

## SAMUEL E. DAWSON



SAMUEL EDWARD DAWSON, Litt. D., a prominent Canadian author, King's printer to the Dominion Government, Ottawa, was born at Halifax, June 1, 1833, and was educated in that city—commencing his business career of bookseller and stationer at Montreal in partnership with his father. He was one of the founders of the "Dominion Bank Company," 1879, and one of the promoters of the "Montreal News Company," 1880. Appointed a member of the Board of Protestant School Commissioners, Montreal, 1878, he became also a member of the Board of Arts and Manufactures of the Province of Quebec, and was subsequently for some years president of that body, and also secretary to the Art Association. Dr. Dawson was one of the earliest contributors to the "Canadian Monthly Magazine," and has written many essays and articles on literary and historic subjects for the Athenæum Club, the Montreal "Gazette," the Montreal "Star," the Toronto "Week," and other well-known journals. He has also written on the topic of "International Copyright." Of separate works from his pen, the most important is "A Study of Lord Tennyson's Poem 'The Princess'" (1882; 2d ed., 1884), which has been pronounced "the best and most appreciative study of the poem that has anywhere appeared." The preface to the last edition contains an interesting letter from the late English poet laureate, which "throws light upon some important literary questions regarding the manner and method of the poet's working," and repudiates the charge of conscious imitation or plagiarism. Lord Tennyson truthfully described the "Study" as "an able and thoughtful essay." Dr. Dawson has also written two monographs on the voyages of the Cabots and the land-fall of 1497, which were read before the Royal Society of Canada, of which body he was elected a Fellow in 1893. In 1890, he received the degree of Litt. D. from Laval University, and in 1891 was appointed "Queen's Printer, and Controller of Stationery of Canada." He still fills this office, now styled "King's Printer."

### THE PROSE WRITERS OF CANADA

[Address prepared for the American Library Association and delivered at Montreal, June 11, 1900. The fact that it was written for the librarians of America will account for the line of thought running through the address; because, outside of a few great institutions, few Canadian books are found in the libraries of the United States.]

IT is not possible in the compass of one lecture to give an adequate account of the prose-writers of Canada. In the first place there is the difficulty of dealing with a bi-lingual literature, and then there is the difficulty of separating

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that which deserves mention from the current mass of printed communication. When one is called upon—in this age of newspapers and magazines—to decide as to what is and what is not prose literature, the difficulty is enhanced by the fact that some of our best prose-writers have never published a single detached volume.

In a general review such as this it will be profitable to inquire into the circumstances under which Canadian literature originated and by which it was directed into its actual channels, when we will at once perceive that, with reference to the history of the other nations of America, Canada is both young and old. Jamestown, the first English settlement on this continent, was founded in 1607. It has been desolate for two hundred years, but Quebec—founded in 1608, only one year later—is still flourishing.

Besides being brave soldiers and skilful seamen, both Samuel de Champlain and Captain John Smith were authors and led the way in English and French prose-writing in America; but there was a break in the continuity of development in the north, while in the south the colony of Massachusetts became the centre of an intellectual life which, though it flowed in a narrow channel, was intense and uninterrupted.

Canadian literature and Canadian history open with the works of Samuel de Champlain. Champlain was an author in the fullest sense of the word; for he even illustrated his own works and drew excellent maps which he published with them. His works include not only his voyages in Acadia and Canada, but his previous voyage to the West Indies and his description of Mexico. He wrote also short treatises on navigation and map-making which are still useful to explain early cartography. The edition of his works published at



Quebec in 1870, under the auspices of Laval University, is a monument of the scholarship of the Abbé Laverdière, its editor, and of the generosity of its publisher. A librarian need no longer spend money upon original editions, for this is the most complete of all, and it is, besides, the most creditable specimen of the printer's art ever published in Canada.

From the time of Champlain down to the conquest in 1759 learned and cultivated men, ecclesiastics for the most part, wrote in and about Canada; but their books were published in Europe. Marc Lescarbot, a companion of Champlain in Acadia, wrote, in French, a history of New France and enticed "Les Muses de la Nouvelle France" to sing beside the rushing tides of the Bay of Fundy.

