

Sept. 26th/43

Dear Mr. Russell - I've just finished reading "His Majesty's Yankees" and I want to let you know I think it's swell. The most interesting Canadian historical novel I've read. I've written enough fiction myself to sense the devotion to your theme, the laborious research and travel to get the "local color" authentic, and the tiring investigation of archives. More power to your pen! I hope the novel has the financial success it so amply deserves. If you are ever up this way, I'd appreciate a ring. I'm the only Eggleston in the book, so you can't go wrong). My wife liked it very much too. So did Col. Powers of Hfx, Dr. H.M. Dory and Charlie Clay. You should have some loyal boosters, anyway.

Sincerely,
Wilfrid Eggleston.

Complement
of W.C.

"CANADIAN LITERATURE COMES OF AGE"

By Wilfrid Eggleston

(An address delivered before the Montreal Women's Club, January 15th, 1945)

My thesis is that we are witnessing something of a Golden Age in Canadian Letters, -- perhaps are only on the threshold of it. The sense that we have arrived, or are arriving, is a very recent one, something that has been evident only in the past two or three years at most. It may be a false dawn, but it has all the appearances of reality. The remarkable developments of the past year or two are in both the creative field and the economic field, -- the quality of the output and the cash rewards to the author. These two are not unrelated: indeed, one could hardly advance without the other. For a long time we moved around in a vicious circle. Our books were not, in the main, up to international standards, and inferior writing is almost certain to bring an inferior return. Our books were expensive and often second-class and it was no wonder they did not sell very well. But just because fine writing was so wretchedly paid in Canada, many of our best intellects who might otherwise have been interested in a career in letters turned instead to engineering, law, finance or industry, or some other field in which they would be adequately rewarded for their talent. We vegetated within our vicious circle, and wondered how we would ever get out of it, short of a miracle. It was extremely unlikely that inferior books would suddenly become profitable and thus make it possible for our writers to invest more time in their new work. Rather the responsibility for breaking the spell seemed to lie on our writers, to ignore their slim returns and devote themselves to their task until they had raised the standard of their writing to world levels. This was a formidable proposition, but the interesting thing is that in recent years Canadian writers have made an impressive step in that direction.

I hasten to make two qualifications. I do not want to give the impression that letters in Canada have suddenly begun to rival the more lucrative professions and callings. Our books are still too expensive for the masses of readers. Our professional and competent writers still too scarce. But in comparison with a few years ago, the situation is definitely encouraging. It seems to be getting still better. We may never go back to the starvation era in Canadian writing. Time will tell.

Nor would I like to give the impression that as soon as writing becomes profitable a great literature automatically appears. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The Golden Ages of all literatures have been the consequence of spiritual, religious and social forces which, for a brief period, have been in conjunction, and have found expression in immortal books. But starved writers do not commonly produce superior works, despite the hoary myth about poets in attics. Read the lives of the great English poets: You will find that almost without exception they enjoyed from one source or another, during their creative years an income which made them relatively free from serious want. Chaucer held high government office and favour at court; Shakespeare was a shrewd, thrifty and successful business man as well as a dramatic and poetic genius; Milton's father subsidized his son's studies and compositions; Dryden and Pope, especially the latter, made large sums from their writings; Shelley's family was wealthy; Byron's mother was an Aberdeen heiress; Wordsworth's most creative years were sheltered by a generous gift from a friend; even Keats, remembered as the son of a livery-stable owner, could put his hand on hundreds of pounds to help his friends and relatives; Tennyson's chief financial embarrassment arose out of a bad speculation; Browning's father was a banker who saw to it that his son was not deprived of adequate leisure for composition; and so on. The poets who have produced immortal work while constantly battling the wolf at the door are really a tiny company.

Precisely what do I mean by the phrase "Canadian Literature Comes of Age"? I mean that for the first time our book-lists contain many works in many fields which are a credit to our nation and not inferior to similar writing in the United States and the United Kingdom; and second, that we are buying Canadian books and being influenced by Canadian books in a way you do not find in our earlier history. And this is a development which has come to fruition in two or three years.

Before I conclude this talk I hope to document both of these statements. But before doing so, let me look back for a few minutes at our late start and slow growth.

II

Canadian literature cannot boast a very long history: indeed, there died only a little over a year ago a Canadian man of letters who had seen Canadian literature born, and had watched it struggle through a discouraging infancy. I mean Sir Charles G.D. Roberts. I know there are those who will say that I am forgetting the earlier Maritime literature and, still more, the French-Canadian literature. But let me quote from Sir Charles G. D. Roberts -- himself a Maritimer:

"When I was beginning to write, I was not aware of any such thing as Canadian literature...But I did dream of starting a Canadian Literature; and I joyously hailed the first efforts of Lampman and Carman, as the beginnings of it."

