

Books And Their Authors

For about sixty or seventy per cent. of the people one gives Christmas presents to, there is no better present than the right book. For about thirty per cent. a book is the wrong thing. Some people are immune to books, so to speak; they have never "caught" them. Since it is quite possible to be a very wise and even a very cultured person without reading any book save the Bible, and equally possible to be a perfect fool and read everything that one can lay hands on, there is no reason for feeling superior to people who are immune to books; they may be much better people than we are. The utmost that one need do about them is to be a little concerned about what will happen to them when they are old, and retired from business, or relieved of the care of the family, or otherwise left unoccupied for a part of their lives. And even then, there is always bridge and mah jongg and the radio. Better not worry about them at all. Better not worry about anybody.

But for sixty or seventy per cent. there is, as we have already observed, no better present than the right book. There is no worse present for anybody than the wrong book. And therein lies the difficulty. It is easy to find out what size stockings the young lady wears, and what kind of cigarettes the young man smokes. It is harder to tell what kind of books the same two persons like and need. That is, it is hard, if you have never given any thought to the subject until you have rushed out three hours before the present has to be mailed, hoping that inspiration will come to you in the book store. It would not be hard if you would think of it a little earlier, and do a little talking about books in conversation or in a letter, sounding them out as it were, telling some of your enthusiasms and asking for theirs in exchange. It would not even be hard if you would think about their characters and dispositions a little and draw your own conclusions.

Remember also that the book is a gift from yourself as well as to the recipient. It should not only please him, but it should also represent you. Never give a book that you are contemptuous about for yourself. This is true even of books for children; the best children's books are those that grown-up people also have admiration and respect for. The bearing in mind of this principle would prevent the sending out to thousands of unfortunate youngsters of thousands of silly, meaningless, paper-wasting books, when there are far more good children's books than any child can ever read, if we would only take the trouble to look for them.

Booksellers say that only newly published books, and a few newly published reissues, are sold for Christmas presents. That is because people are afraid to give books that have been out for more than three months, for fear that the recipient may already have a copy. Yet it seems a shame to give the latest murder mystery or the latest sheik thriller to a young man or a young woman engaged in the earnest effort to build up a working library of the best literature; and there are such young people in Kingston and vicinity. It is well to keep as near to the actual present-day taste of the recipient as possible. Do not give Robert Frost to the lovers of Robert Service, nor confuse Keable, Cable

and Cabell. But it is also well to aim a little above the recipient's taste rather than below it. It is something quite worth while to have been the first to guide a progressive young mind up to a higher step on the ladder of literary discrimination. And after all, that is what happens whenever the book is the "right" book. . . . It is no longer necessary to be ashamed of "Canadian" books. It is no longer necessary to be ashamed of poetry (even though written by somebody who is not a poet laureate). It is no longer necessary to be ashamed of translations; it is now recognized that few people will ever be able to read the classics of more than three races in their original tongues. It is no longer necessary to be ashamed of an ordinary binding; fuzzy bindings are recognized as a nuisance and inappropriate to a book of any real value. But it is highly necessary to be ashamed of bad type and bad paper; in an age when thousands of well-printed books can be had for less than a dollar each, it is an insult to give one that is a bad specimen of the printer's art.

OLD PROVINCE TALES.

By Archibald MacMechan. Decorations by J. E. H. MacDonald, McClelland & Stewart, Toronto. History is something like a great modern hotel. The affairs of state are transacted before the eyes of all in the vast ball-rooms, banqueting halls and lobbies; but meanwhile in the little rooms with nothing but a number to distinguish them, thousands of little ordinary people are living out their lives in obscurity and "king no part in the pageantry of the vaulted apartments and the colonnades. Yet there is drama in these little rooms and tragedy and mystery in these little lives. Dr. MacMechan is fond of delving in the records of history for the human tales of the lesser peoples; and in this volume he presents us with a dozen such episodes of past ages in Canada. . . . What historian could remember, at any rate while remembering, that during the siege of Quebec there were nine British prisoners within the walls of the French fortress? But there were, and here is the tale of one of them, John Witherspoon, done into literature from the bald annals of the Nova Scotia Historical Society. Here too is the story of an American sympathizer who lived on the Nova Scotia coast during the Revolutionary War and helped many an escaping American prisoner to get away from captivity in the British Dominions; but the story is the astounding things that happened to him at the hands of the Republic whose friend he was. Most of the dozen tales are sea-going adventures, not unlike those which many Canadians already know and love in "Sagas of the Sea." Some of them are not very far back in history. You do not have to go back of last year to find romance in a Nova Scotia fishing-boat.

