

# The Canadian Authors' Association

—President W. T. Allison's address at Annual Convention, Vancouver, B. C.

This has been rather an uneventful year in the history of the Canadian Authors' Association, so that I can promise you at the outset of this presidential address that you will not hear any sensational deliverance. It is with much pleasure I report that we have a membership of 661, so that in this respect we are slightly ahead of last year. You will also be gratified to learn that with \$1600 in the treasury we are in very easy circumstances. Our spending department has not been very active this year, for the very good reason that our treasurer, Mr. Robert Watson, in spite of the fact that he is a voluminous and aggressive Canadian author, was born in Scotland.

The outstanding work of the Association during the year was the celebration of Canada's Book Week during the last week of November. As the reports of the branches will show, a large number of addresses were given by our members in various cities to remind the public of the fact that the reading of books is a joy that is easily come by, and is more lasting and more profitable to mind and soul than almost any other human activity. The attention of the Canadian people was also called once more to the fact that we have a national literature which must not be neglected, if unity of spirit and high ideals are to be fostered in this Dominion. I regret that many Canadians have criticised our organization because they have conceived the erroneous idea that our book week educational campaign is commercial propaganda to sell works by Canadian authors. I need scarcely say that this is a misinterpretation of our aim. We are not concerned so much with the books of the season as with our literature as a whole. We feel that only a small fraction of our book-reading public could mention the titles of half a dozen Canadian books which have achieved international fame. I question very much whether one-half of one per cent. of the population of Vancouver, Winnipeg, Montreal, or Toronto, could give the names of ten of our Canadian writers of yesterday or today. There is great need, therefore, for one week a year to be set aside for our missionary labours to reach this benighted Macedonia. And in doing this work we are toiling not so much to raise up support for authors of today as to guarantee that appreciation shall be enjoyed by writers in future years.

The unselfish character of the efforts of the Canadian Authors' Association during Canada's Book Week is proved, I am inclined to think, by the fact that nearly all the addresses delivered have been made, not by our novelists whose wares have been on the book-counters,

but by members whose literary efforts have been of an academic nature or in fields where commercial success has not been sought by them or by their publishers.

And in this connection, as we look forward to the activities of another year, I trust that a book week committee will be set up to work out better plans than ever for this educational service. We are going to have heartier co-operation from the publishers than in previous years, especially from their new organization, the Canadian Bookmen's Association, which, I might say in passing, would never have sprung into being had it not been for the publicity campaign inaugurated by the Canadian Authors' Association.

Another body which could give us invaluable assistance, is the Canadian Teachers' Federation. This organization, which, like the Canadian Authors' Association, is a fellowship of recent origin, has now over 20,000 members. Its annual meeting is being held at this very time in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. On the suggestion of a couple of Winnipeg teachers, one of them a member of our own Association, and both founders and officers of the federation, I sent the following letter to the teachers in convention:

Mr. G. J. Elliot,

Secretary,

Canadian Teachers' Federation,  
Winnipeg.

Dear Mr. Elliot:—

As President of the Canadian Authors' Association, I am writing to you and your organization in the hope of gaining your support in the work of popularizing our national literature. During the last five years, that is to say since the Canadian Authors' Association was founded, we have celebrated each Autumn what we have called "Canada's Book Week." Our branches in leading Canadian cities have endeavored during this period to arouse the interest of the people of this country in the reading of good books in general and of Canadian literature in particular. In this annual campaign of enlightenment we have received hearty assistance from teachers and ministers in many of our centres of population, but we feel that we should make a direct appeal to your federation to assist us in enlarging the scope of our activity by awakening the interest of your members in every province in the Dominion.

We intend this year to celebrate Canada's Book Week during the last week in October. At such a date Christmas examinations are still far distant, and we earnestly request that your executive take this matter in hand and recommend your

provincial executives to make use of circulars and school journals in commending this educational and patriotic project to the teachers of Canada.

Canada has a literature of which her people may well be proud, and we believe that Canadian boys and girls would show keen interest if the teachers would devote some time during Book Week in acquainting them with the work of such poets as Carman, Roberts, Frechette, Drummond, Campbell, and Pauline Johnson, and prose writers like Haliburton, Richardson, Susanna Moodie, Balantyne, Duncan, Rivard, and Heming. Occasionally an extract or two from Canadian writers is to be found in school textbooks, but these are all too few, and generation after generation of boys and girls grow up in almost total ignorance of our national literature.

We think you will agree with us that this is patriotic work of the highest character. Upon teachers and writers more than any other classes depends the shaping of our national consciousness, for nothing is more powerful than ideas. Therefore, we sincerely trust that a firm alliance may be formed between our organizations, the only two Canadian professional bodies of national extent which are primarily interested in things of the spirit. We know neither sectarian, political, nor sectional divisions and are vitally interested in ministering to the Canadian ideal.

Trusting that our request for your co-operation will receive your favourable consideration.

I have enlarged upon Book Week today because I am persuaded that this educational feature of our work as an association has amply justified our existence, and the more energy we can put into it year after year the greater will be our contribution to the general weal. This annual meeting marks the conclusion of our fifth year of corporate life, and, as we look back over the years, we can see that owing to our efforts there has been a distinct improvement in the attitude of the Canadian reading public towards Canadian letters. While it must be admitted that we have to face much indifference to native books and expressed hostility in certain quarters where nothing is judged to be worth while unless it is English or American, there has been a decided change for the better within the last generation.

Perhaps I can best illustrate the change for the better in the literary life of this country by sketching briefly the career of one of our own members who on the new year upon which our organization enters today will put up his thirtieth milestone as a novelist. It was in 1897,