

OBITUARY

Stephen Butler Leacock (1869-1944)

The death of Stephen Leacock late in March, 1944, removed a very distinguished figure from the great world of letters and one of the "founders" from the little world of Canadian social science.

In 1938 a number of lectures on the founders of social studies in Canada were delivered in the University of Toronto. The lectures on Adam Shortt by W. A. Mackintosh and on W. J. Ashley by A. P. Usher were published in this JOURNAL in May of that year. The lecture on Stephen Leacock by H. A. Innis is published below, along with a short tribute from Professor J. P. Day. [V.W.B.]

* * *

Stephen Butler Leacock was born at Swanmore, Hants, England, on December 30, 1869. He migrated with his parents to Canada when he was six years of age. They travelled thirty miles in a lumber wagon from the end of steel and settled on a farm near Lake Simcoe in 1876. He was nine years of age before he saw a railway again. "We lived," he wrote in *My Discovery of the West*, "and had lived for five years before the Manitoba migration on a Canadian farm four miles back of Lake Simcoe, in an isolation not known today even in the Arctic. The nearest village was four miles away, through great cedar swamps, and over narrow roads—a horse and buggy or sleigh the only means of communication. There was no railway. Newspapers we never saw. No one came and went. There was nowhere to come and go." The Manitoba migration followed the beginning of construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. The boom of 1881 and 1882 in the Canadian North-west attracted an uncle, George Leacock, and in turn Stephen Leacock's father. A sale was held on the farm and they proceeded to Winnipeg. After a period of about a year the father lost his money in real estate speculations.

Stephen, whose father, W. P. Leacock, is described in the records of the College as a "land agent" in Winnipeg, attended Upper Canada College for a month in January, 1882, re-entered in the session 1882-3, and graduated as head boy in 1887. He entered the second year at the University of Toronto in 1887-8 and was first in first class in English, Italian, and Spanish, and second in first class in History, French, and English. He was not in the University in the session 1888-9, but was engaged in teaching to secure the necessary funds. He taught at Strathroy the last three months of 1888 where he had among his students, Arthur Currie, later Sir Arthur and his Principal at McGill University, and Professor James T. Shotwell, and at Uxbridge in 1889. In his third year at the University, 1889-90, he was in first class in all his subjects (History, English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish): in his fourth year, 1890-1, he was first in four subjects but third in English and Ethnology. The third in Ethnology was the result of a mistake. "I remember in my fourth year in Toronto going into the exam room and picking up a paper which I carelessly took for English Philology; I wrote on it, passed on it and was pleasantly surprised two weeks later when they gave me a degree

in Ethnology. I had written the wrong paper. This story oddly enough is true." The third in English, there is reason to believe, was a result of the appointment of a young man with high standards in that subject named Professor W. J. Alexander.

In his final year Leacock was Associate Editor of *The Varsity* under W. S. McLay, later Dean of Arts of McMaster University, as the Editor-in-Chief, and Mr. G. H. Ferguson, later Premier of Ontario, as Business Manager. His literary activity took the form of almost weekly articles by "The Sanctum Philosopher." These were short comments on a great number of subjects of interest to University students of that day, in which the mould of later work was clearly discernible. In his first effort on Convocation he wrote:

Picture to ourselves the faculty as they sit before us. All of them are washed clean and dressed in their Sunday suits; no flannel shirts to-day; I venture to assert that almost every professor and senator has put on clean linen and a white collar, and this, too, for our behoof. Perhaps, too, some of them haven't got their shirts and collars on right-side-before, or they may, many of them, be hitching their necks to hide a bone collar-stud. What could be more embarrassing or trying to their equanimity than this? How many of them, too, are nervous, shy men, dazed at seeing so many people together, at the size of the room, and the acclamations of the gathered multitude! Some of them, too, may have mothers; those mothers may be sitting in the vast throng listening with proudly-throbbing pulses to catch the clamour-drowned accents of their Johnnies. For a senator or professor is still his mother's Johnny, lecture he never so wisely. Fellow students, if there is any among you who has a mother, or knows another man who has, let him pause and think of the feelings of a professor's mother when she hears her boy asked, before the assembled multitude, if he has had his hair cut, or, perchance, rudely bidden to have it at the first opportunity. Placed, as the faculty are, in such trying circumstances, is it not unkind to ask them where they got their hats? Is it not ungenerous to suggest to our instructors to pull down their vests before they speak? True, the vest may be indecorously elevated as the professor begins to soar, but would it not be the manly course if one of our number should quietly step forward and pull it down for him? Remember they are doing their best to amuse us; in a humble way, yes, but let us not on that account rudely scoff at it. Seek, rather, to set them at their ease and aid them to laugh off their natural embarrassment.

These undergraduate contributions are not mentioned in the bibliography prepared under the direction of Miss Higgins, but they deserve study by any student of his development. "A Lost Work" (an epic in the style of Hiawatha supposed to have been recovered from débris of the University Library after the fire), and the project for the establishment of the University of Moon College, particularly deserve mention.