That was in the 1880's - - only sixty years or so ago.

It is true that such a starting date ignores Haliburton, Goldsmith, Sangster and Heavyssege, but listen again to the young poet of the 1880's, this time Archibald Lampman, who, as a student at Trinity College School, had come across Roberts' first book, Orion and Other Poems:

Like most of the young fellows about me, I had been under the depressing conviction that we were situated hopelessly on the outskirts of civilization, where no art and no literature could be, and that it was useless to expect that anything great could be done by any of our companions, still more useless to expect that we could do it ourselves. I sat up most of the night reading and re-reading Orion in a state of the wildest excitement.....

From this it is quite clear that Lampman in 1880 or 1881 did not think there was yet any such thing as Canadian literature, unless Roberts' poems were the faint beginnings.

Actually, Lampman, Carman, Roberts, the two Scotts, and one or two others were to have the honor of fostering a Canadian literature, and Canadian poetry, at least, reached its first peak in 1893, that famous year which saw the appearance of Carman's Low Tide on Grand Pré, Lampman's Lyrics of Earth, D. C. Scott's The Magic Earth and Roberts' Songs of the Common Day.

That was fifty years ago, and never since has it been possible to argue away the existence of a Canadian literature. There have been other peaks as well as isolated achievements. The year 1921 saw the honoring of a Poet Laureate and the creation of the Canadian Authors' Association. The year 1926 was notable because there was another and even more remarkable publication of poetry, the collected works of the senior poets like Duncan Campbell Scott and Lampman and Roberts, the complete poems of Marjorie Pickthall and W. D. Drummond, and offerings by a younger generation such as Wilson MacDonald, E. J. Pratt and Lloyd Roberts.

These were the main peaks in poetry; there were no parallel achievements in fiction: only sporadic sensations like the appearance of Jalna in 1927. Nor did our achievements in history, biography, criticism, the essay, or discussion of national affairs measure up to our poetry.

Indeed, after the auspicious beginnings of the 1890's and the solid achievements in poetry of the Group born between 1860 and 1864, there was a singular backwardness about our growth toward a great national literature. All sorts of eyes were trained anxiously upon our book-lists from year to year, and every new achievement was hailed with pride and enthusiasm, but, somehow or other, the trickle of good stuff never became the flood we were looking for. This late harvest made some Canadians unduly apologetic, and they offered all sorts of explanations for our sterility, while others pugnaciously boasted about what we had done, in a way which couldn't help suggesting an inferiority complex deep down underneath.

No one I know has watched more anxiously for the advent of a Golden Age of Canadian Letters than William Arthur Deacon, and I find him as recently as 1931 writing defensively such things as these:

"What we are suffering from is not youth but age. Canadian literature already in existence is a good deal better than is generally admitted. Its low rating is primarily due to the timidity of Canadians, and to their ignorance of the subject, which is itself the product of the false assumption that, if Canadian literature were good, it would be widely known and highly esteemed in other countries."

But Deacon's intellectual honesty impelled him to add, a few paragraphs further down the same article (in Open House, a book of essays) a confession that even those who, like himself, had a wide acquaintance with the Canadian Literature of that date, were far from complacent about it:

Of the improvement in Canadian literature (he wrote) there is no doubt. One can almost see the difference from year to year; at five year intervals the steps are quite visible. But it is not enough. Pedestrian efforts will not avail for the final elevation, where the wall rises sheer, and only sound craftsmanship, propelled by inspiration, can make the final leap to the top.

The following year the Royal Society of Canada celebrated its 50th anniversary, and Dr. Lorne Pierce, perhaps our most learned bookman, was asked to prepare a survey of English-Canadian letters. His judgment was sober and objective. He said:

Charles G. D. Roberts in A History of Canada (1896) declared that our literature was then only at the beginning. So are we yet.

And after a careful appraisal of the outstanding names and works in our literature, Dr. Pierce concluded:

The best of our poetry challenges comparison with the best in the world; our fiction is far below in artistry, ideas and truth to life. It shows the lack of care and discipline. It is satisfied with picturesque aspects of the surface of our frontier life. Compare it with contemporary fiction in Great Britain and the United States, most of it likewise regional, and note the vast gulf.

