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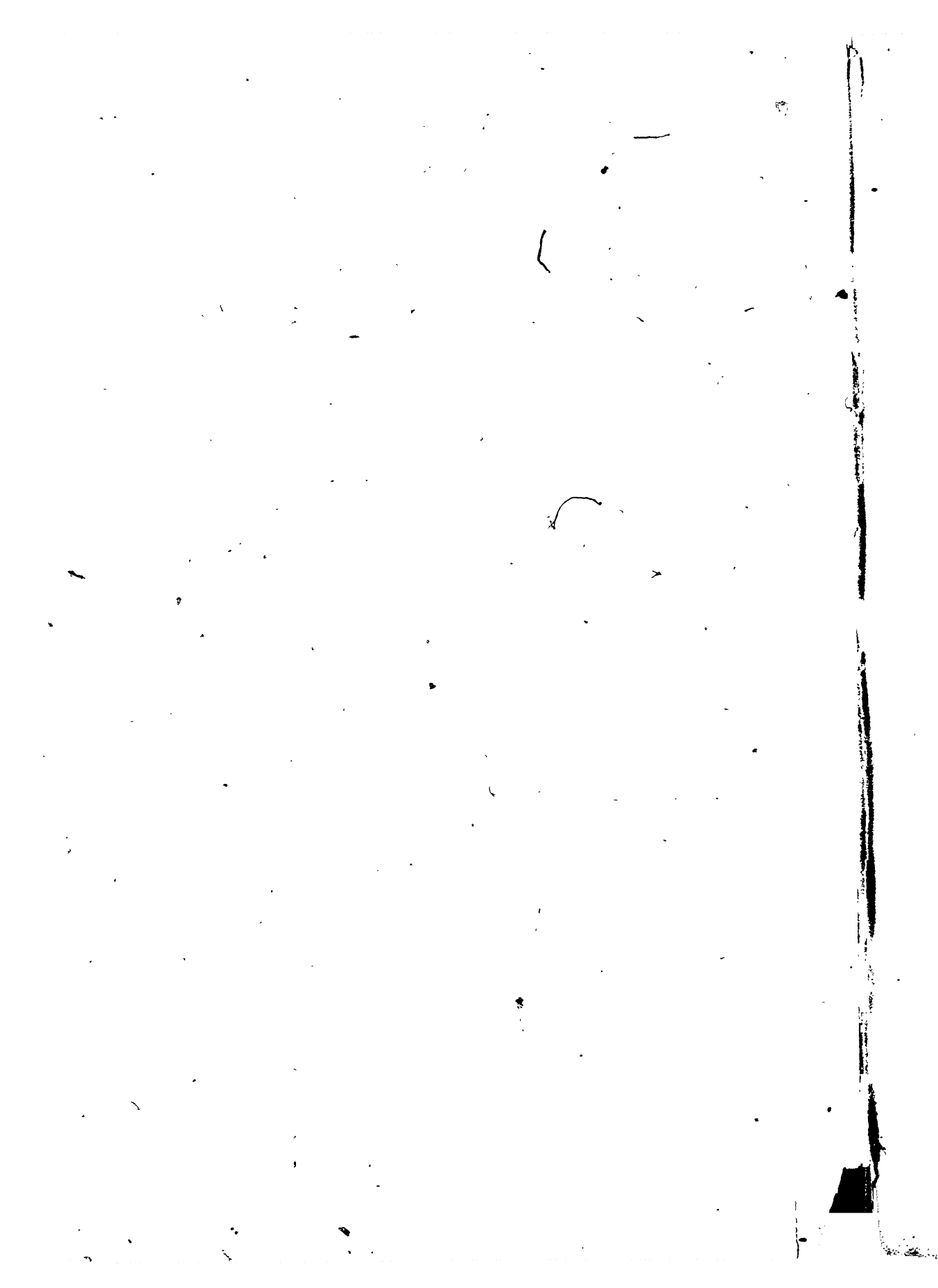
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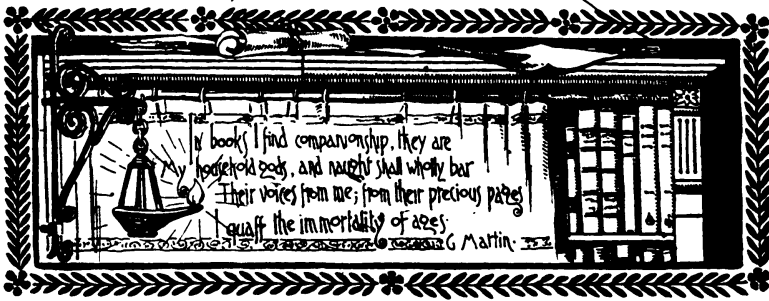


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LITERATURE IN CANADA.