His interests in the University were varied. He read before the Modern Language Club an essay "Strummeliebe" of Müsaus, the German satirist. "The essay consisted of a concise and admirably written epitome of the very pleasing story that Müsaus has given to the world. It was written in Mr. Leacock's best style; it was simple and easily understood, while his facetious manner of handling the subject added much to the enjoyment of those who were fortunate enough to hear it. It is needless to add that the pronunciation and general style of reading was faultless" (*The Varsity*, March 10th, 1891). He left an impression on University life in speaking as in writing. He gave a reading "as a German would have done" of "Der Gang nach dem Eisenhammer." At the Meds' fourth annual banquet he especially distinguished himself by "making what many considered the speech of the evening. It was

certainly the wittiest, very cleverly constructed and delivered in a most pleasing manner."

In his last two years at the University he was an assistant master at Upper Canada College and on graduation from the University he was appointed Modern Languages Master, which position he held until June, 1899. The last four years he was Senior House Master. During this period, or the twenties of his life, while carrying on the arduous work of teaching, he wrote some of his best humorous work. This consisted of short sketches which were published in North American periodicals, especially in *Truth* and *Life*. "Boarding House Geometry" first appeared in *Truth*, edited by Peter McArthur, and was republished in *Punch*. "My Financial Career" was published in *Life*. Their success was evident in the reprinting in England and in translations into foreign languages. The high standard of the work precluded production on a large scale and involved slight returns.

His writing was powerfully influenced by Lewis Carroll¹ (possibly through the influence of Principal Hutton). The lives of Stephen Leacock and Lewis Carroll have many parallels. Both were engaged in academic work, one in political science and the other in mathematics, and both made important contributions in the field of nonsense and humour. Their best work involves an adaptation of their chief academic work to the field of nonsense. Lewis Carroll achieved his effects by applying the abstraction of mathematics to biological material. Political science was used to much the same effect. Lewis Carroll collected all the fragments of his interests and brought them into the loosely knit *Sylvia and Bruno*—a sort of catch basin—a mixture of exquisite nonsense and sentimental slush. Leacock expanded the various odds and ends left over from his main work into books. Paper and ink are cheaper in these days. They were in sharp contrast in their dealings with publishers as recent evidence has shown the hopeless inadequacies of Lewis Carroll.²

Leacock would rather have written *Alice in Wonderland* than the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Throughout this period he was experimenting with the technique of humour. He explains in his volume on that subject his extensive use of the form in which "words and phrases are rushed forward in to a significance which they won't bear on a closer inspection, in fact its significance involves an impossibility." For example the man who leaped upon his horse and rode madly off in all directions.

With the turn of the century, facing the prospect of a teacher's salary at Upper Canada or the uncertainty of a writer's earnings, he decided to abandon school teaching and entered graduate work in the field of political economy in September, 1899, at the University of Chicago. In his second and third

¹"The Dynamics of a Parti-cle"—Plain anger is the inclination of two voters to one another who meet together but whose views are not in the same direction (*The Complete Works of Lewis Carroll*, New York, 1936, p. 1131). "Boarding House Geometry"—A wrangle is the disinclination of two boarders to each other that meet together but are not in the same line (Stephen Leacock, *Literary Lapses*, pp. 26-7). See also *The Complete Works of Lewis Carroll*, pp. 836, 1139; *Literary Lapses*, pp. 5, 237.

²See Charles Morgan, *The House of Macmillan, 1843-1943* (London, 1943).

years, 1900-1 and 1901-2 he held a fellowship and took the degree of Doctor of Philosophy on June 16, 1903. His thesis was the "Doctrine of Laissez-Faire." With the change from modern languages to political science he transferred his allegiance from Toronto to McGill to strike roots in a new subject and a new city. Sir William Peterson was appointed Principal of McGill University in 1895. He established a Department of Economics and Political Science in 1901 and appointed Professor A. W. Flux to a chair endowed by William Dow. Leacock apparently took work with the Department as he was given credit at the University of Chicago for six courses of advanced standing taken at McGill. He was appointed Lecturer from 1903 to 1906 when he became Associate Professor. His academic interests were indicated in the publication of the *Elements of Political Science* (Boston, 1906), which has gone through several editions and is still used as a standard text. It has not the slightest indication of an interest in humorous writing. In the following year he published in the Makers of Canada Series under the editorship of Professor Pelham Edgar, a volume on *Baldwin, Lafontaine, and Hincks*. It is an excellent coherent account of the struggle for responsible government⁸ in the forties of the last century. Robert Baldwin emerges as the hero and Professor Leacock's strong liberal tendencies stamped the work. His knowledge of the English and French background in Ontario and Quebec enabled him to write an interesting interpretative study.

The polemics of political journalism in the thirties and forties of the last century in Canada influenced his later humorous writings. In the description of the Metcalfe campaign he wrote:

Even the Mohawk Indians of the Bay of Quinte were pressed into political service. On the subject of responsible government the ideas of the chiefs were doubtless a little hazy and they discreetly avoided it, but their prayer that the Great Spirit would long spare their gracious mother to govern them may be taken as a rude paraphrase of the Tory argument against the ministry. They regretted the removal of the great council fire from Cataragui to some hundred miles nearer the sun's rising but lapsed into language much less convincingly Indian by saying that the question is simply this; whether this country is to remain under the protection and government of the Queen or to become one of the United States.

In 1908 he contributed a paper to the American Political Science Association on the "Limitations of Federal Government," which may have been read by members of the Rowell-Sirois Commission. The boundary lines of the prairie provinces were "astronomical expressions whose location can only be found by the aid of a solar observation." An article in the *American Political Science Review* in 1910, on the Union of South Africa, referred to the "drowsy nullity of the Canadian Senate."