The 1930's did not contribute a great deal to Canadian literature. Disillusionment and spiritual stagnation was widespread. It was an era of unemployment and depression, and books sold even more discouragingly in Canada than usual. The democracies were on the defensive: the poets of the Waste Land school were more vocal than others.

In an acute analysis, part of which was first published in 1938 and part in 1941, Professor E.K. Brown, who, in his book On Canadian Poetry has given us one of our first enduring works of literary criticism -- exposed the economic, psychological and spiritual handicaps which Canadian writers have faced. It is quite evident that he did not, at that date, expect any early triumph over our obstacles.

Professor Brown's admirable analysis known to all of you who have read his book, but for the sake of those of you who are not familiar with it, I should like to summarize his argument.

"Canadian books," he says, "may occasionally have had a mild impact outside Canada; Canadian literature has had none. Even within the national borders the impact of Canadian books and of Canadian literature has been relatively superficial. The almost feverish concern with its growth on the part of a small minority is no substitute for eager general sympathy or excitement".

He goes on to explain why this has been so. There has always been the economic handicap. Counting out the three millions or so of French-Canadians who do not read English-Canadian letters to any extent, and another million of new Canadians who have not yet become assimilated into our cultural ways, it leaves us about eight millions as a potential population of readers: these are scattered along 3000 miles North of the U.S. boundary,

many of them far from the main publishing centres of Canada, subject to the attraction of U.S. books and magazines and to the competition of British writings. Canadian writers have found it difficult to make a living from their works; either they have emigrated or they have tried to write in their spare time; or they have deliberately aimed at the U.S. or U.K. markets by de-nationalizing their books.

Over and above these economic handicaps, Professor Brown enumerated serious spiritual and psychological obstacles to the creation of a great Canadian literature. There was the colonial spirit, which looked wistfully across our borders to some great good land elsewhere, leaning upon the cultures of other countries. There was the failure of Canadians to unite their diversified regions and cultures into a single nation. There was the contemptuous attitude of the frontier toward books and culture, -- the spirit which worshipped the man who could subdue his physical environment but ignored the writer, the artist and the abstract thinker. There was the dead hand of a rigid Puritanism, which not only censored discussion of many of the most intriguing aspects of life, but even frowned upon all art and aesthetics as immoral.

III

The remarkable thing is that we have so far surmounted such formidable obstacles that these statements have already lost some of their force. The economic and psychological setting has not greatly changed, but in some mysterious manner we have begun to witness two parallel and enheartening developments: (a) the growth of a creditable body of professional writers, most of them still young, who promise great things in the early future; and (b) a market for Canadian writing both in Canada and the United States sufficiently profitable to provide, for the first time, a sort of financial guarantee for further literary effort. If current rewards continue, we may venture to hope that the writing profession will begin to attract some of the talent which in the past has turned aside -- often with regret -- to some more lucrative walk of life.

Now it may prove that 1943 and 1944 were exceptional years; and that in the early future conditions will revert to their deplorable norm. It may be that economic changes brought about by the war, reducing the competition of U.K. and U.S. books, increasing the cash in the pockets of Canadian buyers at a time when it cannot be spent upon new automobiles, new radios, travel and the like, are largely responsible for the current book-buying splurge by Canadians; and that when the war is over, or shortly afterwards, it will again be almost impossible for a Canadian to earn a decent living by writing books. I am sufficiently optimistic to believe that part of the improvement is permanent. I believe that Canadian writers will hold most of the ground they have recently gained. I believe that in spite of discouraging manifestations, Canada is nearer to becoming a great united nation than ever before. If so, then the days of "colonial" dependence, of neglect and starvation for our authors, has probably gone forever, and we have moved into a more hopeful and constructive period of our literary history.

IV

At any rate, for the first time in my own recollection, and I am sure in anybody's recollection, Canadian readers this fall and winter have had to wait many weeks for Canadian books, simply because the enhanced demand could not be supplied.

In a survey which he prepared at the beginning of Book Week last November, the literary editor of the Toronto Globe and Mail, whom I have already quoted, called attention to the singular fact that with 48 new Canadian books of merit listed for 1944 publication, and each of them being published in quantities which would have been thought ample in earlier years, Book Week was upon Canadians with stocks of books already published being exhausted, and with several important 1944 books not yet available at all. He went on to give some figures. Seven thousand copies of Gwethalyn Graham's Earth and High Heaven would he said, be available by Christmas, but the demand was estimated to be several times that. Ten thousand copies of Bruce Hutchison's The Hollow Men had been printed at that date, and publishers were working on a further order of 5,000. Matthew Halton's Ten Years to Alamein had appeared in a first edition of 5,000 and a further 5,000 were expected in about a month.

