

A NEGLECTED CANADIAN MAN OF LETTERS

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ONE evening in last April the press despatches from England told us that on that day Dr. John Beattie Crozier, "physician, philosopher, and political economist", had died in London. For how many Canadians, even those who affect a deep concern about Canadian literature, had this piece of news the slightest national interest?

The proverb about the neglect of a prophet in his own country was indeed notably illustrated in Dr. Crozier's career. Few in Canada seem to be aware of the fame that was achieved in the literary circles of London by one born seventy-two years ago in a hamlet of Ontario, educated in an Ontario village school and afterwards in the University of Toronto, who felt within himself the enthusiasm of letters and resolved to challenge fortune at the headquarters of the English literary craft. Yet it was surely a signal honour to any man that on his seventieth birthday he should have been presented with a congratulatory address for his "distinguished services to thought and human welfare", signed by such men as Lord Morley, Lord Bryce, Mr. Frederic Harrison, Mr. George Gooch, Sir William Osler, Mr. J. St. Loe Strachey, Mr. J. L. Garvin, and Mr. W. L. Courtney. These are critics not much addicted to using complimentary phrases without substantial ground. And their address was but the climax of much more in the same direction from those whose praise is to be valued.

For example, when Dr. Crozier issued his very elaborate and very ambitious *History of Intellectual Development*, it was received with sustained panegyric by the great English Reviews. Dr. Marcus Dods said of it in *The Bookman* that it was one of the most considerable additions recently made to philosophical literature. *The Contemporary Review* called it "one of the great works, the abiding landmarks of the age." *The Academy* spoke of its largeness of outlook which no previous attempt had paralleled, and of the mind of its author as "eminently comprehensive and individual, at once broad and subtle to a rare degree." *The Athenaeum* declared

that English philosophical literature was being enriched by work of rare ability, and *The Westminster*, dealing with the first volume, predicted that when complete it would be the most important treatise of its kind during the fifty years since the death of Comte. *The Spectator* described Dr. Crozier as "known to English readers as one of the most versatile and original thinkers of the day", and said of this particular book that it knew nowhere else in the English tongue such a succinct and brilliant conspectus of the subject treated. His death eight months ago called forth glowing estimates of his literary work from leading organs of the English press, and it seems fitting that this *Review* should add its tribute in the country of Dr. Crozier's birth.

I

His birthplace was Galt, Ontario, the town named after that old Scottish settler so well known to us for his delightful pictures of Scottish rural life one hundred years ago in *Annals of the Parish* and *The Ayrshire Legatees*. Dr. Crozier used to chuckle over the recollection that his ancestors had lived in Liddesdale, that Border country so familiar to all readers of Scott, and had taken their own part in those raids and cattle-drives of days gone by which made the Scotsman so dangerous a neighbour to the north of England. "My father's family" he writes "had been settled in and around the Borders for generations, and were among the descendants, as an old ballad verse still testifies—

Elliot and Armstrongs
Nixons and Croziers
Raid thieves a'

of those ancient raiders who by their feuds and forays had for centuries kept the border-land in a state of turmoil." Some time in the forties of last century Dr. Crozier's parents, married—like so many other emigrants—on the day they set out to cross the ocean, had sailed for Canada, and after a long, stormy voyage they made a journey no less dreary and tedious in jolting waggons through the wild interior till they reached Galt, "at that time a small Scottish settlement only recently reclaimed from the virgin forest and containing a population probably of three or four hundred souls." There Dr. Crozier was born on 23rd April, 1849, and in early childhood he lost his father. His mother was left to face the world with two dependent children, and "with no means of subsistence but the few pounds saved by my father, together with the house and a small plot of ground." She had, however, in addition the energy, the thrift, and the sturdy spirit of independence inherited from that

line of Scottish Calvinists which even the taint of Border cattle thieves had not managed to corrupt. Her son tells us that her whole aim in life was to keep free from debt, to save intact the little capital which her husband had left her, and to bring up her children "in the fear and admonition of the Lord." He adds that her one book was the Bible, her one object of reverence the Minister, her one object of awe the Kirk-Elder. She mixed little with her neighbours in Galt, fell back in moments of excitement into the broadest accents of her native speech, and deplored the fact that her wicked little boy was displaying that temper of disobedience, love of mischief, "and general pagan absorption in the things of this world", which she summed up in that expressive term of Scottish piety "regardlessness." The picture of old Mrs. Crozier in that Ontario village sixty years ago is surely both vivid and complete.