BY

GEO. STEWART, Jr.,
D. C. L., F. R. G. S., F. R. S. C.

*Read before the Canadian Club
of New York.*



BEING deeply sensible of the honor which the Canadian Club has paid me this evening, in asking me to be its guest, I beg of you to accept in return my heart-felt thanks. I thank you also for the very flattering invitation which has been given me to address you on a subject, in which all Canadians must, I am sure, take a warm and appreciative interest. To have my name inscribed on your list of guests, is an honor which I need not assure you, I value most highly. The Canadian Club of New York,

is an institution of which we Canadians feel justly proud, because we know that it is a credit to our countrymen in every way, that it is continually extending and broadening its influence and importance, and that its roll of membership represents all that is best in the political, social and commercial activity of Canada's sons in the great American metropolis. But admirable as its character for hospitality unquestionably is, the Club is more than a means for supplying a place of pleasant resort for resident and visiting Canadians in New York. It is an educator, in a certain sense, and the present series of literary and social entertainments, will do much to stimulate Canadian sentiment, patriotism and aspiration. The pleasure of these meetings too, is materially heightened by the happy manner in which your Committee considers the claims of that element in our population which is always fair and gentle, and to whose refining influences the sterner sex owes so much. With such sharers of your exile from your native land, as I see before me to-night, radiant and charming as they all are, I am forced to the conclusion that your self-imposed banishment cannot be so very hard to bear after all. You do right, Mr. President, in opening your splendid rooms to the ladies on occasions like the present one, and it is an example which I think ought to be followed, and no doubt will be, by other clubs.

But, you have asked me to address you a few words on the subject of literature in Canada. As you are aware, ladies and gentlemen, Canadian authorship is still in its infancy. The plough has proved a mightier engine than the pen, and authorship has been followed feebly and precariously by men and

women, who have never lost heart in their work, but whose labors have been rewarded in too many instances, I fear, by those soft words, which, however sweet to the ear, fail entirely to butter our parsnips. No one has been able, in Canada, to make the writing of books his sole means of living. We have had to write our books under our breath, as it may be said, and the marvel is that we have been able to produce, under such depressing circumstances, so many works of even respectable merit. The Canadian author is either a professional or a business man, and his literary work must be done, almost as an accomplishment, during the leisure moments which may be snatched from the exacting occupations of real life. Of course, authorship prosecuted under such disadvantages, must suffer, but notwithstanding many drawbacks, the mental output of the Dominion is not inconsiderable. At the recent Indian and Colonial Exhibition, in London, no fewer than 3,000 volumes, all by native authors, were shown in the library of the Canadian section, and this exhibit, as you know, by no means exhausts the list of books actually written by Canadians, during a century of time. The collection represented Canadian authorship in every department of its literature, science, history and poetry being especially large and noteworthy, while the other branches were not neglected.

Territorially, our country is extensive, and our literary sons and daughters are to be encountered, now, from British Columbia to Cape Breton, doing work which is good, and some of it destined to stand. Fréchette, the laureate of the French Academy, not long ago, said, "Be Canadians and the future is yours." "That which strikes us most in your poems,"