In 1907 an ominous storm of imperialism broke over him and carried him from his moorings. The *University Magazine* in April of that year opened with a leading article by Principal Peterson on the Imperial Conference. It was followed by an article by Leacock, "Greater Canada: An Appeal." "I, that write these lines, am an Imperialist because I will not be a colonial." After much braggadocio on the size of Canada he wrote:

⁸His thesis was stated in an article, "Responsible Government in the British Colonial System" in the first volume of the *American Political Science Review*.

This then for the size and richness of our country. Would that the soul and spirit of its people were commensurate with its greatness. For here as yet we fail. Our politics, our public life and thought, rise not to the level of our opportunity. The mud-bespattered politicians of the trade, the party men and party managers, give us in place of patriotic statescraft the sordid traffic of a tolerated jobbery. For bread, a stone. Harsh is the cackle of the little turkey-cocks of Ottawa, fighting the while as they feather their mean nests of sticks and mud, high on their river bluff. Loud sings the little Man of the Province, crying his petty Gospel of Provincial Rights, grudging the gift of power, till the cry spreads and town hates town and every hamlet of the country side shouts for its share of plunder and of pelf. This is the tenor of our politics, carrying as its undertone the voice of the black-robed sectary, with narrow face and shifting eyes, snarling still with the bigotry of a by-gone day. This is the spirit that we must purge. This is the demon we must exorcise; this the disease, the canker-worm of corruption, bred in the indolent securities of peace, that must be burned from us in the pure fire of an Imperial patriotism, that is no theory but a passion. This is our need, our supreme need of the Empire—not for its ships and guns, but for the greatness of it, the soul of it, aye for the very danger of it. . . .

Yet this you say, you of the Provincial Rights, you Little Canada Man, is all we can afford! We that have raised our public charge from forty up to eighty millions odd within the ten years past, and scarce have felt the added strain of it. Nay, on the question of the cost, good gentlemen of the council, spare it not. Measure not the price. It is not a commercial benefit we buy. We are buying back our honour as Imperial Citizens. For, look you, this protection of our lives and coast, this safe-guard from the scourge of war, we have it now as much as you of England; you from the hard-earned money that you pay, we as the peasant pensioners on your Imperial Bounty.

Thus stands the case. Thus stands the question of the future of Canada. Find for us something other than mere colonial stagnation, something sounder than independence, nobler than annexation, greater in purpose than a Little Canada. Find us a way. Build us a plan, that shall make us, in hope at least, an Empire Permanent and Indivisible.

All this and more was distributed in pamphlet form. Possibly as a result of this blast he was sent on a lecture tour of the British Empire in 1907-8 by the Rhodes Trust. He succeeded Professor Flux as Head of the Department in 1908. In an article in the *University Magazine* in 1909 he set out to destroy the Monroe Doctrine. "The only person who fails to grasp the situation is the Canadian patriot-politician sitting upon a snow pile and meandering about the protection afforded him by President Monroe."

In 1911 he urged single and unified control of the Canadian navy under the British Admiralty. He wrote a series of articles for the *National Review* in favour of slow rather than rapid immigration, on the "Great Victory in Canada," a pæan of jubilation on the defeat of the reciprocity treaty, and on the Canadian Senate and the Naval Bill. "The action of the Canadian Senate (in defeating the Naval Bill) is in reality the natural outcome of the vicious system that has made it what it is. It is the nemesis of our own political sin. It is poetic justice visited on our evil-doing. Liberals and Conservatives combined we make our Senate not a superior council of the nation but a refuge of place hunting politicians and a reward of partisan adherence." The anchorage of safety during this storm was in humour. The severity of the blast produced his best humorous work on what he called "the glorious humbug of politics."

When he wrote *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* in 1912, at about the age of forty, he had a background of training and teaching in the modern languages until he was thirty and a decade of teaching, research, and active

participation in the field of politics. A distinguished Canadian critic and one-time colleague, Mr. B. K. Sandwell, wrote with discernment of the "extreme accuracy of his observation both of human types and of the conditions in which they move and develop. In a very real sense the creative work of the humorist is based upon the critical work of the professor of economics."

The social scientist and especially the student of political economy is compelled to make his peace with satire or humour. The callous vulgarity which characterizes the humour of the medical profession is paralleled by cynicism in the social sciences. Leacock was a student of Adam Smith, the master of satire in political economy, and he saw much of Thorstein Veblen, the master of satire in North America in Chicago. Although Leacock was thoroughly familiar with Adam Smith as a result of work on his theses, and although he knew Veblen well, he had the advantage of neither in a long arduous preparation in the social sciences and he never wielded his pen with the same force, precision, or sharpness. From Veblen he learned of the antics of the Navajo Indians which served to illustrate short comic notes. Leacock had served too long as a master of modern languages and a writer of humorous sketches to be interrupted for long with the exacting demands of the social sciences. Thrown off his stride by imperialism he became an active writer. The spontaneous and striking success of the sketches which had been written chiefly in the nineties led him to collect and publish them at his own expense in Montreal in 1910 as *Literary Lapses*. The volume was followed by *Nonsense Novels*, which had been written for a newspaper syndicate in the same year, *Sunshine Sketches* in 1912,⁴ *Behind the Beyond* in 1913, *Arcadian Adventures* as well as three small volumes in the *Chronicles of Canada* series in 1914. The prosperity of the war created a demand for his writings. He published *Moonbeams from the Larger Lunacy*, in 1915, and *Further Foolishness*, in 1916, in the preface of which he wrote describing an old schoolmaster who shouted "Any further foolishness?" "I find by experience that there are quite a number of indulgent readers who are good enough to adopt the same expectant attitude toward me now." In the same year he published *Essays and Literary Studies*. There was scarcely a Christmas season that a new volume was not available for an eager public. *Frenzied Fiction* appeared in 1918, the *Hohenzollerns in America* in 1919, and *Winsome Winnie* in 1920.