Quantities like that used to be exceptional. Six or seven years ago a Canadian publisher told me that only one Canadian novelist, Mazo de la Roche, sold over the 5,000 mark in Canada as a regular thing. Indeed, I was told by someone at that time that the average sale of a Canadian book in Canada was only about 500 copies, a figure which spelled serious loss for the publisher, and negligible royalties for the writer. (At that time a Canadian publisher needed to sell 2000 copies to get "out of the red" unless he could persuade a New York or London publisher to bear the lion's share of the risk, and satisfied himself with importing a few hundred sets of sheets for Canadian consumption). How impressed I was to be told by the Canadian publisher of Collins' books that 20,000 copies of Thorn-Apple Tree had been sold up to the end of the first year. It has sold many additional copies since. Another recent book to break the old statistical averages was Bruce Hutchinson's The Unknown Country, which, I believe, sold 20,000 copies of so in the original edition and as many more in the re-print edition. Four, five and six printings of some recent Canadian books have been made. I ordered a copy of Gwethalyn Graham's new book from New York as soon as it was announced, and when my copy arrived it was a fourth printing. Even books of poems, notoriously hard to sell, have gone into second and third printings.

Of course it would be possible to go back through Canadian book history and find isolated instances of books which many years ago sold in tens of thousands. I can at once think of two, St. Cuthbert's, by R. E. Knowles, and Robert J. C. Stead's The Cowpuncher. But I am sure there is no precedent for the substantial sale of such a wide range of Canadian books as we have seen in the past two or three years. In the two decades between the wars, Macmillan's for example, used to encourage Canadian Letters by bringing out works with little prospect of financial reward, so much so that they went 'in the red' consistently on their general Canadian list, but they have now enjoyed two profitable years, which is good news for Canadian authors, since publishing is a partnership which cannot succeed for long unless both partners profit. Some time ago I wrote to Thomas H. Raddall, author of His Majesty's Yankees to express my delight in that historical novel, and in his reply he told me that it had already sold over 10,000 copies. Since then his collection of short stories, The Pied Piper of Dipper Creek has won the Governor General's award, and his novel of the Founding of Halifax, Roger Sudden has appeared and has been welcomed by readers and critics. If good Canadian books can count on a sale in Canada of from 5,000 to 20,000 copies, with an occasional favorite running two or three times that, then the financial return to the author will be large enough to enable him to keep the wolf from the door and devote his best creative years to writing, instead of being driven to accept any bread-and-butter job that comes along.

In passing let me remind you that an author will require a year, two years, sometimes four, five, eight or ten years, to complete a serious work of fiction, history, poetry, or other branch of literature. He may write several books without winning the attention of the reader, and then by a combination of merit and good fortune publish a best seller. If such a work is the result of several years' hard work, it seems only reasonable that he should be permitted to spread his income over a similar number of years. And if the Dominion Income Tax Branch still classifies author's receipts for writing and selling books as "unearned income" subject to super-tax, then the anomaly should be removed without delay. Anyone who has tried to make his living in Canada from writing appreciates the grim irony of classifying the meagre returns from such endeavor as "unearned" income. For fifty years it has been just about the hardest earned income in the world.

V

Quantities and prices, of course, are in themselves no evidence of a Golden Age of Letters, and I would not attach much critical importance to the sudden popularity of Canadian books among Canadian Readers did I not believe that it reflected the stirring of new life in artistic and cultural matters. What are the phenomena which create for me the strong impression that we are in the midst of, or at least on the doorstep of, a notable phase in Canadian Letters?

1. The recent appearance of two more professional writers, living in Canada, writing Canadian books for Canadian readers, and with such literary quality as to appeal to international audiences.

I refer, of course, to Thomas H. Raddall of Liverpool, N.S. and Gwethalyn Graham of Montreal. Of whom, more anon.

2. The awarding of a Canadian Book-of-the-Month Selection to a Canadian author, namely, Bruce Hutchison for The Hollow Men. This is the first time to my knowledge that such an honor has been given to a native of Canada, and one hopes it will become a regular thing. If we cannot support a Canadian Book-of-the-Month Club, - or a Book-of-the-Quarter-Club-ourselves, then the occasional appearance of a Canadian Book as monthly selection in a U.S. enterprise is much to be applauded. It provides one more inducement in the way of prestige and cold cash to the aspiring Canadian author.