Then came the long series of Jesuit Relations, the books of Father Le Clercq, the Latin history of Du Creux, the learned work of Father Lafiteau, the letters of Marie Guyart, the Huron Dictionary and the History of Father Sagard, the Travels of Hennepin, the general treatise of Bacqueville de La Potherie, and the works of Father Charlevoix, still the great resource of writers on Canadian subjects.

There were many others. There was De Tonti—never since Jonathan was there friendship so devoted as his was to La Salle. There was Denys—the capable and enterprising governor of Cape Breton; and Boucher—the plain colonist from the frontier post of Three Rivers (then beset with savage Iroquois) who stood up before the Great King and pleaded the cause of the despairing colony; and then, lest we become too serious, we have that frivolous young officer, the Baron de Lahontan, who paid off the pious priests of Montreal for tearing leaves out of his naughty pagan books by telling slanderous stories of all the good people of Canada.

But this literature, while considerable in extent, was not

indigenous to the soil, although in quality it was, perhaps, superior to that of the English colonies. There were educational institutions and teaching orders and cultivated people; but education did not reach the mass. A printing-press was set up at Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the year 1639, but one hundred and twenty years later, when Canada passed under British rule, there was not one printing-press in the whole of New France. Even the card money was hand-written, and the Ordonnances—a sort of government debentures passing current as money—were printed in France. There was in New France a polite and cultivated society; but the literature which existed was a reflex of the culture of Old France—of the France of the Bourbon kings. This jealousy of the press in Canada is very remarkable, because there was at least one printing-press in Mexico in 1539, and in Peru in 1586.

Upon a people thus socially organized the English conquest fell with great force, for, at the peace in 1763, when New France was definitely ceded, a large number of the educated laymen emigrated to France and left the people without their natural leaders.

I am aware that this has been recently disputed; but I am loath to believe that Bibaud, Garneau, and above all the conscientious and judicious Abbé Ferland, can be in error. The truth lies probably between the two extremes, and it will be safer to say that those who had any concern with the French government or army, or who had any claims upon or connection with the French court, emigrated. Now, when we consider that the government was despotic, and that there was no semblance of free institutions to afford an outlet for independent energy or ambition, we will recognize the effect of such an emigration. It is to the honor of the clergy that



they did not abandon their charge. Bowing to circumstances beyond their control, they severed their connection with their motherland; and, if French literature in Canada now breathes with a life all its own, it is due to the Church which sustained it in its time of sore discouragement.

Literature could not flourish under such conditions; moreover, French and English Canadians both had yet to undergo many trials and many political and military experiences. These they shared in common; for in those days intermarriages were frequent, and the two races understood each other better than they do now. Was it because the age of newspapers had not come?

The English who first came to Canada did not come in pursuit of literature; and, besides, the air was charged with electricity; for the treaty of peace had scarcely been ratified when the Stamp Act was passed. In the ensuing struggle, after some hesitation, the new subjects of England sided with her; for, in the much maligned Quebec Act, she had dealt justly, and even kindly, with them, and they rallied to her support. The war swept to the walls of Quebec, and yet the commissioners of the Continental Congress could not sweep the province into the continental union. Even the astute Franklin, in whose hands Oswald, and Hartley, and Lord Shelburne were as wax, and who was able to outwit even a statesman like Vergennes, was foiled at Montreal by the polite but inflexible resolution of the French-Canadian clergy and gentry.

The tide of invasion receded, and peace came at last—but not repose; for with peace came the sorrowful procession of proscribed refugees who laid the foundations of English Canada. United Empire Loyalists they were called, and United Empire Loyalists are their descendants to the present

day. Well is it for us they were educated men; for the institutions their fathers had helped to found had to be left behind; and they set their faces to the unbroken wilderness where the forest came down to the water's edge, where the only roads were Indian trails or paths made by wild animals through the thickets. The time for literature had not come; for there were farms to be cleared, and roads and bridges and churches and schoolhouses to be built. All these lay behind them in the homes from which they had been driven. Clearly, then, if we want original Canadian works for our libraries, we must pass over these years.