The war necessitated even more active imperialistic propaganda. His pen and voice were at the service of the Empire. In 1921 he made a lecture tour of England. Again the strain of activity during the war led to the publication of a second important humorous work, *My Discovery of England* (1922). It was scarcely less effective than *Sunshine Sketches*, although its material was more sophisticated.

Disillusionment prevailed in the period immediately following the war

⁴See the "Tribute to Stephen Leacock," delivered by B. K. Sandwell over the C.B.C., April 2, 1944, and available in mimeographed form, for an account of the origin of this book and an appreciation of it. "Sunshine Sketches' is the one completely Canadian book of Leacock's enormous output. All this is the very stuff of Ontario life. It has the warmth of the Ontario summer sun and the smell of the Ontario soil fresh turned in the spring."

and was evident in the publication of the *Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice* in 1920. His concluding sentences were: "The safety of the future lies in a progressive movement of social control alleviating the misery which it cannot obliterate and based upon the broad general principle of equality of opportunity. The chief immediate direction of social effort should be towards the attempt to give to every human being in childhood adequate food, clothing, education and an opportunity in life. This will prove to be the beginning of many things" (pp. 151-2). The old order was crumbling. Principal Peterson had retired from McGill in 1919, the previous year.

Prolific writing inevitably brought deterioration. There were those who came to feel more and more like his hero Hoodoo McFiggin, the boy who sat up in bed on Christmas morning and began hauling things out of his stocking. "The first parcel was bulky: it was done up quite loosely and had an odd look generally. 'Ha ha' Hoodoo cried gleefully as he began undoing it. 'I'll bet it's the puppy dog all wrapped up in paper.' And was it the puppy dog? No, by no means. It was a pair of nice strong number four boots, laces and all, labelled 'Hoodoo, from Santa Claus' and underneath Santa Claus had written '95 net'." Mr. C. K. Allen expressed a general feeling in a volume *Oh, Mr. Leacock!* (Toronto, 1925) which could be described as a caricature. The biographical account by Peter McArthur published in 1923 included a penetrating analysis of his work:

Somehow I cannot class him with the great satirists. Although he has decided satirical power, it is slight compared with his genius as a fun maker.

But there is one point that gives me some disquietude. Mr. Leacock has poked fun at everything and everybody—except the modern enterprising publisher. And yet the publisher has deserved his satire more than any one else. If any one has done Mr. Leacock harm it is the publishers, syndicate managers and directors of lecture bureaus. It is true that he gives them a love tap in his essay on O. Henry. This shows that he is aware of the danger of listening to their blandishments, and that is a hopeful sign. But they have already tried to direct the current of his literary output, as is shown in the following announcement which ushered "Winsome Winnie and other Nonsense Novels" to the public:

"It is in response to repeated requests that these new novels have been written."

Quite so. Because "Nonsense Novels" were a wonderful success the publisher wanted more of them. I can imagine him beside Leacock's desk, "squat like a toad," and urging the certain profits to be made from a new book of burlesques. Or perhaps he took him to the top of a high mountain and showed him the world full of people laughing at "Nonsense Novels"—and the rich royalties pouring into the bank account of the author. If so, it is a pity that Leacock did not push him over a cliff and watch him land in a squashy mess among the fossils and geological specimens in the talus at its base.

The curse of modern literature is the enterprising publisher. If one book succeeds, every publisher tries to lure or bulldoze the author, and every other author over whom he has influence, to write another book like it that will be a sure winner. And if the harried author cannot do it the enterprising publisher takes whatever book he writes and puts a jacket on it that will fool the public into thinking that it is like the prosperous best seller of the hour.

Up to the present the publisher has not done Mr. Leacock as much harm as he has to modern authors who have had a measure of success, but I shall not feel satisfied until he turns and reads him. Only then can we be sure that he has realized the danger and that his genius is free to develop along its own lines.

Not that the later burlesques are without merit. The trouble is that they are following an indicated line of success—and that way badness lies.

If the publishers and the public could get over their hysterical demand for comedy and read Stephen Leacock's writings with discernment, they would soon realize that his power of

pathos is never less artistically sure than his command of laughter. His great danger is that he may be misled by an insistent and profitable demand into the modern evil of specialization—an evil with which he has dealt in his literary essays—and will give too free a rein to his genius for fun. As matters stand he is one of the truest interpreters of American and Canadian life that we have had; but by giving free play to all his powers he may finally win recognition as a broad and sympathetic interpreter of life as a whole.

Leacock was aware of the danger. He writes in *Humor—Its Theory and Technique* (1935): "It is a standing defect in nearly all our art and literature that it has to be made obvious. The reason for it is that the great mass of it has got to be suited to ten cent audiences and tuppenny newspapers." What he wrote of Dickens was to some extent true of himself. "There are plenty of reasons why the books should be inferior. It is obvious that authors write themselves out; that some songs can be sung once only; whether early in life or late; that the wear and tear of overwork and overworry can impair any literary output; that commercial reasons will force publication when art would demand delay."

