

Despite Rom

Albertans' Books Rank High Among Best Sellers

By BEATRICE DAFOE

"NO wonder this country produces wonderful poetry and novels when every place you look there is such gorgeous scenery and every place you go you hear such romantic stories." This was said to me by a friend while strolling through the countryside around Ayr, Robert Burns' birthplace. I have thought of that often since coming to Calgary for here we have scenery which surpasses anything else in the world and a history full of "thrillers" and romance that certainly should produce a "best seller." Many books have been written of Alberta and many in Alberta but as yet the great novel from this great country has not been produced.

Robert J. C. Stead, "the Poet of the Prairies," wrote several novels, "Grain" probably being the best and perhaps surpassing any other fiction of Western Canadian life. He was born in Middleville, Ontario, and moved to Manitoba with his parents at the age of two. His schooling with instructors stopped when he was thirteen, but he continued his diligent studying by himself, even mastering the Latin grammar. At eighteen years of age he published a newspaper, then managed and later owned a lumber yard. In 1910 he sold out his interests in Manitoba, joined in the great rush to Alberta and went into the motor car business in High River. Soon after that he came to Calgary where he did newspaper work for a few months, then resigned that post to join the C.P.R. in the Natural Resources Department, and several years later became Director of Publicity for the Federal Department of Immigration and Colonization at Ottawa. He started writing at an early age, first poetry, but soon making the name for himself as one of Canada's foremost novelists by publishing three volumes: "The Bail Jumper," "The Homesteaders" and "The Cow Puncher," and later his greatest, called "Grain," which I have mentioned. In these books you see he is well acquainted with western life. He shows the struggles of the early settlers and the building of the country west of Winnipeg. He writes with humor and philosophy in an entertaining manner. His years of experience on the prairies is shown in a volume of verse called "Empire Builders," next followed "Prairie Born" and "Songs Of the Prairies." In 1917 he published a poem of twenty lines called "Kitchener" which was written the night the news of the death of this soldier was received in Canada. This is probably his greatest and most outstanding poetical achievement. His work is simple and earnest and shows a great understanding of our Western provinces.

IN this vast world of ours if any one crosses our path who has achieved even a small amount of fame in the minds of outsiders we are so quick to claim them for our own. Many writers have lived in Alberta for a short or longer period, some have written of us and our country and many have written of other places.

Laura Goodman Salverson has resided in Calgary on two different occasions, and both times while here she has brought fame to herself and we like to feel to us also. Mrs. Salverson was born in Winnipeg of Icelandic parents and she writes of her own people in a most interesting manner. Her book, "The Viking Heart," tells of the hardships and sufferings of the early settlers in Canada, how they existed and of the makeshifts they had to use for domestic work and farming. To quote from her book—a mother coming home from her son's funeral, says that this Canada which had demanded so much of them—it was her country. The peace which was hers he had paid for. The old saying of her father's flashed through her mind: "All things with blood and toil are bought—all joys are cleansed in tears," and the minister at the burial said: "Your son is dead, yet liveth in the life of his country." So it was and is of the Canadian pioneers. Mrs. Salverson received the Governor General's prize and also a French award on a later novel called "Dark Weaver."

Arthur Stringer is another writer we like to claim for ours as he owns a ranch in Alberta and has spent considerable time here. His verse is unusually attractive; all who have read his book, "The Prairie Wife," will always remember it. In this story, which is really a series of letters, he tells of a couple struggling to adapt themselves to this new wheat country and to one another. His descriptions of prairie scenes show that he is a poet as well as a fiction writer. Although born in Chatham, Ontario, he too shows a keen understanding into the hearts and feelings of the westerners.

Onota Watanna, known to many in Calgary as Mrs. Francis Reeve, is the author of more than eighteen novels, hundreds of short stories and several scenarios. She wrote many very popular stories of Japan. Sunny San, one of the best, was produced on a New York stage and later filmed as have been many of her writings. She has her home in Calgary now, but up to a short time ago Mrs. Reeve lived at Morley on the beautiful Bow View Ranch between Banff and Calgary. This already famous writer published her novel, "Cattle," in 1923. It is a sincere conception of life on the plains.

