

BOOK REVIEWS

HAS CANADA A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND?

The question is often raised: Has Canada, comparatively young as it is, a sufficient history to provide the background, colour and drama necessary for real literature? A doubt is often expressed but, perhaps, without good reason.

Mr. John M. Elson, whose novel, "The Scarlet Sash," has just been published in England and Canada, is one of those who, though sensible to the limitations which a brief history imposes, nevertheless feels that few countries possess a richer field than the Dominion for novelist and poet. He maintains, after having spent many years in preparation before starting to write fiction, that there is in this country a wealth of incident embodying adventure, romance, intrigue and heroism. The public is left to decide whether he has established this view to some extent in the book he has written around the stirring events of 1812-14.

From a boy Mr. Elson has revelled in works dealing with the past. Where ever he has been, in rather extensive travels as a journalist, he has visited battlefields, crumbling forts, places around which tradition and lore have become entwined and scenes where struggles or human emotions have left their memories. The result displays it-

self in his present work and furnishes an answer as to what a writer with mastery and power can do to throw an epoch into bold and engaging relief. Mr. Elson is widely known in journalistic and public circles. He has also attracted notice during the past three or four years by his short stories with historical settings. The book which has come from his hands is said, by those who have read it, to be a literary achievement.

Born just west of London, Ont., he attended the collegiate and also Western University in that city. Later he was on one of the large dailies of Montreal, went to England for a while to study conditions, and, returning, occupied an editorial chair in Toronto. Subsequently he bought and published for a number of years, a daily paper in St. Catharines, Ont. He was Mayor of the latter city in 1919 and occupied several other public offices. He has always been a careful reader of the classics and a close student of Canadian letters and affairs.

"The Scarlet Sash," published by J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., Toronto, is a romance of the Niagara frontier. It deals in a dashing and fascinating manner with the strife of two high-spirited young men for the hand of a beautiful maiden, and they all get caught in the web of international complications. This entertaining story

sells at \$1.75 and will no doubt be found in a good many stockings on Christmas morning.

COURCELETTE AND OTHER POEMS

by the late James Harold Manning, B.A., J. and A. McMillan, Limited, St. John, N.B.

This little volume should have a deep interest for students of war poetry. "Courcellette," the principal poem of the book is written in a heroic vein, and makes a strong appeal for sacrifice and service. As the last verse indicates—

And we who be beneath the plain,
With wider vision now can see
A larger purpose; nor complain
To pay the price of Victory,
Great Judge, in whose just balance
Is only to be earned in pain,
Charter us too—lest we forget—
O Courcellette! Our Courcellette!

The volume includes some thirty poems of different lengths and a long tragedy entitled "What is Truth?" The poems treat of many themes in various ways, some grave, some gay, and the book is quite entitled to a place on library shelves alongside other Canadian poems.

James Harold Manning, the author, like Keats, had a short life. He was born in 1897 and died in 1924. He enlisted as a lieutenant in the 104th Battalion and was twice wounded, the last time so badly that he was discharged from active service with a life pension. While working with the engineering staff of the Standard Oil Co. in Venezuela he contracted malaria fever, which ended fatally.

THE ETERNAL CIRCLE

by Jay William Hudson; McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, \$2.00.

Anyone who reads M. Hudson's well-known novel "Abbe Pierre," will want to read "The Eternal Circle." "Abbe Pierre" took its place quickly with the best literature of the year, and "The Eternal Circle" will doubtless do likewise. M. Hudson's new novel is a love story—a story of two men and two women whose lives meet and clash and who are offered in the end the opportunity of coming together. Bob Vance is a lovable philosopher. Loyal to his friend he is called upon to sacrifice the dearest thing in life—the woman he loves. Jared Phelps, his chum, on the other hand, an idealist, who has turned cynic through disillusionment. Madeline Worthington has experienced sorrow and disappointment in a mistaken marriage. The fourth is Dorothy Fleming, high-minded, pure-souled, a woman who has always retained her ideals. The complicated situation is handled with a masterly touch. The reader's interest will be held from cover to cover.

THE GREAT WORLD

by A Gentleman With a Duster; Geo. H. Doran Co., New York, \$2.00.

The brilliant author of the Mirrors of Downing Street has for the moment exchanged the pier glass of isolated portraiture for the panoramic camera, and in a novel which at once classifies him as a Thackeray of today, he presents a picture of English life from Gladstone to Baldwin. With the world for a canvas, in his new novel the author makes a memorable picture of dukes, politicians, happers and everyday folk in their varying worlds.

THE HARE AND THE TORTOISE

by Pierre Coufflet; McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, \$2.00.

Riding through these pages into the heart of the reader comes Louise, a beautiful Canadian girl; eager, impulsive, vivid as a flame. Flint for flame is Keble Evelyn, her English husband, inalterably conservative by birth and tradition. The very forces which attract them cause their temperaments to clash; reason passionately wielded is the weapon of both, but it is passion wielded reasonably which decides their fate. The Hare and the Tortoise has a breezy western setting and is full of interest and vitality.

FAR HORIZONS

by Bliss Carman; McClelland & Stewart, Toronto; \$1.50.