The prosperity of the twenties gave him no alternative but to continue with the *Garden of Folly* (1924), *Winnowed Wisdom* (1926), *Short Circuits* (1928), *The Iron Man and the Tin Woman* (1929). The depression was characterized by a turn to serious work, although *Wet Wit and Dry Humor* (1931), "compiled in friendly appreciation of prohibition in the United States, the greatest thing that ever happened to Canada," and *The Dry Pickwick and Other Incongruities* were exceptions dedicated to the possibility of a market created by the interest in prohibition. *Economic Prosperity in the British Empire* (changed from *Economic Integration of the British Empire*⁵ at the last moment) (1930), was followed by *Back to Prosperity—the Great Opportunity of the Empire Conference* (1932), *Mark Twain* (1932), *Charles Dickens* (1934), *Lincoln Frees the Slaves* (1935), and in the same year *Humor—Its Theory and Technique*, *My Discovery of the West* (1937) *Humor and Humanity* (1938). *Hellements of Hickonomics* (1936) attacked the proponents of social planning. *Funny Pieces* (1936), and *Here are my Lectures and Stories* (1937) were an indication that the depression was lifting.

Leacock was interested throughout in humour rather than satire. The social sciences marred his work as a humorist and tilted it toward satire. They gave him an interest in institutions rather than persons. For that reason he was less successful in reaching the highest form of humorous writing, namely nonsense, or to follow Chesterton "humour that abandons all attempts at intellectual justification." Mathematics was not the drawback to Lewis Carroll that political science was to Stephen Leacock. The latter comes nearest to nonsense in his "A, B, C, the Human Element in Mathematics." His ambitions were concerned chiefly with humour which he defined "in its highest meaning and its furthest reach finds its basis in the incongruity of life itself, the contrast between the fretting cares and the petty sorrows of the day and the long mystery of the tomorrow. Here laughter and tears become one." To quote Chesterton again, "Humour always has in it some idea of the humorist himself being at a disadvantage and caught in the entanglements

⁵See his introduction to J. T. Culliton, *Assisted Emigration and Land Settlement* (1928).

and contradictions of human life." It is in the light of this definition that *My Discovery of England* and *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* are great humorous writings. Professor Leacock was inextricably caught in them because he was driven off his course in the social sciences. He saw the results and capitalized them. In his humorous writings he worshipped at the shrine of Bacchus rather than of Venus and was strongly opposed to obscenity and indecency in literature. He showed little interest in Rabelais. He suffered from the absence of the tendencies he deplored in modern fiction. "I can invent characters quite easily but I have no notion as to how to make things happen to them. Indeed I see no reason why anything should. I could write awfully good short stories if it were only permissible, merely to introduce some extremely original character and at the end of two pages announce that at this point a brick fell on his head and killed him. If there was room for a school of literature of this kind I should offer to head it."

His writings in the form of mild satire were on the cultural activities of his day: *Nonsense Novels* on the novel; *Behind the Beyond* and *Over the Footlights* (1923), on the drama and the stage; *College Days* (1923), on the University. His life-long connection with schools and colleges gave him a distinctive field and a rich source of material for satire on education. The *New Statesman* (August 11, 1923) in reviewing *Over the Footlights* said that "the mark of a great humorist is that he is saner than other people. Mr. Leacock possesses *in excelsis* this clear preposterous vision of the medley of imbecilities through which man takes his solemn way from the cradle to the grave." To quote Mr. B. K. Sandwell again, "There are no villains in his stories, and in his parodies, the typical villains of ordinary moralizing fiction are reduced to their logical absurdity."

In his serious writings his greatest strength was evident in biography. O. Henry, Mark Twain, and Dickens, especially the latter, were personalities attractive to him as a humorist, and Baldwin and Lincoln as a political scientist. A critical observer has described *Lincoln Frees the Slaves* as a "book of which its author may well be proud, and of which we . . . may be proud with him."

As a Canadian he reflected the influence of England in his admiration of Dickens, and of the United States in his admiration of Mark Twain. He adapted and continued the traditions of humorous writing of the nineteenth century into the twentieth. He wrote "The nineteenth century was the era of the printed word, just as the twentieth is becoming the era of the flickering shadow and the metal voice." In spite of his failure to keep pace with the change, as evident in his radio broadcast for the Pond Cream Company, his verdict was pessimistic. Benchley and Thurber have developed a more subtle humour to appeal to the large sophisticated audience which has emerged from the high schools and universities of our day. Leacock was forced to appeal to a less intellectual audience. "Education is synonymous with the ability to understand the stock exchange page of the morning paper and culture means a silk hat and the habit of sleeping in pyjamas."

Like Mark Twain and Dickens he had an exuberance of physical energy. An incomplete bibliography published in 1935 runs to over twenty pages.

Like Mark Twain he came from the frontier of North America. He was compelled to work his way to his appointment at McGill over a long period. From a rural background he was alert to the pretensions and shams of urban life. These circumstances sharpened his eye for the ludicrous. *Sunshine Sketches*, the best of Leacock's work, is a parallel to *Huckleberry Finn*, the best of Mark Twain's. Humour in North America in the later nineteenth and the early twentieth century was fostered by the impact of science on culture. *Literary Lapses* and other volumes are filled with illustrations which parallel *The Connecticut Yankee*. In the "New Food," the baby swallows a pill which contains thirteen Christmas dinners. "Three hundred and fifty pounds of concentrated nourishment passed down the oesophagus of the unthinking child." It was also a result of the impact of the frontier on an established culture. *The Innocents Abroad* is paralleled by *My Discovery of England*.

