

News, Notes and Views About BOOKS

"Pagan Love"

Murray Gibbon's New Novel

By WINNIFRED REEVE
(Onoto Watazma)

The first thought that occurred to me when I picked up "Pagan Love" was, "I wonder when he found the time to write it?"

It is remarkable that a man of Mr. Gibbon's singularly modest and retiring nature should hold the position of chief publicity agent of one of the greatest organizations in the world. He is always traveling—from one end of Canada to the other to say nothing of repeated trips into the United States and when in Montreal it is said that he puts in as many hours at his desk as a day laborer.

Since the inception of the Canadian Authors' association, of which he is founder and president, an enormous correspondence has been precipitated upon him, to say nothing of the thousand and one calls and demands upon his time. I venture to say that he finds himself in the unique position of oracle, father confessor, champion, agent and general pacifier of the whole tribe of Canadian writers—no enviable job, when we consider the artistic temperament.

When, besides the above duties he produces a novel such as "Pagan Love," we begin to realize that Mr. Gibbon is a man possessed of that rarest and strangest of all qualities—genius!

It seems a pity that he does not concentrate purely upon writing, for we are sorely in need of just such authors as Murray Gibbon. Besides writing beautiful English, he possesses the gift of being able to interest, charm, excite and thrill his readers. Endowed with the natural God-given talent of the writer, he has also the advantages of education, culture and experience. Sceptics assert that there is no such thing as a typically Canadian story. Nothing distinctive, nothing unusual stands out in our literature from that of contemporary production of other countries. Canadians they say, will continue to be the "side men" in the American and English literary shows.

Of course, we know that no one country has secured a corner on greatness. Each land produces its giants, mentally and physically. Our best talent it is very true, has been absorbed into the United States. That is our misfortune and our fault. Now there is a national movement, that seems to be growing like a rolling snowball, to preserve and to cultivate Canada's natural resources and among the natural resources of a country, our native talent unquestionably stands first. No country can arise to greatness without its dreamers. Just as long as we force them across the border into the hospitable arms of the United States, or starve them if they persist upon staying here, Canada will become but a nonentity as a nation. Yet Canada is a literary gold mine. Its surface is barely scratched. In mining, we must not mistake a streak of gold or gilt for the mother lode. It is good to have a man like Murray Gibbon to direct and shepherd Canada's literary talent, but it would be better if he used his splendid gifts as a writer to demonstrate to the world that in Canada we can produce a real literature.

His novel, "The Conquering Hero" was mainly of Canada, a diverting story of a packhorse outfit in the Rocky mountains and an exquisitely funny picture of the tenderfoot Englishman in the B.C. ranching country. I wish that "Pagan Love" could also have been of Canada, for it is a much superior work. "Pagan Love," however, is of no particular country. We move from France and England to Canada and the United States. We are in Czecho-Slovak, Russia, Austria, Poland. Figures from nearly all the countries arise throughout the book, make their peculiarly national mark upon the pages and are absorbed into the general melting pot of the tale, but into this story is woven the thoughts and the aspirations of the great common peoples of the world. At times it is a fascinating, grim narrative, in which the author uses unsparingly the surgeon's knife.

From the beginning of the story, when the starving, Scotch young dervish pauses upon the edge of the river, prepared to make his despairing exit from life, and reaching out a hand saves, instead, his own life, in saving another's—One already in the dark waters before him—we are entrapped in the web of an intriguing and fascinating romance.

"Pagan Love" is cleverly conceived and brilliantly written. In spite of its title, however, "Pagan Love" is rather a sane, philosophical, almost scientific chronicle. Only toward the end we are suddenly surprised by the introduction of a seductive and passionate "Pagan" element. An American millionaire, the cool-headed business genius who has exasperated and fascinated us becomes as by the flash of a magician's wand, transformed into a modern Cleopatra. This curious personality, with his cynical and searching observations upon life and people and his strangely emotional reactions, proves to be a masquerader. Behind his hard mask he has concealed the tremulous wildly

bating heart of a passionate woman. Some day Murray Gibbon will write an exquisite story, lyrical with the charm and beauty of which we have flashing glimpses in his own poetry. A scholar and critic, no doubt, he has found the psychology of the peoples of the world, which he knows so well tempting to his pen. Nevertheless, it may be that that fount of emotion and poetry which is certainly penned up within him, behind the intellectual front, will find expression. The medium of poetry will not suffice. He has more than the equipment of a poet, though poetry he can write most charmingly. As an instance, the following taken from "Pagan Love," and concerning camp life in Canada's Rocky Mountains, gives one an inkling of the type of imagery of which he is capable:

Between the acres of wheat
Are the wide streets of the West,
And worn with moccasin'd feet
Are the ways that I love best.

The shadowy trail through the maze,
Where the cedar and tamarack grow
And the portage follows the blaze,
From the lake to the river below.

Where the moose and deer slip by,
As the fisherman finds the pool,
And the trout swirls up to the fly
From the caverns deep and cool.

And then, while the light allows,
The trail that can never tire,
To the bed of cedar boughs
And the snug tent by the fire.

MR. DAVIDSON'S CANDIDATURE (Red Deer Advocate)

The decision of Mr. W. M. Davidson, editor of The Calgary Albertan, to offer himself as a candidate for the vacant seat in the legislature from Calgary gives the Calgary people a chance to put a live, progressive, experienced public man in the legislature, one who has unstintingly given of his ability and service to the welfare of the common people and one who has constantly endeavored to keep his party up to the best policies and methods. His independence of machine politics has got him into trouble more than once with the party junta that aims to boss Liberal opinion in that city and in this province, and naturally they have taken offence at his "throwing his hat in the ring" without consultation with them. While the Advocate regrets that Mr. Davidson does not see with it that the party system is ineffective and out-of-date, and is being displaced by other forms of political organization, yet he is the type of man who gives life and strength to a political party—a man who uses the party more than the party uses him—and the best uses of a political party can be got through such as he.

If the Liberals of Alberta had vision they would seek out for a man of Mr. Davidson's ability, service and gifts of leadership and would displace the present provincial leaders who have not the touch with the future that give life to a professedly Liberal party.

HAVE PITY!

Readers all,
Great and small,
We would ask
That you excuse, and not accuse,
Our learned contemporary;
Five years ago, you should know,
It made a joke,
A funny poke;
To sustain its reputation,
In spite of exhortation,
It has sinned
Again;
Take our cue,
The next is due
Five years hence;
Prepare! In self-defence!
Until that date,
Sad to state,
'Twill chuckle and choke
At this, its masterstroke;
Be not severe,
But
Drop a tear. —F. G. E.

Chess has been played for at least 4,000 years.

"Nearly Has Depe

This letter from M
Dr. Chase in the hour of