said one of the Forty Immortals to the poet, "is that the modern style, the Parisian style of your verses is united to something strange, so particular and singular it seems an exotic, disengaged from the entire work." This perfume of originality which this author discovered was at that time unknown to Fr chet te. What was it? It was the secret of their nationality, the certificate of their origin, their Canadian stamp. And it is important never to allow this character to disappear. There is much in this. Our country is full of history, full of character, full of something to be met with nowhere else in the world. A mine of literary wealth is to be had in every section of the dominion, and it only awaits the hand of the craftsman. Bret Harte opened up a new phase of American character as he discovered it in wild California. Miss Murfree found the Tennessee mountains rich in incident and strong in episodes of an intensely dramatic color, and Mr. Cable developed in a brilliant and picturesque way life and movement among the Creoles of the South. Have we no Canadian authors among us, who can do as much for us? Lesp rance, it is true, has dealt with one period of our history, in a captivating way. Kirby has told the story of "The Golden Dog" with fine and alert sympathies. Miss Macfarlane's "Children of the Earth" depends on Nova Scotia for its scenic effects. Marmette has presented, with some power, half a dozen romances of the French r gime, while Fr chet te has dramatized the story of Papineau's rebellion.

But Canada is full of incident and romance, and the poet and novelist have fruitful themes enough on which to build many a fanciful poem and story. In history, we have much good writ-

ing, and I trust you will permit me to say, that I think our young historians would do well not to attempt to do too much. I would advise them to deal with periods rather than to write complete histories of the whole country. Mr. John Charles Dent has been most successful on two occasions, giving us the history of old Canada, from the Union of 1841 to the present time, and following up his labors with the "Story of the Upper Canadian Rebellion." Mr. Edmund Collins has written of Canada under Lord Lorne's administration, and in the *Life and Times of Sir John A. Macdonald* he has discussed, with considerable independence, Canada's political and economical progress during a burning period of our history. The Abbés Casgrain and Faillon, Judge Gray, Mr. Globensky, Mr. Turcotte, Mr. George E. Fenety and Mr. de Gaspé have also dealt with epochs, and so have Messrs. David, Carrier, Bryce and Adam.

In works relating to parliamentary procedure and practice, we have the notable contributions of Alpheus Todd, John George Bourinot and Joseph Doutre. And in books of purely antiquarian character, we have the investigations of Scadding, Hawkins, Lemoine and Lawrence, while our annals, from day to day, have found an industrious exponent in Mr. Henry J. Morgan. Our larger historians are chiefly Ferland, Faillon, Garneau, Withrow, Campbell, Sulte, Beamish Murdoch and McMullen. In biography we have the names of Fennings Taylor, Alexander MacKenzie, Charles Lindsey, P. B. Casgrain and William Rattray. In poetry we have a good showing, but I need scarcely name more than Reade, Roberts, Mair, Murray, Heavyside, Miss Machar, Mrs. Harrison ("Seranus") among

the English; and Crémazie, Fréchette, Le May, Legendre and Routhier among the French. The list would not be complete were I to omit a few of our essayists and writers on special topics, such as Col. G. T. Denison, whose history of Cavalry won the great Russian prize, Principal Grant, Chauveau, Le Sueur, Samuel Dawson, Oxley, Jack, Griffin, Ellis, Faucher de St. Maurice, Harper and George Murray. To studies on political economy and finance we have contributed no prominent names as writers of treatises on those subjects, but George Hague and the late Charles F. Smithers of Montreal have presented the banking side of the argument, in sound, practical papers of great value. In almost every department of scientific investigation and thought we have an array of men of whom any country might be proud, some of them having a fame which is world-wide. Briefly, I may mention a few of these, such as the Dawsons, father and son, Drs. Wilson, Hunt, Hamel, Selwyn, Bell, Laflamme, Lawson, MacGregor, Bailey, and Messrs. Sandford Fleming, Matthews, Murdoch, Carpmael, Johnson, Hoffman, Bayne and Macfarlane. Of course, this list, by no means, includes all.

The education of the French Canadian is much more literary than scientific. His taste for letters is cultivated at quite an early age, and oratory, *belles-lettres* and the classics form by far the stronger part of his mental outfit on leaving college. Higher thought and scientific research have few charms for him which he cannot withstand, and he turns, with passion almost, to poetry, romance, light philosophy and history. He is an insatiable reader, but his taste is circumscribed and narrowed, and following the bent of his inclinations,