His humorous work was strengthened by the difficulties under which he laboured in the social sciences. His contributions in the latter field were restricted as a result of his late interest and of the difficulties under which he laboured in the face of the demands of imperialism. Through the profits of a rising market for humorous writings, they were forced into the depression periods. His contributions were nevertheless conspicuous in the work of his department. The sanity of his approach is well described in an educational appendix to his *Hellements of Hickonomics* (1936).

A saving grace of the old curriculum was the existence of the College magazine, not the roaring Daily of today, but a magazine of the old sort, not giving the news but printing translations of Catullus and essays on Oliver Cromwell. Every now and then the magazine helped to create, or rather, to hatch a poet.

At about the end of the old century, began and spread the new idea of a practical curriculum. It is supposed to teach people how to do the very things they are going to have to do. It has been in existence now for over a quarter of a century as a chief element in the college program. I regard it as very largely a failure. It undertakes to train college men exactly in the way in which men who don't go to college get trained. It substitutes four years in college for one in a work shop. Here belongs in great part, as now taught, the subject of Political Economy, compelled by the outside pressure of mass demand to convert itself into a *vade mecum* of business. Here belongs a great part of what goes with Schools of Commerce—which are admirable things in so far as they keep away from Commerce.

Leacock's students universally acclaim his effectiveness as a teacher. Professor Jacob Viner is a distinguished graduate. Graduate students and members of his staff have been engaged in research and the publication of a series of small volumes on Canadian National Problems. With the support of the Rockefeller Foundation an extensive project of research was developed and several volumes of a more ambitious character have been published.

His work has been solidly based on the individualistic approach which characterized a rural background and his interest in humour. His distrust of institutions is best illustrated in "My Financial Career," the first sketch in *Literary Lapses*.

The truth is, and I don't mind admitting it at this time of year, I am afraid, and always have been, of a great city and of the kind of people who live in it. Like every body else who has come off a farm—our homestead was in Georgina Township, up in Ontario; perhaps you know it?—I have never felt at ease with high class city people, with financial magnates, great

criminal lawyers, bank presidents and scintillating literary wits. I always felt that the wits might start something or the magnates sit on something or the great criminal lawyer might say something. Anybody from the country knows the feeling. As to the bankers, everybody knows that these men hold the world in the hollow of their hand; if they lift their thumb over we go. So I am uneasy with them. I don't want them to lift it while I'm around.

Pleading his inability to return to England after the "unpleasantness" at McGill he wrote, "The 'Stamp' I carry is that of the farm in Georgina township and my predilection is for the soil and the Canadian bush."

While his humorous writings were strengthened, his writings in the social sciences were weakened. His Presidential address on the "Revision of Democracy" before the Canadian Political Science Association in 1934, his article in the first number of the *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* on "What is Left of Adam Smith?" (an article which led some malicious individual to ask "What is left of Stephen Leacock?"), and his recent books on the Empire, led to fears of a recurrence of the imperialistic blight. But the saving grace of humour eventually conquered.

Humour can flourish only in democratic countries and the same must be said of the social science which traces its descent from Adam Smith. There are simple minds which adopt Leacock's own statement that political economists regarded him as a humorist and that humorists regarded him as a political economist. According to the lights of this economist he did much to save the soul of both in a period in which they were in grave danger. The work of the humorist is destined not to endure. It is written in water and reflects too accurately the atmosphere of its period to interest later readers. Its traditions must be carried on from generation to generation so long as democracy lasts.

It is safe to say that Stephen Leacock was the best known Canadian in the English-speaking world. He resigned from the Royal Society of Canada on grounds of "personal economy"; but the latter honoured itself in honouring him by presenting him with the Lorne Pierce medal for literature in 1937. If, as he has pointed out in an article on American humour, humour forces literature, he may be regarded as the first important Canadian writer. If the "generality of American humour lacks profundity and wants that stimulating art of expression which can be found only amongst a literary people," his contribution to American literature has not been slight. In the social sciences we are grateful for his direct contributions and for his indirect contributions in saving the subject through making major contributions to humour. Stephen Leacock deserved well of Canada. [H. A. I.]

* * *

Professor Leacock at McGill

Stephen Butler Leacock came to McGill University in 1901 as Special Lecturer in Political Science and History. In 1905 he was promoted to Associate Professor in the same subjects, and in 1908 was appointed William Dow Professor of Political Economy and Head of the Department of Economics and Political Science. He retired as Professor Emeritus in 1936.

When I first met him in 1923, I suppose his fame was at its peak. He had

completed a lecture tour which took him round the world, his *Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice* had been published in 1920, the new and revised edition of his *Elements of Political Science* in 1921, his *My Discovery of England* in 1922, and foreign translations of his writings were beginning to appear. Our first meeting enlightened me at once on one of his permanent characteristics—so many big men have it—his dislike of petty formalities. It seemed to him enough that he should express his willingness to have me on his staff, and mild suggestions from me that I needed some formal contract with the University before I could cable my resignation to St. Andrews were accepted with a good-humoured tolerance for a pedantic foible.