CANADIAN FEDERATION.

By Reginald George Trotter, Dent, Toronto, \$1.75. The amazing thing about Confederation is the ever-growing mass of knowledge concerning it, and the equally ever-growing importance of all of that knowledge. The event, of course, marks a step, and the most definite step ever yet taken, towards the solution of that most

vital of modern problems, the combination of local autonomy with relationship with a larger political unit. Hence everything connected with it takes on a far more than Canadian importance. And in order to get his study within three hundred substantial pages Dr. Trotter has had to delimit his subject very sharply. He has, was, think, included all the essentials, and they have not hitherto been so well arranged—scientifically sifted. It would have been possible to provide a great deal more background, and much of it would have been illuminating; but perhaps it would belong more properly in a History of Canada than in a history of Canadian Federation. And the great History of Canada still remains to write.

Confederation, as a more or less shadowy dream, crops up sporadically in many places and during two generations before the first true movement for its realization, and Dr. Trotter does justice to many such dreamers. One of them was a railway man. The Grand Trunk Railway, unlike the Canadian Pacific, has never stirred the heart of the Canadian historian; it was an alien corporation, and it never conciliated Canadian affection by any brilliant success. But Dr. Trotter reminds us that Sir Edward Watkin, the English financial diplomatist who came out in 1861 to try and settle the railway's problems, was one of the first men to entertain a living vision of a transcontinental British Dominion and a transcontinental railway linking it from end to end. That he conceived of such a Dominion chiefly as a means of relieving the Grand Trunk from its troubles is no discredit; after all, Confederation, to every one of its advocates, was more of a way out of some existing embarrassment than a self-sufficing ideal. But as we read this fascinating narrative we feel that all of these men were men of imagination; that if it was a way out they sought, they were at least seeking it in high and courageous spirit; that their way out was never in the backward direction of a return to narrow provincialism, "state rights" and mutual distrust. George Brown in particular makes a worthy showing in these pages; John A. Macdonald shines mainly by his political dexterity; Cartier's services as "reconciler of French Canada" are adequately valued but might have been described at greater length. Dr. Trotter differs from most authorities in spelling William Macdougall "MacDougall."

MARIA CHAPDELAINE.

By Louis Hemon. Translated by W. H. Blake. Drawings by Wilfred Jones. Macmillan, Toronto, \$2.50.

The agricultural young woman of Peribonka, of the Lake St. John country, goes on her triumphant way; and if, within the lifetime of this reviewer, there has ever been a great popular success more completely justified by true artistic merit, he cannot at the moment recall it. The rural French-Canadian has many aspects, and this is not the aspect revealed by Dr. Drummond (who doubtless did his share to pave the way for the general appreciation of the work of Hemon). But Hemon's picture is in no respect contradictory to Drummond's, and it is much more profound and significant. The new volume contains many charming monochrome pen decorations and several two-color illustrations, the latter seeming a trifle sophisticated for so primal a tale. It is hard to believe, for example, that the Chapdelaine had a first-class collie dog. But it is a highly presentable volume, and will enable those who love "Maria" to present her story to those who have not yet learned it, in a form possessing the true gift-like appearance.

WINDY LEAF.

By Frances Gill. Macmillan, Toronto, \$1.50. This is a book of verses about children. Note, "about," not "for." You can give this book to children if you like; we rather suspect that the publishers hope you will. But don't do so without reading it yourself first, for you will probably get much more fun out of it than the children will. For instance, "Tea-Taking":

It is as odd as odd can be
To think of ladies taking tea
Away from home. They go so far
On foot, or in a motor car.
They must be tired when they go home.
If they would ring, the tea would come
In their own rooms, right on a tray;
I wonder why they go away.

That, which is delicious irony to us, is to a child a mere statement of one of the most commonplace problems of life. The adult knows that there is no assignable reason for this social practice, but the child solemnly believes that there must be, but that it is one of those things which only grown-ups can understand. . . . However, we like Miss Gill's poems very much, and after all, if you give them to a child, the child will probably grow up some day.