he eschews all the troublesome paradoxes of literature, avoids speculative authors, and reads with delight and appreciation the books which furnish him with the most amusement. He seeks recreation in his reading matter, and, sympathizing with Emerson, though he scarcely knows a line of that author, he makes it a point to read only the books which please him the best. He likes clever verses and a good novel, and as the printing-press of France furnishes exemplars of these in abundance, he is never put to straits for supplies. Naturally enough, when the French Canadian attempts authorship, he writes poetry, romances, *chroniques* and history. The latter he does very well, and exhibits industry and skill in the arrangement of his materials and the grouping of his facts. His work rarely fails in artistic merit, and its strength lies in the easy flow and elegance of its diction, and the spirit in which the author approaches his subject. Quebec's list of poets is a long one. Almost every fairly-educated young man can, at will, produce a copy of well-turned verse, but fortunately all do not exercise their power, nor do those who print poems in the newspapers always make volumes of their lays afterwards. Strange to say, Quebec is singularly badly-off for female poets. I know of but one or two ladies who have courted the muses and printed their verses. We must not forget, however, that a poem is often emphasized in the tying of a ribbon, in the arrangement of the hair, and in the fashioning of a bow, and it would be unfair to describe Quebec's young women as unpoetical merely because they have not seen fit to put their thoughts into song. There are many male poets in the province, but it will be unnecessary to concern ourselves, a

this time, with more than half a dozen of the better-known ones. These are Crémazie, Fréchette, Le May, Garneau, Routhier and Sulte, each distinct from the other, in style, touch and motive. Joseph Octave Crémazie deserves, perhaps, the special title of national poet of French Canada, but Louis Honoré Fréchette, whose versatility and fancy rise to great heights, is not far below him. There are few prominent novelists, as I have said, of either French or English origin. The name of James de Mille, a New-Brunswicker, stands out prominently, but his fiction is little tinged with the Canadian flavor. Among the French, we have only Chauveau, Marmette, Bourassa and Le May.

Literature in Canada, owes much to the various literary and historical societies, which exist in nearly all the chief towns of the Dominion. The parent of them all is the old Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, which was founded in 1824, by the Earl of Dalhousie, then Governor-General. This institution owns many rare manuscripts and printed books, relating to the early history of the country, and every year its treasures are explored and investigated by historians and enquirers from all parts of the Continent. The Society has published some valuable memoirs, transactions and manuscripts in French and in English, and these are held in high repute by scholars everywhere. In Montreal, Toronto, Halifax, St. John, N. B., and Winnipeg, similar societies enjoy a flourishing and useful existence. Four years ago, the Marquis of Lorne, founded the Royal Society of Canada. The membership was limited to eighty men, and the objects of the society may be thus described: firstly, to encourage studies and

investigations in literature and science; secondly, to publish transactions containing the minutes of proceedings at meetings, records of the work performed, original papers and memoirs of merit, and such other documents as might be deemed worthy of publication; thirdly, to offer prizes or other inducements for valuable papers on subjects relating to Canada, and to aid researches already begun and carried so far as to render their ultimate value probable; fourthly, to assist in the collection of specimens, with a view to the formation of a Canadian Museum of Archives, Ethnology, Archæology and Natural History. The society is divided into four sections; 1.—French Literature, with history, archæology and allied subjects; 2.—English Literature with history, archæology and allied subjects; 3.—Mathematical, chemical and physical sciences; 4.—Geological and biological sciences. The sections meet separately for the reading and discussion of papers, or other business, during the annual session of the society, which has so far assembled at Ottawa in the month of May. These meetings have been most successful, in point of attendance and work actually performed, and the usefulness of the society has been greatly extended by its catholicity and liberality towards kindred institutions, almost every one of which, in Canada, has been invited annually to send delegates to the Royal. These representatives have the privilege of taking part in all general or sectional meetings for reading and discussing papers. They may also communicate a statement of original work done, and papers published during the year by their own societies, and may report on any matters which the Royal Society may usefully aid in publication or otherwise. The

Dominion Government aids the Royal Society by an annual grant of \$5,000, which is set aside for the publication of the transactions and proceedings. Thus far, four large volumes have been published, and a glance at their contents affords convincing testimony of the value of the work which the society is doing. Its weak point, doubtless, rests in the literary sections. But even those departments may be made valuable and eminently useful in time. In archæology, history and ethnology the field is wide, and it is satisfactory to note that the two first sections are already devoting their energies to their special line of work with vigor and zeal. In one branch of study, in particular, that of ethnology, the Royal Society has an important duty to perform. The Indian population is fast disappearing. In a few years, the characteristics of the red races will be wholly lost. It is necessary to preserve these, while the tribes remain, and this work is being done by the second section of the Royal Society, and it is a work which possesses a value that cannot be over estimated. Of course, in historical research, and in archæological investigation, the extent of the society's labors is practically unlimited. Royal societies, with similar objects in view, exist in various quarters of the globe. Canada surely, is old enough and advanced enough to have one also.

