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**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
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Archibald MacMechan. Canadian Man of Letters

by

Janet E. Baker

Submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at Dalhousie University
March 1977

TO 'C. L. BENNET
in deep appreciation

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is concerned with the work of Archibald MacKellar MacMechan (1862-1933) as a Canadian man of letters. His published writing, much of which has not hitherto been examined systematically, is considered in its historical context. The thesis has been organized so as to place MacMechan's writings in five separate categories: his work as a scholar, as a critic of poetry, as a critic of prose, as an essayist, and, finally, as a chronicler. The first of these divisions is a study of his scholarly work as seen particularly in two editions, those of Thomas Carlyle's Sartor Resartus and On Heroes and Hero Worship. From this beginning, the thesis moves chronologically to a study of MacMechan's interest in poetry in general and Canadian poetry in particular. Here much of the research originates in MacMechan's writings as "The Dean", his nom-de-plume as book-reviewer for the Montreal Standard. The third section of the thesis, on MacMechan as critic of prose fiction, deals with his criticism of fiction in the early part of the twentieth century. It is an attempt to place him in the spectrum of trends developing in literary criticism in the first quarter of this century. The fourth section, on MacMechan as essayist, considers his original writing in the form that was perhaps most congenial to him -- the informal essay. In this section, aspects of MacMechan's personality are considered as they reveal themselves through the essays he wrote. In the final section of the thesis, on MacMechan as chronicler, attention is focussed on the work of MacMechan's last years -- his accounts of the seafaring history of Nova Scotia, the work that he himself considered his most lasting contribution to posterity.

The thesis emphasises MacMechan's essentially moral concern with literature and the influences on his work are traced. These influences include Carlyle, Tennyson, and Arnold and their philosophical bias is evident in MacMechan's conviction that the function of literature is to affirm life and to espouse "Joy" without, however, being either simplistic or yet didactic in presenting such a view.

ABBREVIATIONS

The following is a list of abbreviations used in notes to the text:

- BB "Book and Beaver", MacMechan's first column in The Montreal Standard
- DW "The Dean's Window", MacMechan's later column in The Montreal Standard
- DSC Dalhousie Special Collections
- PANS Public Archives of Nova Scotia

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Introduction

This dissertation is a study of the literary work of Archibald MacMechan. It took its beginning from an article by the late Desmond Pacey in the Journal of Canadian Fiction (Autumn, 1973) in which Professor Pacey spoke of the paucity of factual information available to students of Canadian literature. He pointed out that while thematic studies and interpretative criticism of the subject are fairly plentiful, much of the more basic work of criticism, such as critical editing of letters and diaries and sound biographical study, has yet to be done. The accuracy of this assertion was beyond dispute, and the names of several prominent literary figures came immediately to mind, that of Archibald MacMechan among them. Widely known in his own day as both teacher and author, he is to-day generally overlooked as an influence of importance in Canadian literary history. Initial research revealed that there has been, in fact, very little written about MacMechan: several brief appreciative essays on his life and work, most of them published shortly after his death in 1933, make up the bulk of criticism. Outstanding among these essays are those of C.L. Bennet, D.C. Harvey, and, later, Allan R. Bevan and Thomas H. Raddall. With one exception, MacMechan's books are out of print to-day; the re-issuing of Headwaters of Canadian Literature, with the informative Introduction by M.G. Parks brings to light a long-neglected piece of criticism by MacMechan which is in many ways as applicable to-day as when it first appeared, unfortunately in the same year as J.D. Logan's Highways of Canadian Literature. The bulkier Highways in many ways eclipsed the slighter, though far sounder, Headwaters, and even now it is common for literary histories to cite 1924 as the year of the publication of Logan's book, while ignoring MacMechan's. It is to be hoped that MacMechan's reputation as a Canadian man of letters is gradually reasserting itself and that the reprinting of Headwaters is the harbinger of more books to follow.

The preparation of this thesis involved a great deal of original research. The compilation of a comprehensive bibliography was one of the first and most important tasks. While the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, the Dalhousie Archives, and the Legislative Library of the Province of Nova Scotia were the main repositories of MacMechan's works, none had a complete bibliography of his work. The journals and private correspondence, recently catalogued at Dalhousie, brought to light the personal background against which the public man could more clearly be seen. Having formed some ideas about Dr. MacMechan, I received invaluable assistance in my work from Professor C.L. Bennet, who gave unstintingly of his time and energy in providing me with both written and verbal information that has been of inestimable worth in my research into the life and work of Dr. MacMechan. The information gathered together and presented in this thesis, then, is the product of research into MacMechan's published books; his work as a book reviewer (mainly for The Montreal Standard), his voluminous correspondence, his private journals, and recollections of him by several of his former students and colleagues.

Archibald McKellar MacMechan was born in Berlin (now Kitchener), Ontario, on June 21st, 1862, the first of the three sons of the Reverend John MacMechan, a Presbyterian minister who had come to Canada from Ireland five years earlier, and his wife, Mary Jean, the eldest daughter of the Honourable Archibald McKellar. In 1866 the MacMechan family moved to Pictou where, with his two brothers, "Archie", as he was affectionately known throughout his life, led a happy life. This period, which he remembered fondly in later life, came to an abrupt end in 1870 when his mother died in childbirth. From his journals, it appears that his mother was a more important influence in the life of young MacMechan than was his minister father, for whom his son felt admiration but little apparent affection.