The boy was sent to the village grammar school, and in due time to the University of Toronto, where he studied Medicine, and about 1870 became qualified to practise. But Medicine was never his exclusive interest. While he was supposed to be absorbed in textbooks of Anatomy and Physiology and in the hospital study of cases, he was too often plunging into the books and pamphlets of Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer, or reflecting upon the extraordinary narrowness of outlook in his university teachers rather than preparing to answer questions on the examination papers that they set him. At twenty-two years of age he was making up his mind that, though the need to make a living had driven him into Medicine as a profession, he would as quickly as possible devote himself to literature. He would be what Carlyle called "a writer of books". The question of inducing people to *buy* the books he seems to have contemplated with that easy indifference or that sanguine confidence which belonged to his youth. About one thing he was quite clear, that neither Galt nor Toronto was the right place for him to stay. He would go to the great metropolis of the Empire, and there take counsel with others who had adopted a like mission. With no financial resources, no one to give him a "push", he launched himself in London in 1873, to practise Medicine for a livelihood, but especially to study what he used to call "problems of the World and of Human Life", and to offer his original solutions in this vast puzzle through the medium of literature. One reads with a certain amused interest how in search for counsel on this project he betook himself immediately after his arrival to the writer whose books had at once stimulated and perplexed his own thought so much in the rural hamlet of Ontario. After a letter in which he asked for an interview with Thomas Carlyle had secured an in-

vitiation for "not more than ten minutes," he made his way to Cheyne Row and waited his turn to see the sage of Chelsea. Standing on the hearth-rug, young Crozier explained that he had much to say to mankind about "great problems of the World and of Human Life." Forty-five years earlier Carlyle had himself faced the mysteries with a like intent. But time had brought the old Scotsman to a state of rather cynical disillusionment, and we cannot wonder at the warning he sounded to the youthful adventurer. "Na, na, that winna do. Ye'd better stick to your profession, young man. It's time enough to think of literature when ye've cleared your own mind and have something worth saying. Medicine is a noble calling."

It was, no doubt, good advice. But, if everyone acted on what is good advice for most people, the world would lose the service of some of its most original minds. Dr. Crozier did indeed for a considerable time practise Medicine, and—especially in that department which deals with diseases of the eye—he attained real distinction. He gained, too, what was of more immediate importance to himself, the tangible expression of gratitude from a wealthy patient in the shape of a legacy which—in his financial straits at the moment—was of very great help indeed. And for some fifty years afterwards he laboured at his ambitious purpose, publishing book after book and article after article on subjects social, historical, religious, economic, and philosophic.

II

One of his kindest reviewers has suggested about him that he "spread himself too much", and that he would have gained a greater authority if he had limited his scope. Dr. Crozier would, I think, have replied that to do so would have been to abandon the characteristic work that he had chosen for himself. The reviewer's criticism is indeed very characteristic of the present time. The general man of letters is a disappearing figure in our world. In this age of narrow specialism we expect each writer to have a restricted province, to be an "expert" on this or that, and amid the obvious gains resulting from such a system the general reader loses not a little. Like a pupil in a school that has many masters of departments, but no headmaster to correlate their efforts, he must shape the parts of knowledge into a whole for himself, and this is one of the tasks for which the general reader is poorly equipped.

It may thus be fitly contended that a point of real distinction in Dr. Crozier is the combined breadth and definiteness of his interests. He roamed over many fields, but he surveyed them all with a single purpose. *Who's Who* described him as "philosopher, histor-

ian, and political economist." But his philosophy, his history, and his economics were all cultivated as a means to solving "the great problems of the World and of Human Life", and these problems he conceived not as mutually independent—to be dealt with by each science separately or in turn—but as mutually involving one another, so that they can be elucidated only by the sciences in sympathetic co-operation. It was this co-operating principle that he chiefly missed in the writers of his time. There were specialists, indeed, not a few, but they worked in sublime neglect of one another, and each brought forward his own solutions as if his colleagues in another field had discovered nothing to which he ought to attend. Dr. Crozier's impatience under his teachers in the Medical School at Toronto University was a presage of his later attitude to the philosophers. Speaking of them long afterwards he said:

In truth, so far as I can remember, no hint was ever given us that man had such a thing as an environment at all, or—if he had—that it had anything to do with the teaching of anatomy or physiology; and, had it not been for the visible presence before us on the dissecting table of the human body itself, it might (for anything distinctive that was taught us) have been the body of a fish, a reptile, or a monkey.¹

He had, indeed, the feeling that this early restlessness may well have been due to his lack of steady application to the specialised work of the School, or to his pre-occupation with literature and philosophy. But he felt at the same time that the temperament which was unsuited to the anatomical laboratory had a field of its own to which it should be applied, for what Plato called "the synoptic view" was throughout life Dr. Crozier's haunting ideal.

In this he was probably quite right, and his contributions to thought were far better just because they were not narrowly specialised. He would write about Socialism and Nationalism, about Mr. H. G. Wells's *New Religion* and Emerson's *Over-Soul*, about Herbert Spencer and Auguste Comte, about Phrenology and Spiritualism, about Free Trade and the Government of India, about Cardinal Newman and Lord Randolph Churchill and John Stuart Mill, in short about any of the great issues and great men of the time as one who viewed each in the light of all the rest, and recognized in each some element of value. He was indeed a child of the later nineteenth century, keenly alive to the conflicting currents in its life and thought, and intensely anxious to interpret these for the general reader. The question constantly before his mind was the

1. *My Inner Life*, Vol. I.

question of *values*. For the special scientist, as Dr. Crozier saw him, was in perpetual danger of forgetting that the side of life which was the object of his own narrow researches was only *one* side, and he had to be perpetually recalled to the unity of all human interests in a concrete whole.

Is it to be doubted that we have need of such a monitor in these times, especially of one who is not only aware of scientific and learned progress, but is also possessed with Ezra's desire to "speak a language understood of the people"? Dr. Crozier was indeed one of our University Extension lecturers, lecturing not from the platform but through the printed page, always fearless and always independent in his outlook. One of his best friends said of him; "In politics he belonged to no party. I do not know how he voted at elections. I am not sure whether he voted at all. In philosophy and religion, in like manner, he belonged to no school, preferring the great moralists to the great dogmatists". Such an attitude has its defects, and the non-partisan is not seldom, in Disraeli's phrase, "an ineffectual angel". But the defects are combined with merits, and angelic charity is not perhaps in the long run as ineffectual as it looks.

Most of his books are of the kind which the general reader calls "heavy", but—although as such they can never be popular in a wide sense—they belong to a class of writing that is essential to the thought of the Age. For those who find them too strong meat a most valuable and at the same time a fascinating introduction to Dr. Crozier's mind is available in his autobiography called *My Inner Life*. It is a daring venture for any man to write a book all about himself. Yet, as Froude once neatly said, "Egotism is not tiresome, or it ought not to be, if one is sincere about oneself; but it is so hard to be sincere." Dr. Crozier's sincerity in that volume was beyond all challenge. It is a collection of intensely interesting reminiscences,—beginning with the writer's boyhood in Galt—of the country life of Ontario sixty-five years ago, of the University of Toronto as he knew it in the years from 1868 to 1871, of his early struggles in literary London, and of the notable personalities—some of them belonging to history—with whom he was brought into contact. But, true to its title, the book is concerned chiefly with the inner conflict of its author's mind amid the diverse schools of thought. It has all the interest of what is called "a human document." Dr. Crozier was a great autobiographer, and by those whose taste is chiefly for this kind of historical work his memoirs will be found engrossing.

