

# Books and Current Literary Matters

By WINNIFRED REEVE (Onoto Watanna)

If M. L. Menken, the American editor and writer upon political and sociological subjects, were a non-entity in a literary way, Canadians might very well ignore the latest product of his pen. But Menken has a keen and original mind and a cunning, facile pen. When he undertakes calbously and with brutal disregard for the friendly feeling existing between the United States and Canada, to set down in cold type a categorical statement and prophesy touching upon the annexation of Canada by the United States by force of arms, it gives one pause. That such an article should be permitted publication in an American magazine is in itself amazing. Certainly no reputable Canadian journal or magazine or newspaper would print an article of such an offensive nature concerning a friendly neighbor.

The first part of Mr. Menken's article has to do with the "engulfing" of Mexico and "all the little republics down to the Panama canal, not to mention the West Indies." With a few fatuous and possible facetious paragraphs upon the subject of this easy walkover for the United States, the author comes to Canada.

"Destiny," writes Mr. Menken, "will eventually shove us northward. That is to say, we will grab Canada some day, just as we grabbed Oregon in 1818. So far we have not done so simply because the pressure behind the natural impulse has been more than counterbalanced by contrary pressures, chiefly of a cautionary nature. Moreover, the value of Canada, until very lately, was not very evident; it seemed to be chiefly a snow waste, inhabited by scattered bands of half-civilized French Canadians. But during the past two or three decades it has been developed in so brilliant a manner that its possibilities are patent to anyone. In the east it now has large and prosperous cities; in the far west the prairies have been converted into farms.

"The conquest of Canada, as things stand in the world today, would be enormously difficult and expensive, and so no one advocates it as a practical enterprise. But the fundamental impediments, realistically examined, reduce themselves to two, and neither shows any sign of permanence. The first, obviously, is England. . . . The second the Canadians themselves. . . . Neither need detain us once the time comes. No sane person believes that we'll tackle Canada so long as we remain at peace with England, but who will argue that the present peace is likely to last? Certainly no one who understands the competitions which lie at the bottom of international relations. We are moving rapidly and inevitably into the position occupied by Germany before 1914—that of chief competitor for the sea-borne commerce of the world. Soon or late that rivalry will take on a violent and implacable character. England will have to try to cripple us in order to save herself and the moment the combat is joined Canada will become a convenient club for belaboring the motherland. More, it will instantly attract our elder statesmen as a club that will be charmingly edible and nourishing after its use in war is over.

"The military problems presented by an invasion of Canada are considerably less serious than those presented by an invasion of Mexico. The territory to be conquered is much larger, but getting into it will be easier and it will not be necessary to seize so large a part of it. Once a few towns are taken and the chief railroads are in our hands, Canada will be quite unable to make any further resistance. These towns and railroads, as a glance at the map will show, are so conveniently located that they almost seem to have been laid out by the strategists of the general staff at Washington. Even a militia colonel, given troops enough, could take them in ten days—and in the second or third month of the next war there will be troops enough in our northern tier of states alone to beat any conceivable army that Canada can muster. To cut off Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia from Ontario and Quebec will be a job for a sergeant and twenty men. To reduce Ontario and Quebec themselves and with them the maritime provinces will be a matter for the landwehr.

"Moreover, there is little reason to believe that the Canadian army will make any serious resistance. In the first place the futility of it will be manifest from the start. In the second place the reliability of at least a part of the troops will be seriously open to question. This part will be made up, not of native and patriotic Canadians, but of Americans settled in Canada. During the late war it was easy to enlist such pioneering and adventurous men in the army, and they performed valiant deeds for England and the empire in Northern France. It would not be unreasonable to argue that they saved England and the empire, at least in the first year of the war.

