

THE CANADIAN AUTHORS ASSOCIATION

(By Winnifred Eaton Reeve)

The Canadian Authors' association is about to hold its fourth annual convention. It is now of an age when it may be said to have found its sea legs, and to have demonstrated its valuable staying qualities. It has become, indeed, a permanent institution, and although it has sailed at times through troubled seas of criticism, it seems to be making port.

Let us survey, therefore, neither too harshly nor too leniently the work of this organization. Many reproaches and criticisms have been laid at its doors, possibly the chiefest of which may be said to be its tendency to proclaim too loudly the talent of its members, which, it is claimed, has lowered the ethics and the tone of the literary profession. Some have gone so far as to maintain that the Authors' association is nothing but a huge publicity medium for the Canadian author. That may be as it may be. Why should not the Canadian author have a publicity organ? This is the day of publicity, when unless one makes a noise in the land he is not heard above the great clamor with which the world today proclaims even the slightest of

its achievements. Perhaps, also, the association has been too rigidly held to account, and chiefly by its own members, whose profession it is to analyze and weigh even a straw or a hair. The claim has been made that there is too indiscriminate exploitation of the Canadian author, that mediocrities have been hoisted to undeserved notice, and the trusting public's attention been focussed upon unworthy productions. In the general effort to bring its splendid writers to the attention of the Canadian public it is a pity that we did not find it always possible to separate the chaff from the wheat. Our critics were only too ready to pounce upon the excuse of declaring that in fact our dish was nearly all of chaff. Scarcely an utterance, hardly an action, every single movement of the association has been watched by its critics and unsparingly analysed and often savagely condemned.

Utterances of such men as Robert Stead, the national president of the association, who suggested that our libraries should be made up of 50 percent Canadian literature, met with unmeasured condemnation from authors as well as from laymen. On the other hand, Mr. Stead was supported by many who earnestly and stubbornly upheld his views and who pointed to him as the patriotic leader of the craft.

That the association has been of value to the author cannot be doubted. That it has been the means of acquainting an incredibly indifferent public with their own literary sons and daughters cannot be denied. Once since the Authors' association came into being did the average Canadian know that such writers as Charles G. D. Roberts, Marshall Saunders, Basil King, Arthur Stringer, Victor Lauriston, L. Adams Beck, Marjorie Pickthall, Mazo de la Roche, Marjory MacMurchy and others too numerous to mention here were Canadians. It was the Authors' association, in fact, that acquainted us with the extent of our literary wealth and aroused in us a pride in our past and hope for our literary future. With a romantic literary history that went back as far as 1604, when our bibliography opened with a book of poems by Marc Lescarbots, inspired by and dedicated to the then new colony of Port Royal—Annapolis, in Nova Scotia, with no less than 16 of our Canadian writers crowned by that supreme literary tribunal, the French academy, since 1880, when Louis Frechette won the Montyon prize of 19,000 francs, had we not every reason to believe that our authors of the present generation would also most nobly and splendidly do Canada honor? These were the things upon which the Canadian Authors' association laid stress, and, in fact, forced a sort of awakening in the Canadian mind of a realization that Canada possesses authors of great genius, whose posterity was assured. This, then, was the great work of the association.

Second in importance to this was the bringing together of the authors themselves. I do not mean physically, through conventions or public meetings, for I made the discovery that the conventions are not always visited by the best of our authors. I was told that last year barely a handful of Canada's really big authors were present. This is the case, also, with the local branches, where the author is obliged to give but sparingly of his time and thought. When I speak, there-

fore, of the bringing together of the authors, I mean in that sense where through the medium of articles and speeches or correspondence we have become acquainted with each other. We now know and hail each other. We are in league, as it were, to give each other a helping hand, and to guide those who are essaying the uncertain pathway which we fondly believe leads to the great gates of Fame.

Of the social and public service rendered by the Authors' association I need not touch upon here. It is certain, however, that in every city where they have a branch of the association its influence has begun to be felt upon the cultural life of the community, and that is something.

Nor shall I enter into the details of the large work entailed in the oversight of the laws that have been framed most unjustly in the past against the literary craft. The existence of an organization numbering more than 1,500 members, many of whom are men and women occupying the highest kind of positions, gives the association a power that cannot be disregarded when so serious a question as the copyright comes up before our senate.

We might scrutinize now some of the matters condemned by the critics of the association. If our publicity methods have been somewhat blatant, this might be excused on the ground of our youth, and also because of the almost incredible indifference and even ignorance of the great majority of our people, as regards the Canadian author. It was necessary to dynamite the public conscience; to quicken it to a realization of the importance to the country of its authors and to reveal the condition of the Canadian author.

