

The Career of "Ralph Connor"

"In a recent issue passing reference was made in a book review of "Corporal Cameron" to the career of the author "Ralph Connor." The review of the book, however,, was in no wise a sketch of the writer. The career of Rev. Dr. Charles W. Gordon bristles with so many points of interest that we have thought it well to present a more extended character sketch in this number. It is written by an intimate friend of Dr. Gordon and contains considerable new matter which will be read with satisfaction by his Canadian admirers.

By Harris L. Adams

A COMPETENT critic, when discussing the writings of Ralph Connor, stated that he had been quite misguided as to the game of poker, and that his description of its mysteries indicated that he had not been to the manner born, and had not succeeded in getting in touch with expert players. The critic, however, added that when our author came to describe a fight he could write both forcibly and accurately — none better. The advocates of heredity would account for this by the traditions of his ancestors, indicated by the possession of his family of the famous Gordon bagpipes, presented to one of his forebears for deeds of prowess on the field of war.

Ralph Connor, the *nom de plume* of Rev. Charles W. Gordon, D.D., of Winnipeg, is a Presbyterian minister as his father and grandfather were before him, but in his veins runs the blood of a long line of fighting ancestors. A very distant relative of the family was the illustrious General Gordon, popularly known as Chinese Gordon.

The author was born at Indian Lands in the County of Glengarry, which he has made famous by two of his books, "The Man from Glengarry" and "Glengarry School Days." When he was a lad the family moved to Harrington, in the County of Oxford, which contains the famous township of Zorra. The name, however, is of Spanish origin,

not Gaelic, as is often supposed. It was presumably one of his father's congregation who, when the Fenian Invasion from the United States was threatened, made the remark: "They may capture Toronto, but they'll no tak Zorra."

After studying at the St. Mary's Collegiate Institute and teaching himself for a short time, Gordon came to the University of Toronto. Among his college experiences, probably the one to which Ralph Connor owes most, was the fine classical scholarship of Principal Maurice Hutton from whom he acquired his literary tastes and his philosophical outlook on life and its problems. No one could come in contact as young Gordon did, with George Paxton Young, who has been described as the Prince of Teachers, without deriving great and lasting benefit from his wholesome idealism. To Sir Daniel Wilson may be ascribed his keen historical sense. Though Gordon never was a mathematician yet to the teaching of such master minds as Professor Loudon, afterward President of the University, and Professor Baker, now Dean of the Faculty of Arts, is largely due the habit of clear thinking and close reasoning, which has made him a leader in Church and State. At the University Charlie, as he was then called, took a leading share in the various College activities, such, for instance, as the Glee Club and Football, and played a distinguished

which is situated on Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, has become one of the most influential in Western Canada. It is characteristic of the man, that he ex-

A few years after going to Winnipeg he married the only daughter of the late Rev. J. M. King, formerly Principal of Manitoba College, who before going to



REV. CHARLES W. GORDON (RALPH CONNOR).

pects the congregation to pay his salary regularly in a business way, but it is well-known that he hands it all back with large additions, to be devoted to the work of the church.

Winnipeg was for many years the honored minister of St. James Square Church, Toronto, to whose services his erudite scholarship attracted many of the more thoughtful of the University

students, including Gordon himself. His love of nature is intense and being an accomplished canoeist, he has seen many of the beautiful rivers and lakes of Canada, which are quite unknown to the ordinary tourist. "Beyond the Marshes" describes a thrilling personal experience of his own in Lake-Winnipeg.

His keen interest in athletics, kept up since his college days, helps to make Dr. Gordon a great favorite, especially among the young people of Winnipeg and the West.

Not only does he discharge the work connected with his own congregation, faithfully and efficiently, but he also takes an increasingly important and prominent part in the work of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. He is Convenor of several important committees; and on questions of church policy and statesmanship no voice is more prevailing than that of Dr. Gordon of Winnipeg.

When, for instance, difficulties arose in regard to the Chair of Colonial History at Queen's University, Kingston, endowed by the generosity of one of her most distinguished graduates, Dr. James Douglas, Dr. Gordon was Chairman of the Committee appointed to find a solution, and the matter has been settled along the lines recommended by him. The chair is now ably filled by Professor W. L. Grant, who left a more lucrative position at Oxford to carry on the great work to which his eminent father, Principal Grant, had devoted his life.