Bliss Carman's new book has a peculiar interest for Kingston people, its publication following so close upon his recent visit here. It is an entirely new collection of Mr. Carman's recent poems and contains many gems. The volume gets its title from the opening poem, "Land of the Far Horizons," which has a true western ring to it. "The Return of the Mayflower," stirs the blood as it depicts the sailing back to Plymouth Sound a war transport loaded with "the breed of Rummymede."
"To stay the ancient altars,
Where fire of justice burns,
For freedom still as god may will,
The Mayflower returns."
The little volume is dedicated to the Hon. Walter Nichol, Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia, and there is a fine western flavor about "Victoria," "Malabert," "In the Okanagan," and other poems. The lovers of Mr. Carman's poems will find much joy in this little volume.

A HORSEMAN AND THE WEST

by Beasman Trotter, with Arthur Hawkes, assisting; MacMillan, Limited, Toronto, Price, \$2.00.

Kingston is an old city full of history and romance. It played its part in a very important one—in the early history of the eastern portion of Canada. Nevertheless its people are always interested in the development of the west, and particularly so where Kingstons are concerned. The above book recently received by The British Whig, is not a novel, nor is it history or biography, but a sort of happy mixture of all three. It is written by a

man who was born in Pittsburg township. His father settled about 9 miles from this city about 1840, and went through all the experiences of clearing space for a log shanty, felling trees for room in which to raise a few potatoes, and enduring all the trials and tribulations of a pioneer. Some of the early days in Pittsburg township are interestingly told in the early chapters of the book. The father died in 1887 and the son, responded to the call of the west in the late '70's. In his book Mr. Trotter, has told an interesting story of his own western experiences and has woven a fascinating tale of the early days of the C. P. R. and the leading western cities. In the capacity of a horse dealer Mr. Trotter met many interesting personages and his book is a most entertaining one.

AND THEY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER

by Meredith Nicholson, Copp, Clark Co., \$2.00.

This is a dramatization of modern life with particular regard to the institution of marriage. The truth is set down with fearlessness and force, according to the aim of the author—to bring a realization of how matters stand in this regard to-day, not only in a Middle Western city, which is the scene of the story, but in every large city of the country.

THE SWEET OF THE YEAR

Charles G. D. Roberts, Ryerson Press, Toronto, Price, 50c.

The Ryerson Press, Toronto, believing that lovers of poetry care more for verse of high quality than for costly bindings, have brought out some small books called "The Ryerson Poetry Chap-Books" edited by Dr. Lorne Pierce. "The Sweet of the Year" and other poems by Charles G. D. Roberts is published in this form. Charles G. D. Roberts is a Canadian who has learned the secrets of nature and with an artist's touch has brought them home to those whose eyes and ears are less keen to see and hear than his. "The Sweet of the Year" is instinct with the spirit of spring and the old, old story of the earth bursting into renewed life and the return of the birds and painted butterflies is beautifully told. "Hill Top Songs" in the same volume are two songs in which the common things of the woods and fields are shown to us with uncommon beauty.

COMPANIONSHIP AND THE CROWD

by W. H. F. Tenny, Ryerson Press, Toronto, Price 50c.

Another "Chap-Book" contains this short poem by W. H. F. Tenny, which will be attractive to many people. It is dedicated to Dr. Lorne Pierce. The conception is rather strange but the last lines the solution of the possibility of the escape from the things that crowd and the joy and peace of true companionship with God, is beautifully described. "After the Rain" and "Friends" are other poems of merit in the same volume.

Lady Nairne's Poems

The "Auld House" commemorated in this poem by Lady Nairne was the Oliphant homestead at Galt where she was born and reared.

"The Auld Laird" was her grandfather, Lawrence Oliphant, and the reference in the last four lines of the second stanza is to the visit of Prince Charlie in 1745, when a lock of hair was cut from his head by Mr. Oliphant as a keepsake. Oh, the auld house, the auld house, That, though the rooms were wee, Oh, kind hearts were dwelling there,
And bairnies fu' o' glee,
The wild rose and the jessamine,
Still hang upon the wa';
How many cherished memories
Do the sweet flowers rec'.

THE MAIDS STILL DOOTH SWEETLY SING

The bluebells sweetly blow
The bonnie Earn's clear winding
still
But the auld house is awa',
The auld house, the auld house,
Deserted tho' ye be,
There ne'er can be a new house
Will seem sae fair to me.

Another song written by Lady Nairne (Caroline Oliphant) was "Bonnie Charlie's now awa'."
"Wha'll be King but Charlie,"
The Oliphants were staunchly Jacobites and had proved their loyalty to the lost cause in the field. Her grandfather Lawrence Oliphant, took part in the rising of 1715, and in 1745 again took the field accompanied by his son, Lady Nairne's father. The younger son, then a youth of nineteen, galloped to Edinburg with the news of the victory of Prestonpans, after fighting single-handed with Sir John Cope's run-away dragoons, was present at the battle of Falkirk, also Culloden where he fought by Prince Charlie's side. He escaped to Sweden by sea, a beggar in all but honors. Caroline Oliphant married her cousin, Major Nairne, who afterwards became Baron Nairne. Lady Nairne had one son, who predeceased her. She died in 1847 aged 78 years. Her title passed to another branch of the family and is now held by Dowager Marchioness Lansdowne.

BONNIE CHARLIE

Bonnie Charlie's now awa',
Safely o'er the friendly main
Many a heart will break in twa'
Should he ne'er come back again.

Chorus—
Will ye no come back again?
Will ye no come back again?
Better lo'ed ye canna be,
Will ye no come back again?

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tray
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