salary; the editor was fast becoming the "janitor of the house of intelligence." Mr. Stringer traced the reactive magazine policy of recent years from "the paper roses of optimism, the bourgeois timidity that tabooed all the profundities and most of the sincerities of existence," to that critical institution, the "muck-rake." The muck-raker was worthy of condemnation; he was not a constructor, but a destroyer.

"For several years now, we have heard the trusts execrated and we have seen many corporations exposed, and many black sheep pilloried; but we have seen no adequate and reasonable programme of purification, no synthetic philosophy of regeneration. In fact, I know of no earthly calling or profession more in need of what the editor has been assuming to give others, more in need of spiritual emancipation than is the man who sits in the editorial chair of almost any of our magazines. The commercial chain has hung too close and heavy upon him to let him grow as his spiritual and humanistic chains have grown, yet I confess that it is going to be a hard job to reform him. Before you can regulate the wrist, you must regulate the heart. Before you can broaden and dignify and ennoble him, you must broaden and ennoble the audience of which he is in a very definite way the exponent and the representative. But it is a task that will require courage and a great deal of it, for, as Hamlet said of the players, 'They are the abstract and brief chronicles of the time; after your death, you were better to have a bad epitaph, than their ill report while you live.'"

Miss Jean Graham, editor of *The Home Journal*, made an eloquent appeal to the mothers of Canada to censor their children's reading matter. The comic paper and the *Elsie and Pansy* books, which all gave distorted views of life, were subjects of her strong denunciation. They were "hypnotic poison." How could parents expect of their growing offspring, saturated with this "slushy, goody-goody" stuff, to regard, for instance, a book such as Ruskin's "Ethics of the Dust," other than "verily as dust?"

Besides those of Canadian writers, other papers read before the literary section of general interest to Canadians were: "Reading Societies for Working Girls," Miss C. M. Thompson, Girls' Friendly Society, London, England; "Literature of the Future," Miss E. Stocking, Detroit, Michigan; "What Literature Gives to Painting," Mr. E. Wylie Grier; "The Development of the Public Library for the Public Weal," Dr. Michael Hainsch, founder of public libraries, Austria.

During the session of the Literary Section, the writer was accorded interviews with Miss Agnes C. Laut and Mr. Arthur Stringer. Miss Laut stated that she was going at once to New York to arrange with her publishers in regard to her new book, a history, "The Empire of the North," which is destined to appear in the fall. Then she will hear the call of the northland again and will bury herself there for the next four months. Mr. Stringer imparted the information that he had been minus a collar for the last four months, practising what he terms his vocation of farmer at his summer home near Chatham, Ontario. He has quit writing for the *Popular Magazine*, but is under contract to turn out thrilling yarns for some other American publications. Mr. Stringer will be in Canada probably till the fall.

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