

**THE PROSE WRITERS OF
CANADA; AN ADDRESS
DELIVERED BEFORE THE
TEACHERS OF THE CITY AND
DISTRICT OF MONTREAL**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649190980

The prose writers of Canada; an address delivered before the teachers of the city and District of Montreal by S. E. Dawson

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S. E. DAWSON

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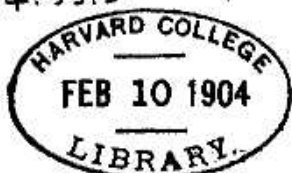
BY S. E. DAWSON, LIT.D. (LAVAL) F.R.S.C.
AUTHOR OF A STUDY OF "THE PRINCESS." THE CABOT VOYAGES, &c., &c.

MONTREAL
E. M. RENOUF, ST. CATHERINE STREET
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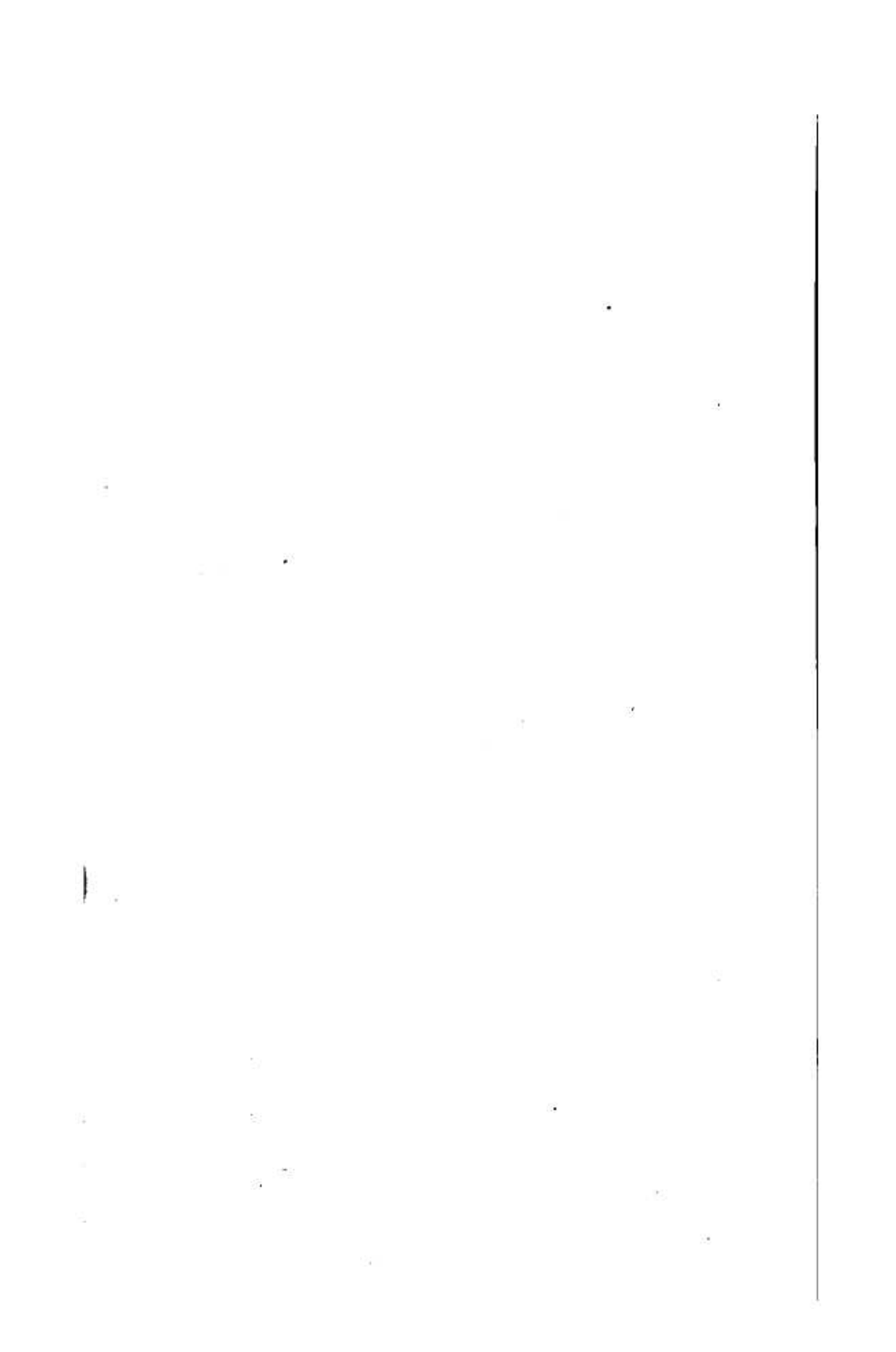
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PREFATORY NOTE.

The following address was prepared for the American Library Association and delivered on June 11, 1900, at Montreal, where the meeting for that year was held. It was afterwards read, with a few additions, on December 7, 1900, in a winter course of lectures to the teachers of the City and District of Montreal.

The fact that it was written originally 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 was intended to be an indication of the directions in which they were to look in order to follow up a neglected department of literature. In the time allotted it could not possibly be more than that.

OTTAWA, January, 1901.



THE PROSE WRITERS OF CANADA.

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 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