In a paper such as this, some reference should be made to the really admirable Department of Archives, which is maintained by the Dominion Government at Ottawa. It is under the charge of that competent and zealous officer, Mr. Douglas Brymner, whose tastes and training well fit him for the duties of his office. He has really created the department and made it one of the most efficient in the public service of Canada.

Fifteen years ago the historical records of Canada had scarcely an abiding place. We had no regular system by which letters, pamphlets, printed books and documents and manuscripts relating to the commercial, literary and political activity of the country could be preserved, and rendered accessible to the student. Thousands of valuable papers were in imminent danger of being lost; many undoubtedly did perish. In 1871, a number of literary men of Canada, petitioned the legislature to organize a branch of the public service by means of which historical data might be preserved. Parliament promptly acceded to this request, and the Minister of Agriculture added the Archives branch to his department. Mr. Brymner was placed in charge, and he began his work of collecting absolutely *ab ovo*, not a single document of any sort being in hand when he commenced. To-day, the shelves of the Department contain upwards of seven thousand volumes of historical papers on every conceivable subject of interest to Canadians. The work of indexing these enormous collections goes on daily, and fresh matter is constantly being added, Mr. Brymner's aim being to make the Archives truly national in every respect and as complete as possible.

Much has been written about the law of copyright. Canada passed a fairly good act in 1875, but as it contravened the Imperial statute, it was not long before the authorities in London declared the act *ultra vires*, and our publishers have been in a most unhappy frame of mind ever since. In a word, the business of publishing books in Canada is at a pretty low ebb, and publishers find little encouragement in extending their trade. The Canadian author is not so badly off, just now.

Under the old British act, a very good rule only worked one way. Thus, the English author who copyrighted his book in England was fully protected in every colony flying the British flag. The Canadian or Australian author, however, could only obtain copyright in the colony or province where his book was published. The other day, an amendment was made to the act by the Imperial Parliament, and by its terms, any work published in the Queen's dominions is fully protected all over the vast empire. The various colonial governments were communicated with on the subject, and all but New South Wales replied favorably. That far-off dependency remains to be heard from. Meanwhile, the act was passed, and for the benefit of New South Wales a clause was inserted exempting any colony from the operation of the measure, should it prefer to keep to the old order of things.

And, just here, is a good place to ask, do Canadians read the productions of their own authors? What encouragement do they give the writers of Canadian books? It is a fact that Canada cannot support a really first-class magazine. The experiment of magazine publishing has been tried in all the chief cities of the Dominion, but it has failed in every instance, though the trial has been made honestly and at considerable sacrifice on the part of the promoters of the enterprise. Every now and then we hear the question: Why does Canada not have a magazine? The Canadians read magazines, and pay for them. This is true; but it is also true that they want the best. Their standard is high, and unless the publisher can supply a publication which can compete with the important old world and United States serials, they will not have it, no matter how

patriotic they may suppose themselves to be. Of course, the day is coming when Canada will have its great monthly and still greater quarterly, but the time is not yet ripe. In the meantime, the question which presses for solution is, what are we doing, in a helpful way, for our own authors in the Dominion? Are we encouraging them to write and publish? We know that men like Dr. Daniel Wilson, Prof. Clark Murray and Mr. Grant Allen, and some others who could be named, never think of publishing their books in Canada. They have something to say, and expression to their views is always given in the largest possible field. They find it to their advantage to publish in England or in the United States. Small editions of their books are sometimes sold to Canadian booksellers, either in sheets, or bound up within cloth covers, but the copies so disposed of, yield scarcely a tithe of the remuneration which reaches the successful author, from the sale of his books in the great markets in which they first see the light. The Canadian author cannot be blamed for making the most of his opportunities, in this way. The market in Canada is limited, and, as a general thing, if a Canadian book is published in Canada, little can be realized out of the venture. There are exceptions to every rule of course, and a few Canadian books, written and published in the Dominion, have repaid their authors very well. Mr. Dent's *Last Forty Years* and his *Story of the Upper Canadian Rebellion*, Principal Grant's *Ocean to Ocean*, Mr. Bourinot's book on Parliamentary Practice, *Picturesque Canada*, Mr. Bengough's amusing *Caricature History of Canadian Politics*, Mr. Lemoine's historical sketches, and perhaps, half a dozen other books, have yielded handsome returns to

