

## Canadian Authors' Association Convention at Quebec City

### ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT ROBERT J. C. STEAD,

*Author of "Kitchener and Other Poems," "The Homesteaders," "The Empire Builders," Etc.*

NOTE—At the third annual Convention of the Canadian Authors' Association, which was held in Quebec city on 19th and 20th May, 1924, British Columbia was represented by Judge Howay of New Westminster, Mr. Francis Dickie, author of "The Master Breed" etc., and D. A. Chalmers, editor of the BRITISH COLUMBIA MONTHLY. Mr. Robert Watson, formerly of Vernon, B. C., author of "My Brave and Gallant Gentlemen," etc., was also present, but as he is now located in Winnipeg (editing "The Beaver") he must be held to represent another province.

We hope to publish additional references to this Convention. Meantime it is fitting to note that it is a reasonable assumption (though the retiring president himself does not hint at it) that Mr. Stead, as one of the leading "officers of the Association" had not a little to do with the official recognition of literature given by the Canadian Government in connection with its display at the Empire Exhibition at Wembley, London. The present government at Ottawa none the less also deserves credit for its thoughtfulness and enterprise in the matter. (Editor B. C. M.)

My first duty is to express the pleasure which I feel, and which I am sure all our visiting members feel, that we are today the guests of our friends and compatriots of the historic City of Quebec. Here, where the pioneers of Canada's physical explorations were wont to assemble in days gone by, it is appropriate that their successors, now engaged in the less strenuous but not less important business of pioneering the routes for a truly Canadian literature—a truly Canadian channel of self-expression—should gather in convention as we do today. I shall be surprised if this meeting representative of the creative literary arts, fails to give life to new impulses which will have far-reaching influences upon our national destiny.

We are particularly happy in sharing the hospitality of this ancient city with our friends of the Royal Society. We hope and confidently expect that their deliberations here this week will be upon that high plane of intellectual outlook for which their Society is so justly distinguished, and that their meeting will be blessed with rich accomplishments both on behalf of the Society and of Canada as a whole.

One regret I must express—a sincere regret that I am unable to deliver this address in that graceful tongue which would have been so much in keeping with the occasion and the place. It is the advantage of our French-speaking fellow-citizens—an advantage which I never cease to envy them—that they are able to tap the deep wells of culture of two historic languages, while we who were born to the English tongue must, in so many instances, be content with one.

Our annual meeting this year has been scheduled somewhat later in the season than on former occasions. A number of considerations led to this decision. Your Executive wished to select a date at which those members who are associated with University activities would be free to attend. They also hoped that by moving the annual meeting on into May the more enjoyable weather might be experienced, so that the convention might combine the holiday spirit with its more serious purposes. And, in the present instance, they aimed to synchronize the meeting with that of the Royal Society for the convenience of a number who are members of both organizations. In making this change from past practices your Executive hope they have anticipated your wishes.

The present annual meeting marks the completion of three years of activity by the Canadian Authors Association. At the end of three years of life the Association may fairly be asked to produce evidence of its right to exist. For the first year or two any infant organization must be engaged mainly in finding its feet, but by the third year it should be getting into its stride. If it fails in that, either the organization itself was badly conceived, or it has been unfortunate in its leadership.

I shall not claim for the Canadian Authors Association any spectacular achievement, but that it has made substantial headway in its purpose I think there can be no difference of opinion. It has at least assisted in awakening Canada to a literary self-consciousness. We do not so often hear arguments today, as we did three years ago, as to whether or not there is such a thing as Canadian literature. The ground of debate has shifted. The question is no longer, "Have we a literature?" but, "What is the kind of literature which these Canadian authors are giving us?" And here perhaps I may voice a mild protest against that school of criticism which demands that we run before we walk. A few weeks ago, in an address delivered in Toronto, I made the claim that Canadian literature was, on the average, as good as the literature which is being imported into Canada. I felt that that was a reasonable claim, and that it was all that could be reasonably claimed or expected. But my remark was made the basis of a criticism which complained that Canadian literature must not be satisfied with being merely as good as the average of other lands; it must be better, before Canadians can be expected to accept it in competition with the foreign-made article. I am not aware of any other channel of endeavor in which it is demanded of a Canadian that he must produce something not merely as good as, but better than, the foreign article before he can hope for recognition in his own country. We must walk before we run, and how shall we learn to run if our critics will not let us walk? But I think this is not expressive of the attitude of Canadians generally toward their own literature. They are interested in it, and appreciative of it, and both their interest and their appreciation are rapidly increasing. I quote from one of our sanest and most constructive Canadian critics:

"I venture to say that more has been written about Canadian literature during the last three years than in the preceding thirty."

If that is so it can only mean that Canadians are awakening to the existence and the possibilities of a Canadian literature, and for this awakening I think the Canadian Authors Association may fairly claim some share of the credit.

For the three years of our existence we have been confronted with a struggle on copyright legislation. In this we have not been as successful as we could have hoped, but when we remember the power of opposing interests, and the peculiarly complicated nature of Canada's copyright problem owing to the fact that the United States has remained outside the Berne convention, our efforts have not been entirely disappointing.

Our work as an Association, and Canadian literature generally have been signally honored by the Canadian Government in its decision to display a Canadian literary section at