But not yet was this people to find repose, for our grandparents had scant time to organize themselves into civil communities when war broke out again and once more they took up arms for the principles they held dear. The struggle was exhausting, for they had to fight almost alone. The mother country could give very little assistance, because she was engaged in a life-and-death conflict with a world in arms. In that "splendid isolation" which has more than once been the destiny of England, the little half-French, half-English dependency stood firm; but her frontiers were again swept by invasion.

The destruction of war and subsequent recovery from its effects postponed again the era of literature; for our land was all border land and felt the scourge of war in its whole extent. At last came peace, and the Canadian people could settle down to the normal development of their own institutions; but long, long years had been lost, and it was not until 1825 or 1830 that any interest in the pursuit of literature began to be felt.

And now that I have endeavored to make plain the circumstances which retarded the development of Canadian



literature, I will pass on to a short and necessarily imperfect survey of the books of which it is composed, and you will find, as might have been supposed, that our prose literature has naturally followed up those directions which had special reference to practical life.

No one, I think, but Rich, had been devoting himself to the bibliography of American books when Faribault published in 1837, at Quebec, in French, his "Catalogue of works on the history of America with special reference to those relating to Canada, Acadia, and Louisiana." He had served in the war; but when the Literary and Historical Society was founded he became one of its most active members. He was president and then perpetual secretary, and in his time were published those reprints of scarce works which are now so rare. He had been chief adviser in collecting the "Americana" in the Parliamentary library which was burned in 1849, and he was then sent to Europe to make purchases to replace the loss. Faribault's catalogue contains valuable notes, both original and extracted. It is now very scarce—a copy in the Menzies sale brought \$8.

Morgan's "Bibliotheca Canadensis" is the next in order. It is a work of great industry and covers the whole period from the conquest down to the time of its appearance in 1867. The same writer's "Canadian Men and Women of the Time," published in 1898, practically continues the first work; for, although it contains notices of a vast number of people who are not in the remotest way connected with letters, yet all the *littérateurs* are there—"all," I said somewhat inadvertently, for there are a few important names omitted.

In 1886 the late Dr. Kingsford published a book called "Canadian Archæology," dealing with early printed Cana-

dian books, and he supplemented it, in 1892, by another—the "Early Bibliography of Ontario"—for the first had been written too hurriedly to be accurate. Sir John Bourinot also has done excellent work in this field in his "Intellectual Development of the Canadian People" (Toronto, 1881), and in a monograph for the Royal Society of Canada, "Canada's Intellectual Strength and Weakness" (1893).

A work of great importance on Canadian bibliography is by Phileas Gagnon—"Essai de Bibliographie Canadienne"—a handsome octavo of 722 pages, published by the author at Quebec in 1895. It contains valuable notes and facsimile reprints of rare title-pages. Besides these there is an exhaustive annotated bibliography, by Macfarlane, of books printed in New Brunswick (St. John, 1895); Lareau's "Histoire de la Littérature Canadienne" (Montreal, 1874); and Haight's "Catalogue of Canadian Books" (Toronto, 1896). I can mention only these few: there are besides innumerable monographs in French and English, separate and in magazines, for the subject is a favorite one with Canadians. The catalogues of the parliamentary library at Ottawa and of the public library at Toronto are also very useful to collectors and students.

The English kings entertained no jealousy of the printing-press. William Caxton had a good position at the court of Margaret Plantagenet, Duchess of Burgundy, and her brother, King Edward IV, received him into high favor. In 1503 two of his apprentices were made "King's Printers," and since that time there has always existed by patent a royal printer ("Regius Impressor") through whom alone the orders and proclamations of the government were issued.

