

CANADIAN LITTERATEURS: ARE THE  
UNIVERSITIES SO MUCH TO BLAME?

REFERRING to an article in your issue of April 8th, signed by "Alchemist," and dating from Montreal, I would venture to say that while I sympathize with the writer's aspirations and hopes for Canadian writers and Canadian development, I would urge that he is very harsh and even unreasonable in his treatment of the Universities. That the difficulty which he deplores exists may be true, but the same difficulty exists in all countries. We do not suppose that Wordsworth, one of the greatest writers of this century, ever received from the sale of his immortal works enough for the livelihood of himself and family. It was a long time before he received that post in the excise which gave him the leisure to ramble over the fells without feeling the pain of anxiety for the morrow, which is depressing to writers as to ordinary men. As "Alchemist" suggests, the true writer, the artist, the teacher, must be tested and tested often by adversity; he claims for those who have been tested solid remuneration and recognition. There is no doubt a special charm about a local literature, and every organized country should strive for the expression of its own proper wants and thoughts and aspirations; but these expressions should not be so excessively local as to appeal only to inhabitants of this Dominion. We are still under five millions, we are not five to the square mile; of these scarce five millions, nearly two millions speak and write French, and have a literature of their own growing up, which, unfortunately, does not form a homogeneous whole with the English literature. The two streams are clear and beautiful we may admit, but they are not the same colour, and though they flow within the same banks, they do not mix. We cannot undo or gainsay history and cheerfully admit that the existence of French Canadian literature is a valuable Canadian asset; but the fact remains that our constituency is reduced to less than three millions—the population of a second-rank American State, much less than the population of London. That such a population could support a literature would be a miracle. Then, consider the age of the Dominion, for the word national as applied to Canada has only been applicable in any sense for a quarter of a century. We have had our baptismal ode, our collect for Dominion Day, but in such a period with such a limited, and scattered, and struggling, and divided constituency we can scarcely expect to provide sufficiently for a class of authors. It is creditable that so much has been done. Such writers as Franklin of the first quarter of the century of the American Nation (1776-1801) wrote for England just as much as for America. And though good work has been done in Canada, it seems to me little can be done for the Canadian authors permanently, until their utterances are such that their words shall be listened to, and listened for, beyond the boundary of the Dominion, till their music shall not be drowned by the roar of the Atlantic. To be successful a Canadian literature must be such as to be called for, and read by, the other English-speaking and English-writing populations. Burns did not write for Scotland alone, nor Tennyson for England, nor Longfellow for the United States; and while it is true that Canadians should gather inspiration from their federated unity, from their picturesque history, from their unique lakes, vast Mediterraneans of vast potential history, from their mountains and rivers, from their festal life amidst the woods, the quaint grouping in the sugar shanty, the merry glee of skaters and tobogganers, from the courage and endurance which have conquered extremes of climate; from the whole compass of that wide gamut which makes up Canadian life, it is also true that their aim should not be local. The material for a special literature or flavour of literature is there, but the utterance must be such in form as to compel attention beyond our political boundaries. A new author of the true type is almost sure to emerge from the crowd; even in the thick press of the English book market, a new singer will be listened to. So if we produce a singer equal to Longfellow, he will find his audience where English is spoken; if we can produce a historian like Macaulay or Bancroft, he will be read as these writers are in the United States and England respectively. The Atlantic and the line of forty-five will not prove to us nonconductors of that deep and truthful human utterance which we call literature. The fact is, competition, natural selection has a cruel looking side. A species of literary protection, I fancy, will not, in the long run, help the Canadian authors much. By all means let us make subscription lists for works of Canadian authors; let us organize Canadian Evenings, but not confine ourselves to them; let us impress on our Canadian Ministers the usefulness of the Civil Service, that not too exacting profession, as a place to provide for promising writers. Dominion pensions might also be advocated; small pensions, such as would keep the wolf from the door at any rate. Perhaps our *littérateur* would develop a specialty and become an authority in some department of statecraft as well as a literary man, as has already been done by J. G. Bourinot and, in another way, by M. J. Griffin. The Provinces, too, might do something. "Alchemist" is quite right in thinking that even high-class journalism is too engrossing for true literature-producing. In few professions can we find men of even partial leisure.