their authors, but the great majority of our Canadian books have hardly paid the publisher in his outlay for printing and binding. Mr. John Lovell, whose experience in the business of book-publishing has been varied and extensive, used to call the fruits of his enterprise, his "housekeepers." Eventually, thousands of these volumes found their way to the trunk-makers and the auction shops. And the same thing is still going on. Now what can be said on the subject? We cannot force the public of Canada to buy and read the works of Canadian writers. Our people are a reading community, and judging from the collection of books which may be seen in most houses, their literary taste is good. It might be said that Canadian books are not bought because the style of their authors is not of the highest excellence, that crudity and not elegance is their chief characteristic, and that in point of topic and treatment they possess little that is calculated to commend them to the book-buyer. But is this true?

We often speak of Canadian literature, but let us ask ourselves the question: Have we a literature of our own? Certainly, we have writers of books; but does the literary work which they perform constitute a literature, in the fullest meaning of the term? Mr. Charles Dudley Warner has voiced the idea that the lack of intellectual activity of the Canadians is due to the fact that they have to put forth so much of their physical energy in an endeavor to keep warm. But Mr. Warner's delicious satire is often extravagant, we know, and we also know that he is never quite so extravagant as when he undertakes to deal with Canadian affairs. Mr. Carter Troop, the other day, discussed Mr. Warner's views, in some sharp

paragraphs, in the *New York Critic*; but, at the same time, he felt constrained to acknowledge that in Canada there was considerable "literary feebleness." The cause of this he ascribes to our "humble political status." "As a colony," he writes, "Canada possesses neither the higher attributes nor the graver responsibilities of national existence; and where such attributes and responsibilities are wanting, national life and feeling, the source and inspiration of all literary achievements, will be equally wanting." Of course, this simply means that the colonial position is fatal to the development of our higher intellectual life and movement,—literary genius in fact,—and that the panacea for our ills in that respect is independence alone. I cannot go as far as that, though I must admit that the idea is suggestive and may be discussed. American letters, we know, during the colonial period, were feeble and insignificant. After years of independence came a literature, full of promise and character. But has its present robust condition been reached by independence merely? Must Canada pursue a similar course of political advancement, if she would have a literature of marked individuality, color and strength? I should be sorry to think so. Canada is still young in years, and time will work a change. American literature has grown with the increase in the ranks of the leisure class in the United States, and education has done the rest. Only a few decades ago, the people of the great Republic, were largely dependent on British and European authors for their intellectual food. Even the serials in the leading magazines of New York, Boston and Philadelphia, were from the pens of English novelists. The literature which we all admire to-day, is really almost of yesterday. Most of

us can remember when America had hardly more than three or four fiction writers of repute, while half a dozen gentlemen only were writing the ballads and poems of the nation, and of the half-dozen, not more than four were distinctively American in their treatment of scenery and incident. Give Canada a chance. Give her time to have a large leisure class. Give to her literary men and women, the incentive and encouragement they need, and Canadian authorship will not lack in individuality and robustness. Much has been done in the way of education. Our wealthy men are endowing colleges, and founding scholarships in the universities. Our schools are practically free; in some of our provinces, they are entirely free. Perhaps, we are crowding too many men into the professions, but in time, even this error, if it be an error, will regulate itself. The country is beginning to pay attention to what men of culture and of thought have to say about the various problems of life and of human experience. Our lectures attract larger and more appreciative audiences. The people read more, and they are exercising greater discrimination in their reading than they ever did before, and, from all these signs, I feel that I am safe in predicting that the day of successful Canadian authorship is not far distant, and that we will yet have a literature of which we may feel reasonably proud, and that too, without changing our allegiance or altering our system of political and national life.



