

Retrospect of a Year's Books

Interesting Review of a Steadily Increasing Output by Canadian Writers in Fiction, Politics, Biography and Poetry

By MARJORY MacMURCHY

A NUMBER of good novels by Canadian writers have been issued during the year. Meredith's Letters, published the other day, told how when the public would not read his poetry, he wrote novels instead and found the attention of the public almost as hard to gain by this method. The reason was that Meredith could only do his best. He did not know how to be popular. But, in spite of everything, he could be a great novelist. Of Canadian writers whose novels and stories have been published during the year, Mrs. Cotes, Basil King, Miss McLlwraith, Mrs. McClung, Miss Alice Jones and Mr. George Pattullo, are probably story tellers by gift and choice. Miss McLlwraith would rather write history. Mrs. MacKay by gift is a poet. Professor Leacock is a humourist who can change his material into any shape he will. Norman Duncan, one believes, perhaps ought to have been a preacher. Mrs. Murphy writes conversationally of what she sees and thinks and comes only a little way towards fiction. Mrs. Sheard's bent is for poetry. But publishers and public almost invariably prefer fiction.

The most considerable amongst the Canadian novels, short stories, and books which resemble fiction of 1912 are: "The Street Called Straight," Basil King; "A Diana of Quebec," Miss McLlwraith; "The Man at Lone Lake," Mrs. Sheard; "Open Trails," Mrs. Murphy; "Rory of Willow Beach," Mrs. Patriarche; "The House of Windows," Mrs. MacKay; "Chronicles of Avonlea," Miss Montgomery; "The Consort," Mrs. Cotes; "The Long Patrol," H. A. Cody; "Corporal Cameron," Ralph Connor; "The Black Creek Stopping House," Mrs. McClung; "Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town," Professor Leacock; "The Best of a Bad Job," Norman Duncan; "Marcus Holbeach's Daughter," Miss Jones; "Man in the Open," Roger Pocock; "The Lad Felix," Henry Milner; "The Long Portage," Harold Bindloss; "The Toll of the Tides," T. G. Roberts; "The Sheriff of Badger," George Pattullo.

OF the novels, Mrs. Cotes' "The Consort" is probably the most artistic work. It is the story of a very wealthy woman, the novelist's idea apparently having been taken from the Baroness Burdett-Coutts. Her husband feels overshadowed and is driven to assert his personality by attempting a political career. The step-daughter is also in something like revolt. Unfortunately, the wealthy wife and her step-daughter fall in love with the same man, who admires the wife and loves the step-daughter. Altogether, the relations of "The Consort" are complicated. The book is very clever, subtle, and consistent. But it is not a happy story

and it leaves a slightly bitter taste. The choice of subject makes clear the difference between fiction which is admired in new and old societies. Nothing could be in stronger contrast with "The Consort" than Miss Montgomery's "Chronicles of Avonlea." They are sweet, straightforward, wholesome and full of laughter. This is Miss Montgomery's best work. Some of the stories in "The Chronicles of Avonlea" are not unworthy of comparison with Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's stories or the work of Sarah Orne Jewett. "The Street Called Straight," by Basil King, is a Boston story. The author gives a curious misreading of the character of an Englishman, probably as understood in Boston. The fine points of conduct in "The Street Called Straight" are elaborated with great care; and it is interesting. Mrs. MacKay's "The House of Windows" is melodramatic. But the author knows how to tell a story and her next novel is likely to be much better than this one. "The Black Creek Stopping House," by Mrs. McClung, is a book of short stories. Mrs. McClung's long stories are better than her short ones. But the same tolerant humour and kindness, fresh, wholesome outlook and interest in human nature are to be found in this likeable little book.

THREE individual books of fiction are Miss McLlwraith's "A Diana of Quebec," Miss Jones' "Marcus Holbeach's Daughter" and Mr. Pattullo's "The Sheriff of Badger." The last named is a story of the southwestern states. It is a good piece of work, a man's book, with plenty of action, frank-

ness and best things coming to the best people in the end. Mr. Pattullo is a Canadian, although his book is not published in Canada. The story is about people in the United States, but it is a good story and Canadians will enjoy it. "Marcus Holbeach's Daughter" is also a good piece of work. Miss Jones has three or four novels to her credit and knows how to tell a story. She is a native of Nova Scotia and knows the Lower Provinces intimately. The scene of this novel is in the country bordering on the Bay of Chaleur. There is a good deal about salmon fishing on the rivers that flow into the Bay. One part of the story tells about prospecting for minerals in northern Quebec. "Marcus Holbeach's Daughter" is a good Canadian story. Some years ago Miss McLlwraith, when writing her "Life of Haldimand," came on material which told about an early love-story of Nelson in Quebec. She has made admirable use of this material in "A Diana of Quebec," which is a sensible, well-built novel, with a trace of homespun in its quality that makes it all the more likeable. The author, it may be, quotes a little too freely from original documents. But one believes that this novel by Miss McLlwraith in its own way will be considered almost as useful a story to read for the history of Quebec City as the famous "Golden Dog" itself. The character of the book is wholly different from that of the "Golden Dog," but it is a good historical novel.

"Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town" is Mr. Leacock's best work so far. The humour is inimitable. The sketches are so true, masterly, and irresistible that one can only offer them to the world outside as an undeniable bit of Canada, quite as truly Canadian as the wheat known as Number One Hard. There are few humorous books of this quality written anywhere. It is to be hoped the little towns will understand that the humorist is proud of his citizenship.

Politics and Biography

A TRIBUTE of memory and regret is to be paid to two Canadian authors who died during the year. Miss Agnes Deans Cameron was a thorough-going optimist. In "The New North" she established a place for herself as a writer of travels which can bear comparison with that of favourably known travel writers of the day. Her lectures were of the same character as her books. She had many plans for authorship which were not carried out. But she has left an impulse for hard work and reasonable enthusiasm which has its influence, perhaps especially among the women writers of Canada. Professor Blewett's death occurred more recently. His work published during the year is referred to elsewhere in the present number of the CANADIAN COURIER. His lucid prose had all the qualities which make the best prose as beautiful as poetry. One cannot say that his work was not complete, although he died young.

Politics, travel, history, biography, and religion are represented among the more considerable Canadian books of the year. The list of general works is fairly long. Amongst others should be mentioned: Lord Durham's Report on British North America, edited by Sir C. P. Lucas; short biographies of Wolfe and Montcalm, by Colonel Wood, of Quebec; a biography of Brock, by Mr. T. G. Marquis; From Halifax to Vancouver, by Miss Pullen-Bury; The Selkirk Mountains, by Mr. A. O. Wheeler and Mrs. Parker, of Winnipeg; The Black Bearded Barbarian, a life of MacKay, of Formosa, by "Marian Keith"; Correspondence between Lord Elgin and Lord Grey on the Affairs of Canada, edited by Dr. Doughty and Professor Shortt—this volume is not likely to be published before the end of the year; Just Before the Dawn, an account of religion in Japan, by a Canadian missionary, Mr. R. C. Armstrong; a new edition of Canadian Men and Women of the Times, Mr. Henry Morgan's standard work of reference; The New-Canada, by Mr. J. S. Willison; and Sir Richard Cartwright's Reminiscences.

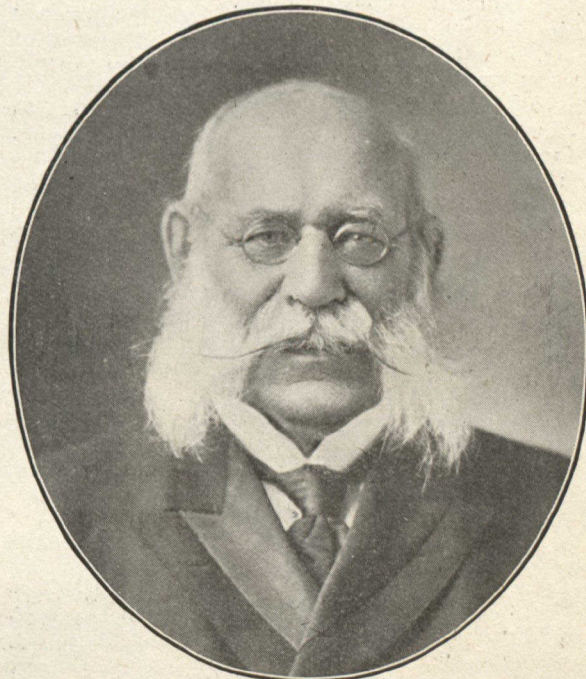
Political works are most important among the volumes mentioned. Beginning with Sir Charles Lucas's estimate of the service of Lord Durham to the British Empire, the year ends with Sir Richard Cartwright's Reminiscences. Durham's service consisted "in the force and clearness with which he pointed out existing evils, and the remedies which must be applied; the statesmanship with which, not content with generalities, he prescribed definite and

immediate action; and the courage and insight, amounting to genius, with which he gave to the world the doctrine of responsible government, not as a prelude to the creation of separate peoples, but as the corner-stone upon which a single and undivided British Empire should be reared to abiding strength."

The New Canada, by Mr. J. S. Willison, editor of the Toronto News and Canadian correspondent of the London Times, is "a survey of the conditions and problems of the Dominion." It is between thirty and forty thousand words in length. Appearing originally in the Empire Day edition of the Times, May 24th, 1912, The New Canada was later issued by the Times in book form. It is a rapid and comprehensive account of the development and present situation of Canada, written in a style which



Alice Jones, author of "Marcus Holbeach's Daughter," is the Daughter of a Former Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia. She was Born Near Halifax, and is Much Acquainted with Military and Navy Society. Her Latest Work is a Romance of the Canadian Woods.



Sir Richard Cartwright's "Reminiscences," Vol. 1, just out, Will be the History of Practical Politics in Canada Written from the Inside. It will Explain Everything in the Evolution of Liberalism from pre-Confederation to Commercial Union in 1887 and Reciprocity in 1911.