It is when "Alchemist" falls foul of the Universities that I think the majority of his readers will part company with him. Such language as he uses in his fourth paragraph

is scarcely worthy of the subject. He says the Universities are most "blameable" on account of their "neglect of Canadian abilities;" "that they are so absorbed in themselves that they are more or less blind to all the new movements going on around them," and so on. Their self-absorption seems to me to mean that they really mind their own natural business. It is their business to teach, first and chiefly; research will come later. They are not, as yet, fully equipped for research. They strive to make the best of the material brought to them in their various faculties, and to instruct and inspire their students. Their business is to do this, rather than to mingle in the political strife, or even the political constructiveness, of their time. Much of their work must necessarily be humdrum, akin to the drilling of recruits. Lectures and examinations may not have an inspiring sound, but there are hundreds to-day in Canada who would gladly confess that one of the leading inspirations of their lives has been the teaching received and the companionship found in college life in a Canadian University, and who know that they are better citizens for the years they have spent in one of those institutions; and the graduates of the smallest, as well as of the largest, colleges feel this strongly. There is one word which is to my mind needlessly and provokingly irritating in the article; the Universities are said to be filled with "foreigners," and it seems these foreigners are causing the Canadian *littérateur* to starve. At what stage the non-Canadian born began to be a foreigner we are not told. We are not even told whether Canada would now be existing without the intervention of foreigners. Sir John Macdonald was foreign-born, and so are more than half the leading men of the Dominion who are over sixty. These foreigners, who have been appointed professors because, as "Alchemist" admits, they are the best men available in the subjects they have to teach, fail to apply themselves to exactly "what is wanted to raise this political organism higher and improve it." What I contend is wanted is that the best Physicist available should teach Physics, the best Greek scholar available should teach Greek, the best English scholar should teach English; by this you will promote patriotic objects more than by consciously making everything subserve the Canadian idea. Surely the list of patriotic professors is not limited to three, much as we all honour the names of Grant, Clarke Murray and Ashley. Sir W. Dawson is a remarkable example of the patriotic University professor. Think of his work for general education in the Province of Quebec, and his scientific audience, whether he writes upon his own subject, or on such questions as the connection of religion and science, is not confined to this side of the Atlantic. He has satisfied the conditions of success, and any Canadian who in pure literature will show a like ability will gain the wider audience, and will not need much bolstering up. Surely "Alchemist" cannot expect Universities to replace "foreign" specialists by Canadian *littérateurs* indiscriminately; he would not have Lampman as Professor of Mathematics, or Scott as Professor of Chemistry; these men must be the professors of literature if of any subject, and the number of such professorships is very limited. C. G. D. Roberts is professor of King's, Windsor, a University implanted here by foreign Oxford men, while young C. Colby is a lecturer of McGill. We all mourn with Professor Roberts on the early death of Goodridge Roberts. He was a theological student, with his course incomplete at the time of his death, and it is a pity he should be mentioned by "Alchemist" as one who already ought to have been a professor. By all means let us have chairs of Canadian History, Archaeology, Literature founded in our large Universities by those who owe their wealth to Canada, but let us get the best man every time for any particular post. Try to secure with high special qualification high personal character and sympathetic disposition. Let us get rid of the slavery of names and boundaries. We are members of that United Empire of all the continents whose motherland is England; we have a fine strain, too, of French blood; this we do not undervalue or ignore, but, in speaking of foreigners, do not let us train ourselves to think of any of the citizens of the United Empire as foreigners. And in literature, science and philanthropy at least let us not consider any who use the tongue that Shakespeare wrote as foreigners. The name "United States," without any geographical addition, has become a name of loyalty-producing love to millions whose native tongue was or was not English; and the term "United" has been tested as by the fire of civil war. The South is not foreign to the North, nor the East to the West. Why should not the term "United Empire," obtaining a new application in these later times, be an equal watchword of loyalty for the people in Canada, Australia, Ireland, Scotland, England? Let Canada be a true unit and organism in a mightier unit and a mightier organism, but not an isolated unit or an isolated organism. Meanwhile I trust I have not been deficient in sympathy with "Alchemist" in his yearnings for the healthy and adult development of Canada and Canadian literature, nor in the desire which I share with him that our writers shall have a sufficiency and even an abundance. May their writings be known and loved from Vancouver to Cape Breton, from Melbourne to Manchester, from London to Calcutta; and in the meanwhile the French writers, too, have our heartiest good wishes. But let no localism disfigure or dwarf our patriotism, nor let us condemn our Universities for doing their special work, or for leaving undone what it was scarcely in their power to do.

Lennoxville.

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## THE RAMBLER.