3. The appearance of a Canadian History, Don G. Creighton's Dominion of the North, which for the first time recites Canada's story against a scholarly background of her economic, sociological and political realities. Dominion of the North should do much to set new standards for Canadian history -- which in the past has leaned overmuch to impressionistic chronicles of events, unrelated to the broad stream of social history. Creighton is still a young man and he is now exploring the intriguing and exciting possibilities in a history of the life and times of Sir John A. MacDonald.

4. There is a new enthusiasm for poetry. E.J. Pratt's - Brebeuf and His Brethren has been called the finest narrative poem in our literature. It has been performed over the CBC with a musical setting by Healey Willan. Pratt's collected works have appeared recently, and are selling well in the United States and Canada. The "Montreal" school of poetry is winning recognition. Leo Cox has been awarded the Prix David. The anthologies of Gustafson and Smith are making Canadian poetry more widely known. There has been an encouraging output of chap books and small volumes of poetry, several of them by service-men. I mention in particular A.M. Klein's Hitleriad, Joseph Schull's - I, Jones, Soldier, Frederick B. Watt's - Who Dare to Live and Joy Tranter's - A soldier's legacy.

5. A surprisingly large number of good, competently written, workmanlike, honest novels have recently appeared, in which company I would include Angus Mowat's - Carrying Place, Wilfrid Heighington's - The Cannon's Mouth, - Lovat Dickson's - Out of the West Land, Grace Campbell's two books, Thorn Apple Tree and The Higher Hill, Hugh MacLennan's - Barometer Rising and Frederick Philip Grove's - The Master of the Mill. There are probably others which I would add if I had read them. Not many years ago we felt proud if two or three competent novels came out every fall. This year and last there have been a dozen or more.

6. The appearance of war diaries and histories which one is not ashamed to set alongside the best similar writing from England or the United States. Outstanding, I think, in this field, is Matthew Halton's Ten Years to Alamein, which, in my judgment, is the ablest piece of literary writing by a Canadian war correspondent in our history.

7. The emergence, in her 70th year, of an established master of the light intimate and humorous essay, to wit, Miss Emily Carr, author of Klee Wyck, The Book of Small and The House of all Sorts.

8. Encouraging items which, of themselves, may not seem significant, but which, added to the above, round out the picture. The ability of such writers as R. Ross Annett, David Lamson, and Bruce Hutchison, to "make" the leading American magazines, with Ross Annett giving literary immortality for the first time, to the "dried-out" farmer of Palliser's Triangle. An enthusiastic and successful writers conference at Banff last August. The bright lively character of - The Canadian Author and Bookman these days. The knowledge that several of our leading novelists are already at work on national themes of the widest significance. The new encouragement being given to the drama by the CBC.

9. Then of great importance is the emergence of a body of sound, scholarly and constructive criticism, for whom we must thank in particular Professor E. K. Brown, whom I have already quoted, Professor A. J. M. Smith, whose anthology of Canadian poetry with introduction and notes was something of a landmark in our literary history, W.E. Collin, whose The White Savannahs seems to have been grossly neglected, Professor Roy

Daniells, and all those critics and authors who have been responsible for the annual survey of letters in Canada published in the University of Toronto Quarterly.

10. You will notice that I have carefully refrained from appraising the state of affairs in French-Canadian Letters. This is not because I have forgotten them, but because of my ignorance of the subject. But my friends who keep in touch with such matters assure me that a parallel phenomenon has been observed there, also, that more and better French-Canadian books are being published, that French-Canadian publishing houses are more enterprising about bringing out Canadian work, that since the fall of France they have undertaken to supply not only French-Canada but many other parts of the world with French classics and reprints. In the province of Quebec there has been a renewed interest by the critics and newspaper commentators in literary affairs, and the space devoted by the French-Canadian press to books rather puts our English newspapers to shame. Among the more outstanding French-Canadian literary works of recent years I should mention the novels of Dr. Panneton, Leo-Paul Desrosier and Roger Lemelin, the historical works of Gui Fregault, and the classic study of Victor Hugo and the visionaries of his time by Professor August Viatte. In poetry, essays, and the drama there has also been an awakening of new life.

VI

Nearly eighteen years ago I read Jalna month by month as it appeared in the Atlantic Monthly; and early in July, 1927, I sat down and wrote the following paragraph for a Canadian newspaper:

Congratulations, Mazo de la Roche!

