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MONTREAL

A CANADIAN HUMOURIST

Is Professor Stephen Leacock, of McGill University,
the Mark Twain of Canada?

By MARJORIE MACMURCHY.

"LITERARY LAPSES" is a little book, but it contains a permanent contribution to Canadian humour. A large part of the Canadian public has refused to take Mr. Leacock seriously when he writes on Imperial politics. When his political writings are taken seriously, then Canadian readers generally often thoroughly disapprove of what he writes. But "Literary Lapses" proves that Mr. Leacock is a master of humour in everyday affairs. In his book of humorous sketches he does not intend to instruct, guide, or even to irritate his readers—this last named function of a writer he has often carried out successfully in the past; but he does amuse them, and to such a point of genuine hearty laughter is the amusement carried that Mr. Leacock has well earned for himself a place as a Canadian writer of humour.

One of the best things that can be said for "Literary Lapses" is that it deals with the actual commonplace aspects of life with which we are all familiar and of which we all must understand something. Here is none of the aloofness of the professor. But the life of the average man and his foibles are illuminated with a kindly laughter, which is keen enough to laugh away some of our foolish eccentricities. What subjects has Mr. Leacock chosen? A man takes his first deposit to a bank; he is overawed by the bank, and the bank, the reader presently discovers, is pretty well overawed with itself. Mr. Leacock's "Boarding House Geometry" first appeared in *Truth* and was republished in *Punch*. Once read, Mr. Leacock's reasoning on weekly bills for boarders will not be readily forgotten.

"If there be two boarders on the same flat, and the amount of the side of the one be equal to the amount of the side of the other, each to each, and the wrangle between one boarder and the landlady be equal to the wrangle between the landlady and the other, then shall the weekly bills of the two boarders be equal also, each to each.

"For if not, let one bill be the greater.

"Then the other bill is less than it might have been—which is absurd."

Mr. Leacock tells also of "The Awful Fate of Melpomenus Jones," the shy man who lacked sufficient self-possession to say good-bye at the end of a call, and so lived and died in the house of reluctant acquaintance. "The New Food" is a tragic tale of modern concentrated nutriment, the youngest of the family perishing from having secured and swallowed the pill which held the whole family's Christmas dinner. A man's thoughts on clothes and what he has suffered from them takes the form of "A New Pathology." Statistics, as viewed by the man on the street; the beautiful girl who hypnotises Mr. Sapling by flattery; street cars; the romantic novel; the detective story; the man who always knows and always doubts; travelling; what is left after a school and college education; society reporting; self-made men; these are some of the topics ready-made for the hand of Mr. Leacock. Two or three short journeys on a Canadian railway train are all that is necessary to fit anyone for appreciating Mr. Leacock's suggestions on marking passengers.

"I have observed that it is now the practice of the conductors to stick bits of paper in the hats of the passengers. They do this, I believe, to mark which

ones they like best. The device is pretty and adds much to the scenic appearance of the car. But I notice with pain that the system is fraught with much trouble for the conductors. The task of crushing two or three passengers together, in order to reach over them and stick a ticket into the silk skull cap of a traveller is embarrassing for a conductor of refined feelings. It would be simpler if the conductor should carry a small hammer and a packet of shingle nails and nail the paid up passenger to the back of the seat. Or, better still, let the conductor carry a small pot of paint and a brush, and mark the passengers in such a way that he cannot easily mistake them. In the case of bald-headed passengers, the hats might be politely removed and red crosses painted on the craniums. This will indicate that they are bald. Through passengers might be distinguished by a complete coat of paint. In the hands of a man of taste, much might be effected by a little grouping of painted passengers."

If one is not greatly mistaken, the sketches in Mr. Leacock's "Literary Lapses" will read as well after ten years as they do now. They have the gayety, the wit, the penetrating critical attitude towards what is temporary and unreasonable, and the kindly understanding of average human nature, which are essentials of true humour.

Selling Scenery

"IF you could sell Ontario air and scenery to visitors from other provinces or from abroad at \$100 per visitor would you not think it good business?" asks the pamphleteer of the Ontario Forest, Fish and Game Protective Association. Industrial interests alone are not to be considered in the big movement for the conservation of natural resources. For instance, the encouragement of tourist traffic has been added to the Commission's programme. Especially in Ontario are there red hot champions of the tourist. The Ontario Forest, Fish and Game Protective Association is responsible for a large part of the enthusiasm. This body sees great unrecognised potentialities in the rustling woods and silver streams just as they stand. They have learned a few lessons abroad—in Switzerland, mainly supported by the foreigners who pay for the privilege of climbing the Alps; nearer home, across the line in the State of Maine, they have wondered at the twenty-five million dollar revenue which Uncle Sam's hustlers annually gather in from the sporting tourists. In the year 1907, two hundred and fifty thousand non-resident sportsmen hit the trail into Maine, each approximately leaving \$100 behind him to trickle through the community. How much of this wealth has Ontario pocketed during the past few years? Ontario has the same scenery to sell as Maine—only eight times as much of it. But yet in 1909 merely 8,500 non-resident anglers registered their tax with the government. The people of the province made \$850,000—why not twenty times that amount? Here is the answer of the provincial conservationists:

"The Ontario public does not fully appreciate the economic aspect of this question. Consequently insufficient interest is taken in the enforcement of the laws, and a source of great wealth to the community is being not only neglected but materially injured."