CANON CAYLEY, of Toronto, has in his possession a translation of the Hebrew Funeral Oration for the late Duke of Clarence, delivered in the great synagogue at Jerusalem. I append some of the more florid and intensely Eastern portions of the sermon or elegy, which appears to have been a fine effort on the part of Rabbi Joseph Nassim Barba. The references to Her Majesty will be seen to be in the warmest and most loyal vein:—

"A sound of distress, of sickening and the groaning and sighing of the globe, proceeding from London the Metropolis, has reached us; for a man in whom the King delighted, a Prince of Princes and a Duke of Dukes, Prince Albert Victor, grandson of the mighty Queen Victoria, is cut off, and all the people lament and mourn 'Alas and Woe.' For fire descended from heaven to entreat in the earth the precious vessel, the sardius and topaz. The four quarters of London trembled and shook, and they that looked out of the windows were darkened. . . . Evil and bitter is the fountain of tears, as the brooks are they spread forth. Weeping is as rivers and brooks, because a prince and a mighty one fell this day in Israel, cut off as a young branch. For a fire went forth and consumed even the very apple of the eye. . . .

O thou mighty man, blessed among sons, how art thou eclipsed. A voice of crying, of sorrow and distress, the stone from the wall crieth out in pain for the burden of sorrow which has befallen Her Majesty in the death of her beautiful, cedar-like grandson 'Israel.' We sympathize with and say to her, 'We grieve for thee, O mighty Queen of Sheba.' . . . The loss of this great Prince, who was a most important personage, is (comparing mental suffering to physical), in respect to painfulness, as pain in the cavity of the heart; for in physical diseases the intensity of suffering felt depends on the member of the body affected, and in like manner the sorrow felt on account of the death of a member of society depends upon his position and usefulness."

Montreal exchanges contain full reports of the first general meeting of the Canadian branch of the American Folk-Lore Society, held Tuesday week in the historic hall of the Natural History rooms. Although the idea—that of following up original research in the walk of native folk-lore—seems a new one, I imagine that our own Canadian Institute here in Toronto has been doing a great deal of work in a similar direction for years past. However, the formation of the new society will doubtless call forth the labours of ardent specialists in this direction, and draw into the true and proper channel much valuable testimony to the great wealth of the French province both in history and tradition. Ex-Mayor Beaugrand has been elected president, Mr. John Reade, secretary, and Dr. Louis Frechette, second vice-president. A ladies' executive, composed as follows, was also added: Mrs. Beaugrand, Mrs. Frechette, Mrs. Penhallow, Mrs. Robert Reid, Miss MacCallum, Miss Van Horne. It is proposed to hold monthly meetings during the winter months. Membership in the Montreal branch will also secure membership in the American society, and its journal, which is published quarterly, can be procured from any of the officers of the branch.

If we believe that a certain hackneyed line of old-time verse be true, and that the proper study of mankind is man, then folk-lore may, I suppose, be looked upon as the foundation of the most important of all sciences, that of anthropology, and therefore very interesting in itself. But who were the greatest masters of folk-lore? Not the men of science, the pamphleteers, the contributors to quarterly journals and reviews; say, rather, the troubadours and poets, the writers of fairy-tales and sketches, the essayists and gentle scholars who embodied the tales of their childhood in charming and picturesque pages. Nevertheless the anthropologist proper, whoever or whatever he may be, hath my sympathy, as well as the unconscious anthropologist, who, like the incorrigible Jourdain, may remark: "Why, I have written on these subjects for years and must be a master of folk-lore without knowing it!"

The topic reminds me of a story by Leigh Hunt, which I quoted recently to one who was in want of something weird but not sensational, impressive, but not decked out in imagery. I think it the model of a short story remarkable for point, human interest and suggestiveness. This is the outline, and as some admirers of Leigh Hunt are among my readers, they at least will not quarrel with the digression. A gentleman of Bavaria, noble and wealthy, had the misfortune to lose his wife. Soon after he gave way completely to grief and isolated himself from society of which he had ever been very fond. It is necessary to say here that his one great fault previous to his great loss had been a violent temper, which, although never vented in anger upon his gentle wife, made him anything but an agreeable friend and perfect master. One day while visiting the burial-ground, a messenger of divine aspect hands him a letter from his wife, which he reads by the light of the setting sun, and which asks him to repair at once to the public walk, where he will find his wife—alive and well. Obeying the mysterious summons, he does find her—the "Bertha" of his love, apparently as she had been before, and after a sweet reconciliation, they return home to take up the old life once more. A mock funeral is referred to in order to quiet the neighbours, and for a time all goes well. The Bavarian's temper at first is character-