"The number of such Americans in Canada is usually greatly underestimated. Not only do they constitute a large minority of the recent settlers in the western provinces, but they are also very numerous in Ontario, and particularly in the big cities. Their presence, in fact, is partly responsible for the bitter anti-American feeling which rages among the native Cana-

dian loyalists. These loyalists see their country gradually succumbing to peaceful penetration. Such towns as Toronto, Hamilton and London are now quite as American as Scranton, Pa., or Joliet, Ill., and so are Vancouver, Winnipeg, Calgary and even Regina and Edmonton. The four western provinces, in fact, have been settled by the same wave of immigration which settled Minnesota, Wisconsin and the Dakotas. The international boundary grows more frail and academic every day. Even if there is no war the whole of Canada west of the Soo will be thoroughly American within twenty-five years.

"To obliterate the boundary will be a good job. Its existence simply dooms Canada to an incurable second-

rateness. It can never hope to be anything more than a puerile and unconvincing imitation of the United States. It lacks the variety of resources, the geographical compactness, the military power that are necessary

to a nation of the first rank. Its politicians are a trashy and tricky lot, bent only upon attracting the condescending notice of their English overlords by a fawning loyalty. Like  
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# BOOKS

By WINNIFRED  
REEVE

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all colonies, it constantly loses its best men to the motherland. Worse, it is in the position of a colony with two motherlands. Both England and the United States drain it. Its provinces would be immeasurably better off as American states. They would help to augment the power and dignity of the United States and they would share in that power and dignity. Their development would proceed more rapidly; more first-class men would settle in them; they would become richer and more secure.

"What stands in the way of that upward step is simply sentimentality. It will be disposed of by force of arms. To attempt to halt the inevitable expansion of so vast and powerful an organism as the United States by appeals to principles and ideas is as childish as to attempt to overcome gravity by prayer."

We might, of course, ignore and treat with contempt this vain outpouring; but that would be like the ostrich who sticks his head in the sand and imagines that no one sees him. On our newstands, in our homes, spread upon the tables of the libraries, lies the magazine containing this inflammatory and extraordinary article in it. It cannot be allowed to pass unchallenged, lest we be charged with indeed being "puerile." Puerile, Canadians are not, as the war demonstrated, but painfully slow to resent an affront; nay! a gross libel and insult, it would seem we must be, for so far as I know there has not been a single movement to stop the entry into this country of this magazine, and the circulation has gone on without interruption.

It is not my intention to attempt to refute the vain-glorious boasts or diagnose the military program outlined by this "prophet." That is a task for an abler editorial pen than mine, or possibly for a military expert. What I would like especially to point out is that though there is no denying that the article is most cleverly and plausibly written, the author reveals that amassing ignorance concerning Canada and Canadians so common in the United States and other parts of the world, and it should bring home to Canadians the fact that it is high time that this erroneous opinion should be corrected and proven to be false. We have been misrepresented and grossly libelled by writers who have used our country for literary exploitation.

"Until lately chiefly a snow waste, inhabited by scattered bands of half civilized French Canadians!"

Is it then, indeed, only lately that the "towns" of Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg, Vancouver were snow wastes? Are the cities of Toronto, Hamilton, London, Edmonton, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Calgary, Regina and Edmonton American as this editor claims?

His ignorance concerning these cities is almost as ridiculous as his delusion that during the late war our army had so many Americans in it in the first year that "they saved England and the empire!"

It would be interesting if statistics will be published giving the exact percentage of Americans in the Canadian army at that period. Once and for all then that inflated bubble, which is blown by so many across the line would be pricked and dissolved into thin air.

As a matter of fact, the Canadian army in the first year had far more Englishmen in it than Americans.

It is well to "see our sels' as others see us." As regards our conquest, it might be well to remind Mr. Mencken that Canadians are no duller, nor less valiant than during the war of 1812, when the matter of the conquest of Canada was not considered such an easy task.

Stephen Leacock's recent speech anent the matter of our population of three or four and our government railroads (this was not one of Stephen's humorous speeches, or was not meant as one, but an attempt—and failure—at serious speech), aroused far more wrath than mirth among his fellow-countrymen, but pallid and innocuous appear his words beside these sinister ones of the American.