It was inevitable that his reputation as an economist and political scientist should be overshadowed by his literary fame. It is also true that his students could learn much more from him than mere economics. The deduction, however, that his serious regard and enthusiasm for his work at McGill suffered from his many-sided interests is not one which would ever be made by his colleagues or his students. We knew very confidently that his heart was in his work; we felt his genuine interest in our progress, and we could always rely on him for aid and comfort.

He founded the McGill Political Economy Club and one of the most delightful events of the year was the dinner he always gave to his departmental colleagues before the opening meeting of the Club. When the time came for Dr. Leacock to retire under the rigid—too rigid in this case—age-limit rule, the Club did its best to honour him with a farewell banquet. We more or less blunderingly paid our tributes in an atmosphere tense with a deep emotion, and I well remember how gaily, lightly, and wittily he eased the situation, by forecasting that the press reports of the gathering would mention that “the condemned man ate a hearty meal,” before going on to that wise, tender, and graceful valedictory address which will always remain a treasured memory to those who were present to hear it.

In the lecture room, Dr. Leacock ever sought to expound broad truth; it was the essence that he desired to distil and present. Every authority, to be worth his mention in his Political Science course, had to stand for something, something significant and comprehensible. He had a certain impatience with pretentious scholarship, hair-splitting, and refinements of abstract economic analysis. “Scholars who love minutiae deny everything,” he told the Canadian Political Science Association in 1933. In his later years he seemed to become scornful of a good deal that went under the name of Economics, and he might well have written a “Lament for Economics” if Barbara Wootton had not already done so. “I fear,” he said, “we economists are still in the class of witch doctors and astrologists.” “I think,” he wrote in 1936, no doubt in the exaggerated vein suitable to the preface of his *Hellements of Hickonomics*, “the whole science is a wreck and has got to be built up again.”

No Head of a Department could ever have been more courteous and considerate to his colleagues, more stalwart in their defence, more anxious to help us, or more exuberantly willing to acclaim whatever successes we achieved. All his geese, staff or students, were swans to him. We prided ourselves—and the credit was his—that we were the happiest and most harmonious

Department in the University. Departmental meetings, which can be too often boring and sometimes acrimonious, were under his auspices riotous fun and better entertainment than could be found by any costly search; but the work got done.

When Dr. Leacock retired in 1936, a colleague sent him a photograph as a gesture of a hope not to be forgotten. He replied from Orillia: "Your portrait now adorns my library here, beside my own. After I have had a couple of drinks I can't tell them apart. It was so kind of you to send it. I look back with much feeling to our unruffled years as colleagues of what Mr. Sapsea would call 'Old McGill'." A very characteristic letter: one finds there his ever-generous appreciation of the motive behind a clumsy effort, his humour, and his shyness of sentiment. Unruffled years they were, very happy in the living, and very precious in the retrospect. [J. P. D.]

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY OF STEPHEN LEACOCK'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SOCIAL SCIENCES*

BOOKS

- Elements of Political Science* (London, Boston and New York, 1906; revised ed., London, 1921; new and enlarged ed., Boston and New York, 1921).
- Baldwin, Lafontaine, and Hincks: Responsible Government* (Toronto, Morang and Co., 1907; revised ed., London, New York, Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1926).
- The Mariner of St. Malo: A Chronicle of the Voyages of Jacques Cartier* (Chronicles of Canada Series, vol. II, Toronto, Glasgow, Brook, 1914).
- The Dawn of Canadian History: A Chronicle of Aboriginal Canada and the Coming of the White Man* (Toronto, Glasgow, Brook, 1914).
- Adventurers of the Far North: A Chronicle of the Frozen Seas* (Chronicles of Canada Series, vol. XX, Toronto, Glasgow, Brook, 1914).
- National Organization for War* (Ottawa, 1917).
- The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice* (London, New York, 1920).
- Economic Prosperity in the British Empire* (Toronto, Macmillan Co., 1930).
- Back to Prosperity: The Great Opportunity of the Empire Conference* (Toronto, Macmillan Co., 1931).
- Voyages of Louis Armand de Lom d'Arce, Baron de Lahontan, 1666-1715?* (edited by Stephen Leacock, Ottawa, Graphic, 1932).
- Stephen Leacock's Plan to Relieve the Depression in Six Days, to Remove it in Six Months, and to Eradicate it in Six Years* (Toronto, Macmillan Co., 1933).
- The Gathering Financial Crisis in Canada* (Toronto, 1936).
- Hellements of Hickonomics in Hiccoughs of Verse Done in Our Social Planning Mill* (New York, 1936).
- My Discovery of the West* (London, 1937).
- All Right, Mr. Roosevelt!* [Canada and the United States] (Oxford Pamphlets on World Affairs, no. 1, Toronto, 1939).
- The British Empire: Its Structure, Its Unity, Its Strength* (New York, 1940).
- Canada: The Foundations of Its Future* (Montreal, privately printed, 1941).
- Montreal: Seaport and City* (Garden City, 1942).
- Our Heritage of Liberty* (London, 1942).

PREFACES

Reciprocal and Preferential Tariffs, by the 1925 Graduating Class in Commerce, with a preface by Stephen Leacock (McGill University Publications, Economic Studies, XV(4), Toronto, Macmillan, 1925).

