

One of his most moving compositions was occasioned by the death in 1933 of General Sir Arthur Currie, McGill's principal and vice-chancellor for 13 years and one of Canada's greatest soldiers. Leacock had once taught Currie in a small rural Ontario school. Decades later, at the university, they became firm friends. They heartily hated the same things -- misuse of power, greed, cruelty, disloyalty.

If, as has already been noted, Leacock was no great shakes as an economist, often he exhibited some advanced thinking in this field. In The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice (1920), he saw a great need for social security, minimum wage laws and legislation guaranteeing the shortening of working hours. At the same time, he stood adamant against socialism in any form. His attitude was summed up thus: "In my opinion, with perfect citizens any government is good. In a population of angels a socialistic commonwealth would work to perfection."

In retrospect it seems wholly naive, but Leacock's enforced retirement from his professorial post left him an embittered man. Early in 1935 he had privately circulated a pamphlet in which he felt he had found solutions to the financial crisis which the university was then experiencing. These suggestions included a recommendation that senior staff members should be retired to make way for younger men. When, a few months later, he and 12 others were placed on pension, he raised a howl which really never subsided.

To prove that he was not "as senile as the McGill board of governors apparently consider me", Leacock forthwith set a terrific pace in his accelerated writing schedule. He continued to contribute articles to the Encyclopaedia Britannica ("I would sooner have written Alice in Wonderland than the whole of the Encyclopaedia Britannica," he once said). His comic pieces took on a freshness which they had lacked for a long while. He addressed himself to problems, national and international, discussing the world's muddle over gold, the labour situation in the depression, emigration, and Canada's relationship to the British monarchy.

Shortly after he had protestingly assumed the status of professor emeritus, Leacock looked to the Canadian West. To put it more accurately, he was pressed by some of his influential friends in business and industry to go West and write and speak about the state of the economy there and about certain political movements. Out of this triumphal progress, while it very nearly exhausted him, emerged My Discovery of the West, a volume well-salted with humour that did much to inform the citizens of Central and Eastern Canada. It won him the country's top literary award, the Governor-General's prize. Almost at the same time, he received the highest honour of the Royal Society of Canada -- the Lorne Pierce Medal.

Meanwhile there had been no relaxation in the production of amusing fiction. Funny Pieces, Model Memoirs, Too Much College (a good deal of which dealt with his philosophy of education), Laugh Parade, Hellements of Hickonomics (which he regarded as his best work of humour, though few agreed with him), and My Remarkable Uncle all appeared in his post-McGill period. For over half a century, he hadn't given a thought to an uncle who had impressed him tremendously in his childhood. Only when The Reader's Digest, in 1941, asked Leacock to contribute to a series called "My Most Unforgettable Character" did he enshrine E.P. Leacock in print - an astonishing fellow, who posed well beyond his means,