I do not agree with Robert Stead that 50 percent of our literature in the public libraries should be Canadian. I respect and admire Robert Stead, but I no more agree with that dictum of his than I do with another statement voiced by him in his inaugural speech last year, when he adjured the Canadian author to cultivate contentment with his lot and to be "satisfied to be in the Ford class." I am of those who passionately believe that we should attach our wagon to the very farthestmost star. "Build high Master Builder!"—and whether, as Mr. Stead seemed to infer, our place in the sun be of but limited dimensions, beyond which we dare not go, yet the aspiration to attain the heights, the divine discontent and the fret under the chains that gail and hold us back, are the spurs and the hope that will speed us along the way. I for one would sooner snap all my pencils in twain and cut to bits the paper upon which I write my stories if I had no better hope before me than to achieve the Ford class.

It would be a deplorable thing, moreover, if 50 percent of the books in our libraries should be Canadian. It would indeed be a literary tragedy. I am inclined to believe that Mr. Stead has been misquoted.

If anyone were to ask me what I considered the greatest defect of the association, of which I am a member, (Continued on Page Sixteen)

 **SIMS
PAPER**

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IS SPRING?

All It Does Is Worry Folks

Life puzzles, amuses, annoys, thrills, bores and scares us.

Which is a peculiar statement to make right here when no telling who will see it.

But, sure enough, all you got to do to live is get a formula and fill it, maybe. If you get the right formula and fill it properly you are a success.

Formulas differ according to desires, you might even say inherent desires. And you might say these inherent desires are swished and swayed, but not materially changed, by personal contacts and activities.

So it seems as if the proper thing to do is to figure out your own formula, and fill it the best you can, even using substitutes where you can't get the real articles.

And if this expert editor doesn't quit thinking he may lose his job and have to go to work, which isn't in his formula.

EDITORIAL

The iceberg season in the North Atlantic covers about four months, some of the larger icebergs being almost as chilly as a conscientious chaperon when she finds the party is too rough.

CLEAN NEWS

If you come across something while spring cleaning and don't know what the thing is maybe it's the bathtub.

HOW TO MARRY

You can marry almost any man by sympathizing with him until he thinks he needs sympathy.

BERING
MAKES
GOOD GLASSES

The Canadian Authors Association

(Continued From Page Four)

I would be inclined to say its apparent inability to keep out of its membership a certain class of writers who are not truly authors. Shot into being like a mushroom overnight, it was inevitable that numerous parasites of the pen swiftly slipped under the wing of the association, and they have stuck with the tenacity of bloodsuckers.

When I was east a couple of years ago, even then there was considerable discussion among the authors as to this, and dissatisfaction was felt that the association had not confined membership purely to authors. When Wilson MacDonald was here, he told me of a group of authors in the east who were getting ready to form a new Authors' League, which would be made up wholly and entirely of authors, and to which no one would be admitted without proved credentials.

In some of the branches the busiest of bodies and the loudest voices heard emanate from those who by the widest stretch of imagination cannot be described as authors, and it is no secret how some of them became members. Many of us recall the time when Murray Gibbon, accompanied by Arthur Stringer and other authors, made his famous trip over the country, forming branches of the organization in every city of any size or importance. A local club would give a function of some kind or other for the visiting authors, and at that function, after Mr. Gibbon had explained the objects and purposes of the association, then and there membership was enrolled. It was an easy matter for one to leap up, nominate a friend, and, presto! he was a member, for, naturally, in our eagerness to obtain a membership there was a disposition to be extremely kind in our scrutiny of the applications, and more than one went through as a regular member who was nearer to being a waiter than an author.

The association was in the way, therefore, of being exploited by the hangers-on upon the skirts of the literary profession—people whose relationship to literature was of the vaguest.

In a way the association, even in the beginning of its life, appreciated the possibility of something like this, and for that reason they made the laws governing the associate members extremely elastic and admitted to associate membership writers of any kind or sort and those associated with literature in various capacities. This was as it should be, and one could find no complaint were even the type of members referred to above contented to remain in the associate ranks. But no, they pushed and shouldered themselves in among the authors who had won their right to regular membership through years of arduous literary work. Indeed, there were occasions when the author was shoved unceremoniously out of the way with a barefaced brazenness and lack of pride and sensitiveness almost unbelievable.

The Canadian Press club, a dignified and splendid organization, already existed for members of the newspaper profession, and it is notable that the average bona fide newspaper man and woman made no effort to come into the Authors' association, save where they properly should. They recognized the fact that there was a place for both organizations, and they gave a generous and hearty support to the new association. More ambitious, however, were certain slush-mush scribblers, who intrigued and pulled wires and insinuated themselves into the newly formed and unsuspecting Authors' association. An Authors' association should be what its name implies—an Authors' association.

In our desire to proclaim our sons of talent, our effort to help the young and potential literary genius of Canada, it may be that we have unconsciously been also cultivating weeds, and we know that weeds will outgrow the strongest of plants and in time choke and destroy them.