

# BOOKS, LITERARY NOTES, ETC.

(By WINNIFRED EATON REEVE)

An important event in the impending Book Week, is the coming to Calgary of the distinguished Canadian poet, Wilson McDonald, who will give a recital in the Public Library on Nov. 19, under the auspices of the Canadian clubs, the Press and Literary clubs and the Canadian Authors' association.

Practically unknown until the last year, Mr. McDonald's poetry attracted the attention of the critical and literary world by its beauty and power. There are scores of would-be poets, rhymsters, poetasters and writers of various sorts of verse, but there are in the Dominion of Canada scarcely a dozen who may claim the title of poet. To this limited company, Wilson McDonald unquestionably belongs. There is a musical loveliness about his verse, a gentle wistfulness and melancholy pervades many of his lines, yet he possesses a dramatic gift which is reminiscent of Masefield.

A volume of poetry may be likened to a casket of jewels. Some jewel cases, we know, contain paste and tawdry imitations; but some there are that are full of rare and precious gems. A beautiful poem is a finer thing than a rare gem, for the jewel charms but the eye, while the poem reaches the heart. The poet is the sensitive medium through which the noblest and the loveliest thoughts of heaven and earth find expression.

The birth of a great poet in any land is as important an event as the discovery of radium. The poet who is coming to Calgary has received high praise from the critics of the east and from English and American lovers of poetry and literature. The Toronto Saturday night says of him: "A new elemental force in poetry—perhaps the first since Whitman." The San Francisco Star declares his "Song of Brotherhood" might well be read into the Hall of Conference at Versailles. From William Archer, dean of English critics, from Bliss Carmen, from the English poet Masefield, and from many others come enthusiastic appreciation of his poetry.

Timid, delicate, fragile as his own poems, the Canadian poet is travelling. Like a minstrel of old, from city to city in Canada, reading to appreciative audiences the poems that are certain to bring him sure fame. If Canada is cold to this native son of genius, other lands will not hesitate to acclaim him. But a few years ago there was in Canada a young artist, whose work was shown at various exhibitions in the west, and I believe in one of the cities of the east. His work, though receiving high praise from art critics was practically ignored in this country. He could not sell enough pictures to keep a roof over his head. He was driven almost to the perilous edge of starvation. Friends assisted him to leave his native country, which had failed to appreciate or even allow him the boon of a livelihood from his work. Today

he is one of the most famous artists in Europe. His work created a furore in Paris. He is recognized in New York as one of the greatest of modern artists, but, and this to a lover of Canada, is surely a bitter drop—he is proclaimed and known not as a Canadian artist, but an American.

Time will make of this city of the Foothills something more than an agricultural and business center. In a measure we have already our intellectual and our cultural life, but that side of us still is in the growing stage. Nevertheless there are many in this city who will appreciate and delight to honor the Canadian poet, of whom Rivert Norwood, M.A., D.C.L., has written:

"Do not stifle his genius by indifference. Honor him. Let him feel your pride in him. He is one of the greatest poets of the Anglo-Saxon race." And he is a Canadian!

If I were asked to name the most significant, the most important work of fiction by a Canadian author published during the past year, I should be inclined to say, "The Viking Heart." This is the work of Laura Goodman Salverson. It is a first novel, though a volume of poems from her pen was accepted by American and Canadian publishers prior to the publication of this work.

The word "epic" has been used so often lately that I hesitate to pronounce this book to be "an epic of the soil," which indeed it is. It is a great piece of work. The author conceived a canvas of no mean size on which to print what, in a way, may be accounted a masterpiece. She did not confine her plot to one or two characters. She set out to write the saga of a tribe—immigrants from Iceland who, rendered homeless, when the mountain under whose benevolent shadow their little farms and hamlets had sheltered, burst into violent volcanic eruption and drove them into enforced exile. I have never read a more graphic and at the same time simpler description of a flight of a terrified people as Mrs. Salverson pictures in the first few chapters of her book. Almost one sees the flames and feels the heat of the storming lava and fire. Almost one hears the voice of that Rachel, who could not be comforted, when her glorious young son turned back to succor the sheep trapped in those walls of fire and perished beneath the ashes and molten flames. Even as the exiles from the land of Evangeline, so down unending rivers and over strange, forbidding, desolate lands, wandered the Icelanders seeking what they fondly believed would prove to be the land of promise—Manitoba, at that time almost a barren wilderness, where subsistence was for him only with the strength, courage and the heart of a Viking. There is in this narrative such a ring of sincerity and truth that we feel as if we were reading not a work of art and fiction, but the human life story of Canadian pioneers. One has a sense also of shame and wrath at the

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callous treatment of these pitiful exiles by the then immigration authorities, who separated families from each other, assigned parents to bare, unbroken lands in immigration settlements and put the growing young sons and daughters out to service with strangers 50 to 100 miles apart.

Of the family, whose life story Mrs. Salverson records, but one survived the ravages of hunger, cold and the fearful scourge of smallpox which devastated the unsanitary camps of those bitter days.

"The Viking Heart" has been compared with the work of such master writers as Tolstoy. It possesses something of the slow gathering force of de Maupassant's "Une Vie," but is more than the life story of an individual. It is the tragic saga of a race.

Mrs. Salverson was born in the city of Winnipeg, Manitoba, but her parents were Icelanders. She writes with authority, information and first-hand knowledge. Her uncle is the present governor-general of Iceland.

Of interest to Calgary is the fact that she is now a resident here, her husband, in the employ of the C.N.R., having recently been transferred from Edmonton to Calgary.