Yesterday I read the second and third instalments of Jalna, and waxed more enthusiastic than I have over any writing for many a long day. When I got to the end of the second instalment I was ready to prance about my room in sheer delight. It was not only patriotic and literary fervour, -- joy in the fact that at last Canada has produced a novelist worthy of the name, but joy in sheer creation, the same sort of exuberance that makes one, sometimes, while reading Dickens, fling the book high into the air and utter lusty war whoops. That scene in the Whiteoak family when young Piers brings home his bride is one of the most dramatic and amusing scenes I have read anywhere.

I recall that incident because such thrills are scarce, and because once or twice in the past two years I have felt a similar surge of enthusiasm.

One of these came when I read Gwethalyn Graham's - Earth and High Heaven, a few weeks ago.

I have no doubt that the average Canadian has been chiefly awed by the impressive pot of gold to which Miss Graham has been led by her success, but the appearance of Earth and High Heaven is an even more important event in the literary history of Canada than in the economic fortunes of Canadian authors. It is important for its promise as much as for the actual achievement. Miss Graham has elected to be a professional Canadian author -- a very audacious undertaking; she has had the courage to choose a contemporary Canadian theme and a controversial one at that, has had the pluck to persist through many discouraging years, and has had the artistic integrity which was not satisfied with inferior work, no matter how much writing and revising and polishing was required. She has now had her reward. Incidentally, she has presented us with a novel which at once takes its place among the really skillful Canadian novels. In this she has amply fulfilled the promise shown in her first novel, - Swiss Sonata, published seven years ago, of which Professor J. R. MacGillivray wisely commented:

" .. The general impression is of imaginative plenty, of ease in composition, and of reserve power, which makes one expect even better work in the future."

I do not praise Earth and High Heaven because it has made a lot of money, or because it has been climbing up near the top of the N.Y. Times Literary Section's Chart of Best Sellers, or because eminent critics in several countries have lauded it.

Why, then, do I single it out from all recent Canadian novels for special mention? Because of the assurance and mastery of its construction, the professional finish of its style, the intellectual respect which the handling of the theme commands, the deftness in character portrayal, the wit and convincingness of its dialogue. The novel is strong in so many and various places in which we are always finding weaknesses, finding them and apologizing a bit in our hearts, because, after all, we say, we can't expect our Canadian writers to measure up to those slick London and New York authors! But in reading Earth and High Heaven it is not necessary to explain anything away. Everything is done with smooth competence, so that one can concentrate on the story without the usual distractions of awkward phrases, incredible episodes, speeches out of character, and the like.

The theme of Earth and High Heaven which most commentators have singled out is the Semitic problem. But it is really wider than that, and is of the utmost significance for a heterogeneous country like Canada, and for all countries in an age when the engineers and the scientists have made the whole world one. It is the problem of assimilation, and of mixed marriage, and of breaking out of our bigotry and narrow provincialism and ultra-conventionalism -- all of which we must do if we are to live in a world in which peace has become indivisible and in which all men are our neighbours and should be our friends. This is a book with a lesson of peculiar concern to Canada now and in the future.

Gwethalyn Graham's success should give heart to her fellow-writers in Canada. She has blazed a promising trail. The possibilities before her, both as author and as exemplar, seem endless. If she goes on in her present vein, she will establish a firm place in the international world of letters.

Another Canadian novelist who seems to me to have broken new ground is Thomas Raddall. His first book - His Majesty's Yankees -- a catchy title for U.S. readers, possibly, but not altogether happy -- is the most interesting Canadian historical novel I have ever read. And I believe it is authentic. Raddall has studied Indian life, and military campaigns, and the early days of Nova Scotia, and is that rare bird among writers, one who is at once erudite and sparkling. I am in the midst of reading - Roger Sudden now, and I believe that in some ways it marks an advance even beyond the charm and scholarship of his first novel.

VII

Among the many sage remarks in Professor E.K. Brown's book on Canadian poetry is this:

One of the forces that can help a civilization to come of age is the presentation of its surfaces and depths in works of imagination in such a fashion that the reader says, 'I now understand myself and my milieu with a fullness and a clearness greater than before.'

I believe that novels like those of Miss Graham and Mr. Raddall do perform that service for the Canadian reader. What we need now are more of the same skill and penetration. We need some outstanding imaginative works on Confederation, on the Birth of a Canadian Nation, on the great men of our past, on the problem of Canadian unity, on the relations between the English-Canadian and the French-Canadian, on the relations with the New-Canadian, and on Canada's role in the new world. We have endless spiritual and social themes, and our writers no longer need, as Lorne Pierce put it, to concern themselves exclusively with the 'picturesque aspects of the surface of our frontier life'. We are no longer a pioneer fringe: we are an important nation, whose stature has been established before the whole world in the past five years.