A LAST SCRAP BOOK.
By George Saintsbury. Macmillan, Toronto, \$2.25. Dryness is an astonishing quality. Mr. Saintsbury has always possessed

& in abundance, and exhibited it in many forms. Dryness in a historian of literature is in some respects a weakness; and until a few years ago Mr. Saintsbury was chiefly known as a historian of literature. Dryness in a wine and in a literary philosopher is emphatically a virtue; and ever since Mr. Saintsbury produced his "Notes on a Cellar-Book" and his first "Scrap Book" he has been known as a philosopher to more thousands than ever knew him as a critic. This he tells us, is the last "Scrap Book"; and it is true that if its author were to get much drier and more caustic he would have to be printed on asbestos paper. For here is an unrepentant Victorian riding full tilt at almost everything that the 1924 Georgian prides himself upon. It is a delicate spectacle. The Copec Conference decides to decree "the absolutely equal value, in the sight of God, of every human soul;" and "blasphemy" is the mildest word Mr. Saintsbury finds to utter. Photographers, thanks largely to the improvement in artificial teeth, adopt the practice of making their clients smile when sitting; off goes Mr. S. into a dissertation upon "the grinning she." Psychological tests of "educable capacity" come into vogue; and Mr. S. assures us, in very beautiful and convincing English, that "the thing cannot be done." Some Anglicans seek for "reunion" with Rome; and Mr. S. asks: "Why hurry God about the millennium?" And Mr. S., by the way, is "fond" of the Thirty-nine Articles. It is well that such men should be still with us and still vocal.

PIPERS AND A DANCER.

By Stella Benson. Macmillan, Toronto, \$2.

Miss Benson is already famous for her disillusioning pen, first exhibited in its full acidity in "I Pose." It is an incredibly, uncannily, deplorably clever implement. It is undoubtedly true that there is a lack of genuineness in most of us when we are exhibiting ourselves in the presence of fellow-humans; that we pose, "act up," turn ourselves into what we think our friends want us to be. This fact revolts many young writers; but unless mankind is to consist of individuals separately marooned on so many desert islands it seems to be rather necessary for the general comfort. It is true also, and much more dangerous, that some characters have a tendency to "boss" and even to depersonalise those with whom they come in contact; and there is some reason to protest against institutions and conventions which give aid in this process. But when the bossing is a result of nothing on earth but bossishness on the part of the active element and bossability on the part of the passive, what can be said? Miss Benson seems to be in revolt against the results of the "inferiority complex;" but she does not tell us how to get rid of it. This is an excessively clever novel, partly laid in China.

NOTES OF NEW BOOKS.

"Gentlemen of the Jury," by Francis L. Wellman (Macmillan, Toronto, \$4.50) is an extensive but very original dissertation on "the profound importance and dignity" of the jurorship, intended to convert American citizens to a higher view of their duties as such. It is anecdotal rather than scientific, and many of the anecdotes will be familiar to all who have some knowledge of the history of the jury system; but we assume that most of those whom Mr. Wellman addresses have not.

"A Chapter in American Education," by Ray Palmer Baker (Scribner, New York), is an account of the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, now celebrating its centenary. With reasonable compass, it contains a great deal of interesting matter upon early technical training in America. Its author is the eminent authority upon Canadian literature, who is Professor of English in the Institute. The Slason Thompson Bureau of Railway News and Statistics has issued the 1923 "Railway Statistics of the United States of America," a volume which is prefaced by a vigorous vindication of the transportation system against the attacks of Senator La Follette. So far as it is an attack upon the Senator, it is campaign stuff which has ceased to be interesting. But there is and always will be need for an able setting forth of the case for the railways, so long as there are political parties striving for success by attacking them.

The Department of Mines, Ottawa, has issued a highly important monograph on "Development of Chemical, Metallurgical and Allied Industries in Canada in Relation to the Mineral Industry," by A. W. G. Wilson, Ph.D. It includes a series of lists of the raw materials employed in all the chief modern industries, showing which of them are obtainable in Canada and which are not. A monograph on "Bentonite" by Hugh S. Spence is another recent publication.

Choosing the Holly.
Superstitious people assert that one should be careful about the choice of the holly for the decorations. Part should be smooth and part prickly. Then providing both kinds are carried into the house at the same time, all will be well. But should the prickly variety be taken in first, then the husband will rule the household during the coming year; if the smooth is brought in first the wife will be "top dog."

After the death of Jean Francois Millet, French painter, 56 incomplete canvases and designs from his studio were sold for \$65,000.

Writing Letters To Santa Claus

"Mother, I want to write a letter to Santa Claus."

How many mothers in Kingston heard this from their little tots during the past week or so? It is safe to say that every youngster had a desire to write to Santa Claus—the friend of all children. And the pile of letters received by the Whig to be forwarded to Santa Claus will verify this.

