

is to allow the usurpation of substance by shadow. Often words become charged with their whole meaning only when we see and handle what they describe and discuss. And there is further reciprocity between the museum and the library; when the label-writer has more to tell than a label gives him space for, he can refer by title and page to the book where his story is continued to the end.

It is with regard to this matter of the label that the methods of the museum are distinctly in advance of those of its neighbour and friend, the public library. The curator has put so much light and colour into his ticket that the dry bones of his cases move and live; the librarian still shows a catalogue of mere titles which the ordinary reader runs over much as he might a series of tickets in a museum twenty years ago. Great treasures are undoubtedly heaped up in the shelves before him, but he takes the fact very largely upon trust. The veins of gold here and there are mixed with how much dross, with how much ore not worth the mining! Beside each other are the few genuine books of all time, the volumes which interpret these and bring them down to date, in much greater profusion, the mere echoes and dilutions of weighty writing, together with a preponderant mass of downright rubbish. Each book bears nothing more or less than its title; in the unrespecting catalogue no authority is before or after another. Francis Parkman and a catchpenny historical compiler touch elbows; George Eliot and Mrs. Southworth kiss each other. Of course, readers in choosing this book rather than that have some reason for their choice. But is the reason a good one; shouldn't there be an opportunity to choose with only the best reason possible? Perchance some friend has recommended the chosen volume; but is the recommendation informed and trustworthy? Or it may be that a laudatory advertisement has directed the choice; and how much reliance can be put on advertisements? Or, what occurs oftenest of all in the literature of instruction, the reader interested in birds, or African exploration, or electricity, takes the book most recently published, or which bears the name buzzed loudest in the public ear. But is it always the best book that latest leaves the press, even in the realm of travel, or exploration, or science on the march? Is it always the most popular author who best deserves popularity? One small class in the community has the good fortune always to have the best reasons in reading and studying its books. The young men and women in our colleges and universities enjoy manifold advantages of training, discipline and culture; among all these benefits one of the chief is their economy of time and attention through reading and studying only the best books. Thanks to the guidance of trustworthy judges they can shun the output of the mere mechanic of the pen; one first-hand work of authority judiciously supplements another; the defects and errors chargeable even to the greatest writers are pointed out, and where a subject is brought down to date in periodicals, the best of these are indicated. Popular education will receive an immense impulse when guidance of this kind is rendered the plain people, not only by the university professor, but by everybody else able and willing to give it. That guidance should come, I think, in a brief descriptive, critical and comparative note, duly signed and dated, to be carried within the book itself, and also to follow the title-card in the public library. Thus the reader, looking up French ceramics, or entomology, or taxation, might see the relative values of all the books of these subjects in the library as fully as if there stood at his side a company of men and women of authority on pottery, insects, or public finance.

And here we begin to see why it is that the museum specimen has long had its label, while the library book still lacks its note. The label is descriptive purely; the book note must be not only descriptive but critical, and so ably and justly critical as to commend itself to every informed and fair mind. By so much as sound judgment exceeds simple knowledge is the task of the literary evaluator more difficult than that of the label writer. One advantage, however, rests with the appraiser of literature, his notes can serve at once hundreds of public libraries and thousands of isolated students; a label-writer's circle is bounded by his own halls and galleries.

In canvassing this proposal among librarians it has been objected that if notes of the quality we seek were to be had, the proper place for them would be in bibliographies, and not on cards in the library catalogue. But if they were

concealed in bibliographies, I fear that few readers would take the trouble to find them there, whereas a reader could not very well dodge a note if it stood before him in the catalogue. Agur prayed that his food might be convenient for him.\* Let us for this occasion change Shakespeare a little so as to have him say,

"How oft the sight of means to do good deeds  
Makes good deeds done!"†

Library machinery as it stands is excellent, as machinery; it can take on a new character and a fresh usefulness when its mechanism includes the best available judgments of the stores committed to its keeping—judgments put directly into the hands of the public, not at so much as a single remove from the youngest or poorest person who enters a library door.

How, it may be reasonably asked, are we to get all this suggested characterization in the vast and swiftly extending field of literature? Of course, by piecemeal, there is no other way. Let but one department of history, or biography, or applied science, be worthily passed upon, and we shall soon know whether the public wishes to have our plans carried further. History, perhaps, might be taken up for a beginning. Historical literature grows steadily in popular favour; it unites entertainment and instruction, while it naturally and pleasantly introduces the questions social, political, and economic, which to-day knocked at the door of the veriest recluse of us all. At first a thousand titles might suffice; the choice to rest with an editor-in-chief, having a corps of assistants, each responsible for a definite part of the whole. The notes should have such conciseness as not to burden their cards with a needless word, while omitting nothing which the reader or student should be told.

The public library has waited a long time for its note of guidance; let it wait as much longer as may be necessary to get that note in sensible form, of the right quality, and first of all with respect to such books, humble or great, as best deserve the golden scales we are trying to set up.

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## Letters to the Editor.

### THE PROVINCE OF QUEBEC AND THE EARLY AMERICAN REVOLUTION.

SIR,—In your issue of August 8th I find a review of my late study, "The Province of Quebec and the Early American Revolution." While without either the power or the inclination to follow up reviews, I feel that *THE WEEK* occupies too important a place in Canadian literary journalism to let this one pass entirely without comment. My work is at least a serious and earnest effort to contribute to the elucidation of some important and neglected aspects of Canadian history; I confess, therefore, to some disappointment in finding that *THE WEEK* has not subjected it to a serious scrutiny. For I cannot regard as serious treatment the criticism of a writer who says that I describe "the military rule of the French from 1750 to the Capitulation of Canada in 1763," and who represents as my main contention the thesis that "the Government of the day erred in giving too much freedom to the French-Canadians." It seems not unreasonable in an author to ask that the critic who is accorded a place in a reputable journal should be able at least to conceal both too distressing an ignorance with regard to the fundamental facts of the subject in question and too entire a misconception of the writer's position.

Your reviewer, however, is cautious enough in the main to refrain from approaching facts too closely and assaults especially that part of my work which he says "launches upon the sea of philosophical history and pretends to condemn the Quebec Act." I wish now merely to point out that the entire basis of his attack is precisely that old idea which I have laboured to show has no historical foundation. This idea is that (to use the reviewer's words) "as we all know they [the French-Canadians] remained faithful to the British Government" during the Revolution. It seems incredible that any serious critic should have wholly failed to notice the fact that I have devoted more than thirty pages

\* Prov., xxx., 8.

† King John, iv., 2.