*In compiling this bibliography the Editors have relied for the period up to 1935 on *A Bibliography of Stephen Butler Leacock*, compiled by the class of 1935 in the McGill University Library School, under the direction of Miss Marion Villiers Higgins (Montreal, 1935).

- The Port of Montreal*, by Laurence C. Tombs, with a preface by Stephen Leacock (McGill University Publications, Economic Studies, 1926, XV(6), Toronto, Macmillan, 1926).
Assisted Emigration and Land Settlement with Special Reference to Western Canada, by John Thomas Culliton, with a preface by Stephen Leacock (McGill University Publications, Economic Studies, 1928, XV(9), Montreal, Federated Press, 1927).
The Story of Money, by Mrs. Mary Duncan Cartier, with a preface by Stephen Leacock (New York, Farrar and Rinehart, 1932).

ARTICLES

- "Greater Canada" (*University Magazine* [McGill], vol. VI, April, 1907, pp. 132-41).
 "Responsible Government in the British Colonial System" (*American Political Science Review*, vol. I, May, 1907, pp. 355-92).
 "The Limitations of Federal Government" (American Political Science Association, *Proceedings*, vol. V, 1908, pp. 37-52).
 "Sir Wilfrid Laurier's Victory" (*National Review* [London], vol. LII, Jan., 1909, pp. 826-33).
 "Canada and the Monroe Doctrine" (*University Magazine* [McGill], vol. VIII, Oct., 1909, pp. 351-74).
 "The Union of South Africa" (*American Political Science Review*, vol. IV, Nov., 1910, pp. 498-507).
 "Canada and the Immigration Problem" (*National Review* [London], vol. LVII, April, 1911, pp. 316-27).
 "The Great Victory in Canada" (*National Review*, vol. LVIII, Nov., 1911, pp. 381-92).
 "What Shall We Do about the Navy?" (*University Magazine*, vol. X, Dec., 1911, pp. 535-53).
 "The Canadian Senate and the Naval Bill" (*National Review*, vol. LXI, July, 1913, pp. 986-98).
 "The American Attitude" (*University Magazine*, vol. XIII, Dec., 1914, pp. 595-7).
 "The Warning of Prohibition in America" (*National Review*, vol. LXXIII, July, 1919, pp. 680-7).
 "The Gold Standard" (Address delivered before the Life Insurance Educational Congress, Toronto, 1924, 12 pp.).
 "The Proper Limitations of State Interference" (Address before the Empire Club of Canada, Toronto, 1924, 14 pp.).
 "Business as I See It" (Harper, vol. 148, May, 1924, pp. 815-25).
 "Quebec Liquor Law" (*Review of Reviews*, vol. LXXIV, Oct., 1926, p. 370).
 "The Economic Aspect of Aviation" (Royal Society of Canada, *Proceedings and Transactions*, series 3, vol. XXII, sec. 2, May, 1928, pp. 213-32).
 "Baron Lahontan, Explorer" (*Canadian Geographical Journal*, vol. IV, May, 1932, pp. 281-94).
 "If Gold Should Cease to be Gold" (*Canadian Mining and Metallurgical Bulletin*, no. 244, Aug., 1932, pp. 430-6).
 "A Rare Traveller's Account" (*Canadian Historical Review*, vol. XIV, Dec., 1933, pp. 409-11).
 "Lahontan in Minnesota" (*Minnesota History*, vol. XIV, Dec., 1933, pp. 367-77).
 "The Economic Analysis of Industrial Depression" (Canadian Political Science Association, *Papers and Proceedings*, vol. V, 1933, 20 pp.).
 "The Revision of Democracy" (Presidential address, Canadian Political Science Association, *Papers and Proceedings*, vol. VI, 1934, 12 pp.).
 "The Last Five Years in Canada: How the Country Reacted in a Period of Depression" (in *The World Today*, London and New York, Encyclopedia Britannica Co., 1934).
 "Stirring Pageant of Canadian History" (written in connection with the celebration of the four hundredth anniversary of the landing of Jacques Cartier in Canada in Aug., 1934, *New York Times Magazine*, Aug. 19, 1934, pp. 6-7, 17).
 "Economic Separatism in the British Empire" (*Quarterly Review*, vol. 265, July, 1935, 1-11).
 "Edward VIII and Canada" (*Review of Reviews*, vol. XCIII, March, 1936, pp. 29-30).

- "Social and Other Credit in Alberta" (*Fortnightly*, vol. CXL (n.s.), Nov., 1936, pp. 525-35).
- "Social Credit" (*Review of Reviews*, vol. XCV, Jan., 1937, p. 65).
- "World's Muddle over Gold" (*Nation's Business*, vol. XXVI, Jan., 1938, pp. 18-20).
- "Canada and the Monarchy" (*Atlantic Monthly*, vol. CLXIII, June, 1939, pp. 735-43).
- "The Question Nobody Answers" (*Canadian Banker*, vol. XLVIII, July, 1941, pp. 459-65).
- "What's Ahead for Canada?" (*Financial Post*, Dec. 4, 1943, to Feb. 5, 1944).
- "A Plea for Geographical Science" (*Queen's Quarterly*, vol. L, spring, 1943, pp. 1-13).
- "What's Ahead for Canada?" (*Maclean's Magazine*, vol. LVI, May, 1943, pp. 12, 22, 24).
- "Gold" (*Canadian Banker*, vol. L, 1943, pp. 39-51).