William George Hardy, Professor of Classics at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, has written two splendid novels. The first, "Father Abraham," which received the Book Guild choice in England, and the second, "Turn Back the River," a Roman novel. Hugh Eayres says Professor Hardy is the "most promising writer in Canada."

Miss Donald J. Dickie, I feel should be mentioned here. Her writings and teachings started over fifteen years ago and have been along the lines of the new education. To quote her she says, "I believe the great fault in the teaching of history to be that the children are required to learn a chronological outline of events, dates, wars and steps in political development before they have been given any social background to which to relate their events. All political events are the out-growth of the lives of the people and are understandable, meaningful and memorable only when they are thought of in connection with the social life of the community. The ideas of social conditions must be grasped before events are understood." Our social studies of today emphasize this. Miss Dickie, an instructor in the Calgary Normal school, has written several text books authorized for use in the public schools of Alberta by the Minister of Education. Among them were "Modern Practice in the Teaching of Composition," "Learning to Speak and Write," and several readers and text books on Canadian History.

In 1926 Mary E. Waagen, a resident of Calgary at the time, although a native of Quebec, wrote a book called "The Wayside Cross." This is a French Canadian Habitant Folk story that was a prize winner in the English section of the David Literary prizes. It was a clean, admirable contribution to our Canadian literature. Calgary was proud of this exquisite literary work.

MRS. ARTHUR MURPHY, widely known as "Janey Canuck," has done a great deal to spread Western Canada's work throughout the world by her life and works. She was another native of Ontario, but came to Alberta in 1907. When in 1915 she was appointed Police Magistrate in Edmonton she was the first woman in the British Empire to be so honored. She worked strenuously for women's rights, did a great deal of club work and was always keenly interested in charitable organizations and strived endlessly for better hospitalization to be put in the reach of all. Her first books, "Janey Canuck in the West," "Open Trails" and "Seeds of Pine," are stories of pioneer life in the West told in an entertaining and witty manner. Her book, "The Black

Candle," which deals with the alarming spread of drugs in Canada shows, by her keen insight and accurate portrayal, her study on this subject. Her books all have literary merit. An extract from one of them shows her strong faith in the West. "No man is ever broke," she says, "at least not for long in the Canadian Northwest. Here a man does not necessarily lie as he makes his bed—when he loses his reputation he at once gets another—the same with his fortune."

I heard some one say a couple of years ago, when the Board of Governors of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation was named with eight men and one woman, but as that woman was Nellie McClung they thought it was properly balanced. For the last I have purposely left this author, lecturer, humanitarian, and I am proud to say, friend, Mrs. McClung was born in Cheshworth, Ontario, in 1873, and came West in 1880 by train to St. Boniface, then by boat across the river to Winnipeg. A short time later traveled for two weeks by ox-train to Millford, a distance of one hundred and eighty miles. The first school was opened in Manitoba in 1884 when the author started her education. In July, 1889, she went to Brandon and wrote the teachers examinations and passed and attended Normal school in Winnipeg for five months that winter. She taught the next year in Hazel school, three miles from Manitou. After teaching for several years she married in 1896 and moved to Alberta in 1914 and resided in Calgary until four years ago. The best known of her books were written here — "In Times Like These," essays published in 1915—"Sowing Seeds in Danny," "The Second Chance," "Purple Springs" and "Clearing in the West," which is autobiographical. Mrs. McClung was one of the first women to be elected to a seat in the provincial legislature of Alberta. She is the most widely known woman platform speaker in Canada. She always shows a keen interest in public welfare and her opinions are always honest and candid. Calgaryans are always proud to say "Our Nellie McClung."

There has been much more written of and in Alberta than I have mentioned here as many writers have chosen the prairie and foothill country as the locale of their stories and the majority of the most popular Canadian writers have at some time called the West their home. There has not in my estimation been a great poem or great novel written as yet of this wonderful province of ours. Certainly the material is here. A few years ago a very popular novel was written in the United States called "Oil," so perhaps a story with Turner Valley for its background will be the one to surpass all others. Or perhaps a native son or native daughter will write as Margaret Mitchell did in "Gone With the Wind," or Laura Krev in "And Tell of Time." Just stories told to them and put together in such an interesting way that they became "best sellers."