III

This is not the place to attempt anything like a complete critical estimate of all that he has left to us, for his enterprise was too vast to be even considered in a short article. One should probably admit that some of the more sanguine and enthusiastic encomiums by the English reviewers were overdone. But these can afford even large abatement, and yet leave to us the picture of a mind of the first rank, learned, discerning, instructive to a very high degree on the great problems of our time. In his controversies he often grappled with giants, taking courageously the risks and not seldom bearing off the honours of such a formidable encounter. The original scheme of his *History of Intellectual Development* promised indeed more than the author fulfilled, more perhaps than any man could reasonably undertake to fulfil, but it is rich in varied knowledge and suggestive criticism. *The Wheel of Wealth* will be variously judged, according to the reader's attitude towards Free Trade which forms the central theme. English Tariff Reformers thought it a gospel, whilst one of Dr. Crozier's most intimate and most sagacious personal friends summed it up to the present writer with the words "Crozier has turned Protectionist; I would as soon have heard that he had turned Mohammedan!" A like disturbing factor of political opinion will no doubt prevent the quite calm and judicial estimate of his *Sociology applied to Practical Politics*. The surest basis for his lasting repute has perhaps been laid in his *Civilization and Progress*. Some will be most grateful of all to him for *My Inner Life*.

To say that Dr. Crozier is unequal in his literary performances is to say of him what is true of all writers who are good for anything at all. Like at least some other writers, too, he gave us perhaps his very best on those rare occasions when his temper was roused. For he was not of that colourless and insignificant class in whom temper is wholly and invariably restrained. There is indeed a captivating placidity about his reminiscences, about his vivid and often quite original illustrations from Nature, about his quaint Emersonian reflectiveness on the cosmic enigma, even about that premature assuming of the mantle of old age against which the effervescence of true spiritual youth was ever asserting itself in spite of him. Dr. Crozier might well have said—as Edwards said to Johnson—"I too have tried to be a philosopher, but cheerfulness was always breaking through." The fault of such qualities is like the fault of those dainties which should be taken just occasionally lest they pall, and which soon drive back the wholesome appetite to

the nutritious wheaten bread of common life. And Dr. Crozier was no mere purveyor of literary *Delicatessen*. That he could be stirred to an incisive trenchancy of attack one living writer has learned to his cost. We have to go back to such a classic of invective as Macaulay's review of Robert Montgomery if we would find a real parallel to Dr. Crozier's merciless onslaught on Mr. Benjamin Kidd! The present critic, for one, has not the least desire to depreciate the value of Mr. Kidd's work, some of which he would place quite high among sociological writings. But Mr. Kidd has the exasperating habit of repetition, of summing up in one paragraph what went before and then re-summing the accumulated aggregate in paragraphs that come later, so that one might almost withdraw attention from several pages at a time feeling sure that the whole will be re-stated a little farther on, and Dr. Crozier has not only touched the exact spot of weakness but has pilloried the victim with a merciless satire that should live in criticism. Reviewing *Principles of Western Civilization* he wrote as follows:

In the one particular of sheer repetition the world of literature, I will venture to say, has not its parallel. Like the tailor whom I once saw sitting cross-legged in the grounds of a Canadian asylum, fiddling without intermission all day long as if engaged in some life and death struggle with his instrument, and who, I was told, began the morning with the continuous repetition of a single tune, but as the day wore on added another and yet another to his repertoire, repeating each of them from the beginning with quickened intensity of pace until, by nightfall, he had fallen over exhausted, Mr. Kidd starts out modestly enough with the repetition of some single phrase, but keeps adding others and yet others to it, hoarding them all the while and counting them over and over lest any coin of them should be lost, until, when the middle of the work is reached the list becomes so long, and the repetition so tedious, that not only is the narrative blocked at every turn, but it is with the greatest difficulty that you can keep your attention until it begins again. One can stand the house that Jack built, and the malt that lay in the house that Jack built, and even the rat that ate the malt that lay in the house that Jack built, but when it comes to the cow with the crumpled horn, the maiden all forlorn, the man all tattered and torn, and the rest, and when you can see it all coming before it arrives, nothing but the sheer sense of duty to your author can avail to keep you awake through it all.

This must not be taken as a sample of our author's usual style, but it was a style which he could adopt when his critical severity was stimulated, and, since the critic's lash must at times in the interest of the reader be employed, one cannot help admiring him who can wield it with such mordant effectiveness.