It need occasion no surprise that Canadian literature should have blossomed in the midst of a fearful war. For many years before the actual outbreak, democracy was on the defensive. Appeasing and yielding and rotting, while many detached observers wondered if Mussolini and Hitler had discovered a more efficient philosophy on which to build a nation. But all that has changed. For two years or more we have been on the offensive, both from a military and a spiritual point of view. We have renewed our faith in democracy and individualism and in the Christianity out of which both sprang. You remember what Shelley wrote in 1821; after a long period of revolution and war:

"We live among such philosopher^s and poets as surpass beyond comparison any who have appeared since the last national struggle for civil and religious liberty. The most unflinching herald, companion and followers of the awakening of a great people, to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution, is poetry. At such periods there is an accumulation of the power of communicating and receiving intense and impassioned conceptions respecting man and nature . . . Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present. . . the trumpets which sing to battle . . . the unacknowledged legislators of the world".

It is on this high note I should like to leave my subject. I believe our service men and women are going to return to Canada with a new vision, a new cosmopolitan outlook which will not tolerate narrow bigotry and parochialism. I believe they will expect us to work with them in raising Canada to spiritual and cultural levels in keeping with the new economic and political status to which they -- and the war workers at home -- have raised this country. And in the forefront we would expect Canadian writers, joining in with other spiritual leaders, to find voice and symbol for the new era.

January 26th, 1945.

Dear Mr. Eggleston,

It was most kind of you to let me have a copy of your address to the Montreal Women's Club. I wish I could have been there -- not just to hear some heartwarming things about my own work, but to meet you and to hear this masterly summary and progress-report delivered in person. For it is masterly, it's the best summary of our literary growing pains that I've seen, as well as the most encouraging.

Canadian letters have suffered from an inferiority complex, of course. You are a newspaper man and it was natural for you to turn aside and write "The High Plains"; you were accustomed to seeing your work in print and you needed no intermediary on which to try your hand. But the majority of our writers must depend on the magazines for that, and in Canada you might say we have only one magazine. Maclean's encourages young Canadian writers of course, but its capacity is severely limited and of necessity it must reject a great part of the material submitted to it. Back go the manuscripts and there is an audible dashing of hopes from coast to coast. You hear the cry, "If a Canadian story isn't good enough for a Canadian magazine, who on earth is going to publish it?" Who indeed? -- for too many of the writers follow the modern ~~dogma~~ dogma about "slanting your stuff to a particular editor" and aim their tales like so many rifles. A miss is as good as a mile.

The fault lies with the editors who insist on a "slant", I suppose, but this doesn't excuse the writer, who should aim his story at the world. A good tale is a good tale in any language, in any magazine or book. It must be well told, though, and here again the writer has no excuse. Some Pierce put it very crisply when he said "our fiction ... shows lack of care and discipline". I know because from time to time I am asked to address groups of writers and would-be writers, who usually bring manuscripts for discussion. Too many of them are obsessed with that tiresome old notion that you have to "get a break", and having got it you can "sit down and rattle off anything" -- and sell it for great sums. When you mention re-writing -- and re-writing and re-writing, when you point out that a well-told tale is usually the product of great drudgery, they regard you with knowing smiles as if you were trying to invest your craft with some sort of initiatory-ordeal rite, witch-doctor fashion.

Nevertheless a satisfying number are busy learning their trade, with full confidence that they can make their own "breaks" when the time comes because they have tales worth telling to the world -- and telling in the best way possible. It is a good sign, one more assurance that we have come of age. The story of Canada past and present has been little told, even within our own borders, and it is time. Once we realize that the workmanship must be worthy of the material we have leaped our greatest barrier -- and the world is waiting for our tale.

With all good wishes,

Sincerely,



House of Commons
Canada

THE PRESS GALLERY

November 14th, 1946.

Dear Mr. Raddall:

I am delighted to hear you expect to be in Ottawa and have consented to talk to the Authors here. Mrs. Eggleston and I hope you are not engaged for that afternoon nor for dinner before the Authors' meeting, since we would like to have the honor of entertaining you at our residence, "Blinkbonny" on the Aylmer Road (Quebec side of the river). Could you find time to drop me a note or, failing that, give me a ring at my home number (2-9823) when you get into Ottawa? I had planned to go down to the convention at Toronto at the end of June but Mr. Ilsley queered that by bringing down his budget: I was sorry to have thus missed meeting you but hope we can make up for it on your visit here.