"How are you, dear Santa Claus, and how is dear Mrs. Santa Claus?" writes one Kingston girl. "I hope, dear Santa Claus, that there will be enough snow for you and Mrs. Santa Claus to make your trip with your big sleigh and reindeers," writes another. "I will leave a piece of cake on the parlor table for you," says another Kingston "kiddie" in his letter.

Laura, who is five years of age, writes as follows:

"My grandmother has been reading some of the Santa Claus letters appearing in the Whig to me, and I thought I would send one too, and tell you what I would like for Christmas. I would like to get a horn, overstockings, mittens, candies, nuts, and do not forget to bring something to mother and grandmother. Grandmother lives with me, and she is so good to us all. Also, remember all the little 'Kiddies' all over the world."

Little Horace in his letter says: "Will you please bring me a train and tracks, a drum and a monkey on a stick, and please send me lots of nuts and candies."

Little Jimmy has a thought for other boys and girls, as his letter will show. Jimmy says:

"I am not asking you for very much this year, as there are other little boys and girls to think about, but I would like to have a sleigh, a steam engine and I also want to thank you for all the nice things you gave me last year."

Carrie lives out in the country. "I am well and I hope you are the same," she says in her letter. "I wish you would call at my place Christmas and leave me a dolly and also leave one for my little sister, also a carriage for our dollies." Willie, who lives about ten miles from the city, writes the following: "How are you and Mrs. Santa Claus? I am nine years of age. Will you please bring me a gun, a box of oranges, a watch and a little toy horse."

"I want two pink and two blue hair ribbons," writes little Sadie, who also sends her love to Kris Kringle.

This is what a certain little girl named Ver has to say: "I am just like other girls in Kingston—waiting for you to make your visit. I hope you will not leave the North Pole before you get my letter. I would like you to bring me



Getting Ready for the Christmas Party

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a sewing machine so I can make dresses for my dollies."

A girl who signs her name Mary tells Santa Claus that he will find a nice piece of cake and pie awaiting him on the dining-room table.

It looks as if Santa Claus is to have a big feast the night he makes his rounds.

A youngster named Verdun, who lives in Yarker, says:

"You look so jolly in your pictures. I am sure you must be a nice old man. I am only six years of age, but I know what I want you to bring me. Please bring me a top, a small gun, an ax, a jackknife, a train, some nuts, and some candies. Please don't forget all my playmates. I hope I am not asking for too much."

"If you are coming to my place this Christmas, will you please bring me a gun with a cork in it to shoot, some peanuts, and some candies. Don't forget my brother, my sister and my cousin. With love to Mrs. Santa Claus."

Vivian, who lives in the country, has the following:

"How are you and Mrs. Santa Claus? I am nine years old. Are you coming to my house? If so, will you bring me a doll's carriage, a little table and chair, also a ball and a top. You will find a glass of

milk and a piece of cake on the table."

Charles lives in Portsmouth and he evidently wants to be a fireman when he grows up. He is asking Santa Claus to bring him a big fire engine, also a fireman's hat.

The Distinguished Boggs.
Sir Philip Gibbs tell about being introduced to an audience by a man who had forgotten the lecturer's name. "We have on our platform to-night a man," the chairman began, "whom it is unnecessary to introduce, whose name—er—whose name—er. . . here he cast a beseeching glance at me, and I murmured 'Philip Gibbs' as he bent slightly down over the speaker's desk. He rose triumphantly and introduced me, with a sweeping gesture and a bow, as 'Sir Frederick Boggs.'"

Tell Us, Santa.
Tell us, Santa, tell us true,
How you know just what to do
What to bring in games and toys,
To the waiting girls and boys?

Ma and pa and all the rest
You just give what they like best
Tell us how your plans are fixed
That you never get things mixed.

Kingston People Particularly Will Be Interested In

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By Mrs. A. D. Skelton

THE BACKWOODSWOMAN

By Mrs. A. D. Skelton

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OTHER ATTRACTIVE CANADIAN BOOKS:

- The Inner Circle**
By Mrs. Trevor H. Davies
This new volume by the gifted minister of Ebor, Memorial Methodist Church, Toronto, subtitled "Studies in the Associates of Jesus," presents an attractive garment, new ideas on such characters as Simon Peter, John the Evangelist, Philip of Bethsaida, Mary of Magdala, Simon of Cyrene, Judas Iscariot. The book is done with Dr. Davies' characteristic charm. Beautifully bound. . . . \$2.50
- Looking Backward**
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- You Tom o' Mine**
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