Notwithstanding the heavy demands of his pastoral, ecclesiastical, and literary work, Dr. Gordon keeps thoroughly posted on all the great public questions of the time. He has made a special study of the relations of capital and labor. When appointed Chairman of the Board of Conciliation under the Lemieux Act, to deal with the bitter strike in Winnipeg of the Street Railway employees, he succeeded in bringing the warring parties together, and in effecting a settlement along the lines which he himself worked out.

Many of the leading thinkers of Great Britain, who in increasing numbers now visit Canada, make a point of

discussing Imperial problems and Canadian conditions with Dr. Gordon and find that few others have so accurate a knowledge of Canada and its needs, or have thought more profoundly on the problems with which Canada is face to face and must solve.

His Alma Mater, Knox College, recognized his work by conferring on him the Doctor's Degree and he was similarly honored by Queen's University. Some years ago Dr. Gordon was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada.

It is a curious reflection upon the supposed shrewdness of our cousins to the South, that Ralph Connor's first book, which was highly valued in England, was rejected by the United States Publishers, though when his fame became established the sales of pirated editions mounted up to the millions, and publishers eagerly competed for the privilege of printing his next book, "Sky Pilot," in the following year of 1899. Only two years elapsed before the publication of his next book, "The Man from Glengarry," which was followed the next year by "Glengarry School Days." Two years later (1904) appeared "The Prospector," to be followed in 1906 by "The Doctor"; in 1908 by his Biography of Dr. James Robertson and a booklet "The Angel and the Star." Four years ago appeared "The Foreigner" and in 1912 "Corporal Cameron," which contains an adequate tribute to the patriotic work of that splendid body of The North-West Mounted Police, and was discussed in a recent issue of MacLean's as the best seller of the month.

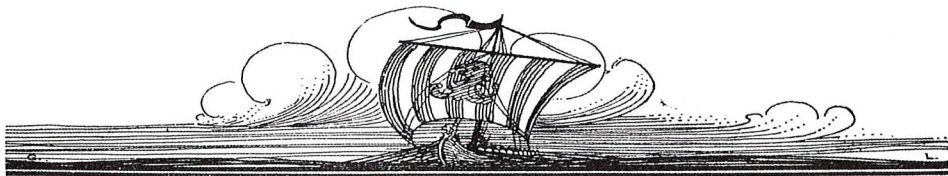
Space will not permit a detailed analysis of his literary work or an estimate of its value. A close study, however, of his productions to date forces the conclusions upon one, that in Ralph Connor we have the promise and potency of a great literary work, which will truly and nobly interpret the voice of the Canadian West, a work which will finely combine the force and robust vigor of "The Man from Glengarry," with the exquisite polish of "The Sky Pilot" and "Black Rock," and do for this present

generation what was so splendidly done for the last, by Charles Mair.

The task is a worthy one, for the time is at hand when the voice of the West will be the voice of Canada and when the voice of Canada will dominate that Great Empire of which we may now, more truly than even in the mighty days of Cromwell, say with Milton in his "Areopagitica":—

"For as in the body, when the blood is fresh, the spirits pure and vigorous, not only to vital, but to rational faculties, and those in the acutest, and the perfect operations of wit and subtlety, it argues in what good plight and constitution the body is, as that it has, not only wherewith to guard well its own freedom and safety, but to spare, and to bestow upon the sublimest points of controversie, and new invention, it betok'n us not degenerated, nor dropping

to a fatal decay, but casting off the old and wrincl'd skin of corruption to outlive these pangs and wax young again, entering the glorious ways of Truth and prosperous virtue, destin'd to become great and honorable in these latter ages. *Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks.* Methinks I see her as an Eagle muing her mighty mouth, and kindling her undazzl'd eyes at the full midday beam; purging and unscaling her long abused sight at the fountain itself of heavenly radiance, while the whole noise of timorous and flocking birds, with those also that love the twilight, flutter about, amaz'd at what she means, and in their envious gabble would prognosticat a year of sects and schisms."



DISILLUSIONMENT

It has gone!
 Out of thine eyes that swerveless look,
 That gave thyself, in love, to me,
 —Gave until all my spirit shook
 At its poor insufficiency—
 Awed—as some little novice pale,
 Breathing to Christ her child-white vows
 By a new altar's rail.

It has gone. . . .
 And having gone, I know—dear God—
 It cannot come again. We meet
 And smile with rigid lips, or nod.
 The wound has dried, but incomplete,
 Stealthily changed is life. Alone,
 With eyes awe-starved, I crouch beside
 My broken altar-stone.

Mary Linda Bradley.

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