Sincerely yours,

Wilfrid Eggleston.

WILFRID EGGLESTON

DIRECTOR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM

Carleton College

RESIDENCE: 234 CLEWOW AVENUE,
OTTAWA, ONT.
TELEPHONE - 2-9823

October 2, 1954.

Dear Mr. Reddall:

I am writing you on an impulse that may merely waste a little of your valuable time, or maybe of some use to you: you will be the best judge of that.

This summer a Mrs. Jones of Ottawa, an old acquaintance of ours, turned over to me for appraisal some literary and graphic material on the history of St. Paul's Island, of which I knew nothing but which I am sure is no stranger to you. Her grandfather, John Campbell and later her father Samuel Cunard Campbell were 'governors' of the island, and she herself was born on the island. I found that the principal items in the collection were, a 12,000 (word) 'History' -- described as 'collected and arranged from the Official Records and Diaries of my Grandfather... my Father, and my Brother, John Malcolm Campbell, by Lena Campbell Jones.' A second item is a 2,000 word sketch of autobiography or reminiscence of her earliest recollections and girlhood days on the island, by Mrs. Jones. The material includes a chart of the island, listing 40 wrecks that took place nearby or on its rocks and shoals. The Royal Sovereign was among the ships. Included also is a column by Commander D.G. Jeffrey (from one of the Halifax papers July (?) 1938), which contains the following sentence: 'Someone should write the history of St. Paul's ...it has Sable Island backed off the map'. There are also some photographs.

Mrs. Jones is neither a professional historian nor a competent writer. She turned the material over to me, I think, in the hope that I would be interested in working it up either as a long magazine article or a small book. But I was prairie-bred and could not do anything worthy of the theme. I am not sure that anyone can or will; but the reference to Sable Island, and the way the story, amateurish as it was in its telling, seized my imagination, made me wonder whether it would be of any interest or value to you. I am not Mrs. Jones' literary attorney, and I have no idea whether she thinks her material has some cash value. My impression is that her main concern is the preservation of lore linked up very intimately with her family, in some permanent and dignified form. Now it may well be that the theme has already been exhaustively exploited. It may be that there is nothing in her material not available elsewhere. I am writing only on the long chance that you might like to look at the two manuscripts and the chart, which I could send you if you wished. Mrs. Jones is not acquainted with any Maritime authors, I gather. Now all this may not interest you in the slightest, and I have too high a regard for you to want to add to your present labours. I am sure you will have no difficulty in composing an answer to this, and I shall not feel put out no matter what it is.

Best regards,

Sincerely
Wilfrid Eggleston

WILFRID EGGLESTON

DIRECTOR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM

Carleton College

OTTAWA COLUMNIST SATURDAY NIGHT

Ans'd
Mar. 26/51

229 POWELL AVENUE

OTTAWA, ONT.

TELEPHONE - 2-9823

March 24/51

Dear Mr. Raddall:

You may not have seen the attached, which appeared in the Winnipeg Free Press a little over a month ago. Also, we at Carleton College have been offering an evening course on Canadian Writers. I had the honour of discussing your work in a symposium on modern Canadian fiction ^{on Mar 6th}. I hope all goes well with you.

Sincerely, Wilfrid Eggleston.

August 22, 1980

Dear Wilfrid:

I'm delighted with the autographed copy of "Literary Friends", which I sat down and read as soon as I got back from my morning trip to the post office. Enjoyed every bit of it, especially the references to Charles and Theodore Roberts.

I didn't join the Merkel circle at 50 South Park street in Halifax until about 1940, so I never met the Roberts brothers and the rest of the merry group of "Song Fishermen" (their own term) who congregated there in the 1920s and 30s.

I heard a lot about them from Andrew and Tully Merkel and one or two others of the original circle.

One of Merkel's most prized possessions was a copy of Elsie Pomeroy's sycophantic biography of Charles, in which brother "Thebe" had inscribed his own comments and revelations of matters that poor prim Elsie obviously didn't know about.

I don't know what became of Merkel's library after his death, but the book is surely in existence somewhere. It's absolutely hilarious.

Like you I had, and still have a high regard for Charles' early poetry and most of his nature stories, but the rest of his long life's production was simply rubbish.

Even some of the animal stories are poor things. I remember one about grizzlies in the Rockies, written at a time when Charles had never seen the Rockies, except perhaps from a train, and indeed had never seen a grizzly except in the London zoo.

All good wishes,

JHR

Wilfrid Eggleston
Ottawa