The office of king's printer became thereafter an important factor in English administration, and it was introduced



into all the colonies. No sooner, therefore, was Canada definitely ceded in 1763 than a printing-office became a government necessity at Quebec, and in 1767 Brown & Gilmore published, by authority, a folio volume of Ordinances. William Brown continued to print for the Crown; but the first imprint which appears to indicate the existence of a formal royal patent direct from the Crown is that of William Vondenvelden in 1797. John Bennett was king's printer in Upper Canada in 1801. Christopher Sower was king's printer in New Brunswick in 1785, and John Bushell was king's printer in Nova Scotia as early as 1752. In 1756 we find his name affixed to a proclamation offering £25 for every Micmac scalp. Settlers on the outskirts of Halifax had been losing scalps; for the Micmacs made their collection a labor of love, and the Abbé le Loutre, who controlled the Micmacs, could buy eighteen British scalps for only 1,800 livres. Naturally they had to bid higher at Halifax. All this did not invite to literary pursuits; but the volumes of statutes and official documents were well printed, and if literature did not flourish it was not for want of a printing-office. These volumes were books, but not literature and cannot be noticed here.

It will be of interest to say a few words about the first books—the Canadian "incunabula" so precious to bibliophiles. The first book printed at Quebec was "Le Catéchisme du Diocèse de Sens" (Brown & Gilmore, 1764—one year after the cession). Only one copy is now known. Then followed, in 1767, an "Abridgment of Christian Doctrine," in Montagnais, by Father Labrosse. Then Cugnet's "Traité de la Loi des Fiefs"—and other branches of the old French law (for it was in four parts) (William Brown, 1775). Cugnet was a very able civil lawyer. He became clerk to

the Council and assisted the English government by advising them upon the old laws of Canada.

The first book printed at Montreal was "Le Règlement de la Confrérie de l'Adoration Perpétuelle du Saint Sacrement" (Mesplet & Berger, 1776). Then we have "Le Juge a Paix," a translation of a portion of Burn's "Justice of the Peace," by J. F. Perrault, a volume of 560 pages, octavo, printed by Mesplets in 1789. Religion and law are the two organizing factors of society, and this practical people were chiefly concerned with conduct in this world, not forgetting regard to the next, in which everybody fully believed. Later on, in 1810, we find the imprint of Nathan Mower on a reprint of Bishop Porteous's "Evidences." In 1812 appeared Blyth's "Narrative of the Death of Louis XVI," and in 1816 a volume of Roman Catholic prayers in Iroquois. These are not all the books printed in those years, but the titles indicate the tendencies of the people.

We have in Huston's "Répertoire National" (the first edition of which is very scarce, but which was reprinted in four volumes at Montreal in 1893) a collection of extracts,—in fact a cyclopædia of native French-Canadian literature from the earliest times down to 1848. One piece alone (a poem) bears date prior to the English period. It is dated 1734. From 1778 to 1802 there are only twelve articles. It was not until 1832 that the French national spirit became thoroughly awake, and from that year the extracts became increasingly numerous.

The first books in general literature began to appear in 1830 and 1831, and in 1832 the Legislative Assembly passed the first Copyright Act. That year would then be a convenient date from which to reckon the revival of literature in Canada. Do not suppose that the Canadian people were



uncultivated in those days. Although they were too busy to become writers they were great readers, and there were more book-stores in proportion to the population than now.

The first book in general literature published in Upper Canada was a novel, "St. Ursula's Convent; or, The Nun of Canada," printed at Kingston in 1824. There was also a press at Niagara (on the Lake) which did some reprinting; for we find that in 1831 Southey's "Life of Nelson" and Galt's "Life of Byron" were printed there. The same press issued in 1832 an original work by David Thompson, a "History of the War of 1812," and in 1836 was printed at Toronto a book of 152 pages in octavo, "The Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, and the Origin of the North American Indians." This book was reprinted in the United States.

I cannot pretend, in a paper like this, to give more than a general indication of the extent of publication in those days. There were books and pamphlets I shall not have space to mention; but there were very few books published in Lower Canada before 1833, and in Upper Canada before 1841. During all that period, however, there were many prose-writers; for the newspaper press was very active, and in the times before telegraphs, when news came by letter, the newspapers contained more original matter, compared with advertisements, than they do now. Newspapers did not contain so many contradictory statements, for there was more time to secure accuracy. They were diligently read, and editorials were more valued than now. Dare I say they were more carefully written?