IV

Reference has already been made to Dr. Crozier's distinction in England, and to the chorus of praise from the best critical quarters which ultimately crowned his work. But it was long before he was recognized at all, and straight out of his own experience he has given us his views upon the lot of the writer who has many valuable things to say and can find no one ready to listen. In 1917, when we read his sparkling article *A Literary Outcast*, some of us must have felt that a significant addition had been made to the field of despondent memoirs. To call the paper at once sparkling and despondent will seem no paradox to those who know such literature. An interesting collection might, indeed, be put together of the considered estimates by writers of repute regarding "the literary life". Dr. Crozier reminded us of some of these,—how Landor railed against the misjudgment of his contemporaries, how Hazlitt appealed to "Posterity", how Dr. Johnson exulted in the carelessness of old age about the "sweet voices" of either gods or men. Carlyle declared that the most mournful record known to him, excepting the *Newgate Calendar*, was in the biographies of authors. And in that intimate self-disclosure by poor George Gissing, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, we find this melancholy sentence: "With a lifetime of dread experience behind me, I say that he who encourages any young man or woman to look for a living to 'literature' commits no less than a crime."

The burden of what Dr. Crozier had to tell us in *A Literary Outcast* was to the effect that the best work is assured of cordial welcome from a few, but that it cannot win its way among the multitude unless the writer has various artificial aids, such as the prestige of an official position, the sanction of a professional class, the organized support of a school, or the all-powerful influence of newspaper advertisement. One remembers that this was the doctrine too of Oliver Wendell Holmes, when he spoke of "conventional reputations", of the tacit understanding among men of letters that they will not disturb the popular error respecting this or that electrogilded celebrity. Holmes formed a view darker even than Dr. Crozier's, for he had little faith in the "authoritative critics" themselves, and thought them quite capable of acquiescing in an estimate which they did not share. He declared that a literary actor might become such a favourite with the pit as to make it unsafe to hiss him from the manager's box. So the "venerable augurs of the literary and scientific temple" would just smile faintly when the name of a successful impostor was mentioned! A note of

asperity rings out in this passage from *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*. Dr. Crozier spoke of a public which he had himself tried and tested, but his complaint was redeemed from all bitterness by that saving grace of humour in which he was at no time lacking.

How far the judgment of posterity will approve either the earlier neglect or the later enthusiastic eulogies it is for posterity to decide, and no attempt will here be made to anticipate the verdict. Least of all could such anticipation be safely ventured by the present writer, who knew Dr. Crozier well, who felt his passing as a personal bereavement, and who has far too many grounds of gratitude for long continued kindness to trust himself in forming an impartial judgment. The field of literature which this brilliant Canadian made his own is one in which it is specially difficult for any man to win enduring renown. The fame of even our best essayists and critics is written in sand, and Dr. Crozier would have been the first to insist that he himself did not belong to that great upper circle which it is hardest to forget. But that he did belong to a group of which we have indeed few, the group which combines strong thinking on deep problems with a literary grace and a lucidity of expression that can enthrall the interest of the educated reader, does not admit of any doubt whatever. Still less can one doubt that his high achievement, in a sphere in which most achievements are low, called for a far warmer appreciation among his own countrymen than was ever bestowed upon him. It has indeed to be remembered that continuous residence on the other side of the ocean for nearly half a century could not fail to separate any writer from the national interests of the country of his birth, and one notices how complete was the exile in Dr. Crozier's case from one slight but curiously suggestive fact. In his autobiography he spoke of his native Galt as a village in the *far west* of Canada! These are surely the words of a Canadian of long ago, and it may be said that if this country has omitted to follow Dr. Crozier's progress in the great republic of letters he too has omitted to notice his country's progress in the great national development of the last forty years. Yet it would be a poor provincialism which should confine our pride in our great writers to those who have written about our own concerns, or have kept up even when removed to a great distance their intimate knowledge of all that we do. Dr. Crozier was a man whom this country gave to the wider world. One notes too with a pathetic interest that in his final book, issued a few years before his death, his thought returned to his native land, and he discussed economic arrangements with the United States under the title "A Warning to Canada." The book was called *Last Words on Great Issues*

and the reviewer in *The Times* expressed the hope that we should have many more "last" words from the same honoured pen. The present writer seconded this hope, but in a private letter—deeply edged with mourning for the loss of his wife—Dr. Crozier replied "No! The *Times* man was wrong; I have written my 'Last Words' in their strictest meaning, and am ready—even hoping—soon to pass out". Amid all his varied interests, enthusiasm for the Canada of his boyhood was still keen in his old age, and in any record of Canadian literary work during the last half century he would have been proud to claim, as he abundantly deserved, a personal place.