The political circumstances of Canada are so exceptional that almost every problem which can arise in the domain of politics has been, at some time or other, encountered by our

statesmen. Questions of race, of language, of religion, of education—questions of local government, of provincial autonomy, of federative union—of the relative obligations between an imperial central power and self-governing colonies—have all been, of necessity, threshed out in the Dominion of Canada. Their underlying principles have not only been laid bare, but legislation has built firm social and political structures upon them.

For this reason there has always been a great deal of political pamphleteering in Canada, and of solid thinking also, which in later days and in larger communities would have been expanded into books. I have a great respect for a pamphlet upon a serious subject, because I feel sure the author did not write it for money, but because he had something to say. Pamphlets come hot from the brain of a man who cannot help writing. Great revolutions have been wrought by pamphlets falling, like burning coals, upon inflammable materials. Many of the pamphlets relate to the union of the colonies. Many of them look forward to the organization of the Empire, but, able though many of them were, the times were not ripe. The people of England were then, as they still are, in political thought far behind the colonists.

For the reasons cited above, the number of our prose-writers who have devoted their labors to constitutional and parliamentary history and law is large. Two, however, stand out before the others and have won high reputation throughout Britain and her colonies. Dr. Alpheus Todd and Sir John Bourinot are known wherever parliamentary institutions are studied. Dr. Todd's chief work, "Parliamentary Government in England," is one of the great standard authorities. It has passed through two editions, and a con-



densed edition has been published by a leading English writer. It has also been translated into German and Italian. He wrote also a work, indispensable to the self-governing colonies of the Empire, "Parliamentary Government in the British Colonies," in which is set forth in clear detail and with abounding references the mode of adaptation of the British parliamentary system to all the diverse colonies of the Empire.

The name of Sir John Bourinot, the Clerk of the House of Commons, must frequently be mentioned in any account of Canadian literature. His literary work is large in extent and is valued throughout all English-speaking communities. His "Parliamentary Procedure" is the accepted authority of our Parliament. His "Constitutional History of Canada" is the best manual on the subject. His two series of "Lectures on Federal Government in Canada" and "Local Government in Canada" have been published in the Johns Hopkins "University Studies," and his "Comparative Study of the Political Systems of Canada and the United States," read before Harvard University and the Johns Hopkins School of Political Science, has been published in the "Annals of the American Academy of Political Science." On these and kindred subjects he has contributed largely, not only to the periodicals of his native country, but to reviews in England and in the United States.

Although I have specially mentioned these two writers there are many others who have done important work in this field; as, for instance, Prof. Ashley, now of Harvard, whose "Lectures on the Earlier Constitutional History of Canada" are highly esteemed, and William H. Clement, whose volume on "Canadian Constitutional Law" is the text-book at Toronto University. The field was very wide, and from the

first the problems to be solved after the cession were complex and difficult. A people, alien in race, religion, and language, and immensely superior in numbers, were to be governed, not as serfs, but as freemen and equals. It was a civilization and a system of law equal to their own with which the English had to reckon; and with a religion which penetrated to the very foundation of society as deeply as did their own national churches. The subject is profoundly interesting, and there is a mass of literature relating to it.

A few English immigrants who came in from the southern colonies immediately after the conquest thought to govern the country without reference to the institutions of the conquered people, and the early English governors, General Murray and Lord Dorchester, were to the French Canadians a wall of defence. The period may be studied in the works of Baron Masères, a man of great ability who was attorney-general of the Province and afterward baron of the exchequer court in England. He was of Huguenot stock and had strong anti-Roman prejudices, though personally very amiable. He could not see why the French should not prefer the English civil and ecclesiastical laws, and he wrote a number of books to persuade them to do so. He utterly failed to comprehend the French Canadians, though he was French in race and spoke and wrote French like a native. Later on came the discussions which led to the division of the Province and the separation of Upper from Lower Canada. Then followed the agitations of Papineau in the Lower, and of Gourlay and Mackenzie in the Upper Province, with an abundant crop of pamphlets leading up to the re-union.

But while these were sometimes merely party pamphlets of no real value, there was also much writing by such men as the Howes, Sewells, Stuarts, Robinsons, Haliburtons, and