In 1870, MacMechan was sent to live in Hamilton with his grandfather McKellar. He remained in Hamilton for the remainder of his schooling and entered the University of Toronto in 1880 as a student of modern languages. Something of his attitudes at this time can be discerned in various essays he wrote and published in the undergraduate newspaper, The Varsity, many of which were later reprinted in his volume of essays, The Porter of Bagdad and Other Fantasies. From them, one sees MacMechan as a sensitive, idealistic, and somewhat morbid young man, much given to romantic musings on the possibility of an untimely death.

In the summer of 1883, MacMechan travelled to England, the homeland of his "heroes" -- Ruskin, Tennyson, Carlyle, and the rest. To earn his passage, he was obliged to work on a cattle boat, and the pages of his journal which remain from this time reveal his love of the sea and his excitement in travelling to the "Mother Country". Graduating from the University of Toronto in the spring of 1884, he taught school, first at Brockville and then at Galt, until, in September, 1886, he entered Johns Hopkins University as a doctoral candidate in modern languages. At Johns Hopkins, he began writing for newspapers, contributing work as "The Reviewer" to Goldwin Smith's Toronto paper, The Week. In 1889 he completed his dissertation, The Relation of Hans Sachs to the "Decameron", and in the same year married Edith May Cowan of Gananoque and was appointed George Munro Professor of English Language and Literature at Dalhousie College, Halifax.

The city of Halifax appealed to him at once and provided much of the inspiration for the work of the remainder of his life. MacMechan found Halifax a city into whose life he was immediately able to fit. His work at Dalhousie, his private scholarship, his happy home life with his wife and three daughters, his regular attendance at Fort Massey Presbyterian church, and his outdoor activities were the main features of the pattern

he established early in his residence in Halifax, a pattern which continued almost unbroken for the forty-four years he spent in the city.

His early published work was of a scholarly nature. His edition of Carlyle's Sartor Resartus, for many years the definitive edition, appeared in 1896, and a second volume of Carlyle's work, On Heroes and Hero-Worship, was published five years later. By the turn of the century, which was also the mid-point of his life, there appears a discernible change in the direction of his published writing. The subject matter of his essays and articles is largely that of his immediate environment, Dalhousie College and Nova Scotia, which he called, affectionately, "Ultima Thule". His Life of a Little College (1914) is a collection of these informal essays which gives the reader an idea of MacMechan's public life in the early years of the century. The private journals that he kept between 1890 and 1895 reveal much about his personal self -- his doubts about the responsibility he was assuming in taking the position at Dalhousie, his fears of being inadequate as a bread-winner for his beloved family, his insecurity as a junior scholar, his vivid perception of the drudgery of teaching. Entries such as these become increasingly rare and, between 1895 and 1915, the journals do not appear at all -- a great pity for one interested in the evolution of MacMechan's thinking, for, by 1916, the record of his life given in the journals becomes almost formal and primarily gives an account of a busy academic life punctuated by references to domestic life. The journals provide, then, informal commentary on what was becoming a successful career as a teacher and a writer, but much of the self-examination of the earlier years is absent from the later journals.

The years of his maturity were devoted largely to his teaching at Dalhousie, where for many years he worked single-handedly; to his reviews in the Montreal Standard, which were widely recognized as sound, personal,

and engaging; to his work as librarian at Dalhousie, and to his personal writing. In 1919 he was one of several distinguished Canadian guests at the Lowell Centenary held in New York, and in 1920 he was awarded an honorary doctorate from his alma mater, the University of Toronto, an honour, as he recorded in his journal, "greater than I could ever have wished". In 1921 two events in his life draw attention to his growing concern with the state of Canadian nationhood. The first was the publication of an article entitled "Canada as a Vassal State", a denunciation of the Americanization of Canada, which was published in the Canadian Historical Review and received widespread recognition. It was to be taken seriously because, for one thing, MacMechan had long been associated with American universities, particularly with those in New England: he had taught at several summer sessions at Harvard, and was a friend of Charles Eliot Norton and George Lyman Kittredge. This article marks a stage in MacMechan's nationalism. The second event was his participation in the work of the Canadian Authors' Association, which was formed in March of 1921. His activity as a member of the Association demonstrated his awareness of the necessity for a healthy national feeling in Canada.

The interest MacMechan had long maintained in Canadian literature was expressed in a succinct manner in 1924, with the appearance in print of Headwaters of Canadian Literature. Its appearance also marks a turning away from the subject, and an increased interest in historical matters, particularly those of his "adopted" province, Nova Scotia. In these closing years of his life, many public honours came to MacMechan: in 1926 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and in 1931 he was awarded that society's Lorne Pierce medal awarded in recognition of distinguished services to Canadian literature. In 1931 he retired from teaching, though he maintained his ties with Dalhousie and continued to live in Halifax, where his retirement was made active by his research into the

seafaring history of the province. In excellent health throughout his life, MacMechan had retained a youthful vigor remarked by many people who knew him and accentuated by his long walks and his swimming and golfing. It was a great shock to those who knew him then, when, after only a few days' illness, he died at his home on August 8, 1933, apparently of a coronary thrombosis.

This thesis is an attempt to assess MacMechan's contribution to Canadian letters, as both scholar and teacher, by consolidating and examining a body of work that has, for too long, remained obscure to students of Canadian literary history.

Archibald McKellar MacMechan: A Chronology

- 1862 Born June 21, eldest son of the Reverend John MacMechan and his wife, Mary Jean McKellar, daughter of the Honorable Archibald McKellar, in Berlin (now Kitchener), Ontario.
- 1870 His mother died in childbirth and Archibald was sent to live with his grandfather McKellar in Hamilton, Ontario.
- 1880 Entered Modern Languages Honours programme, University of Toronto.
- 1883 In June, he went to England on a cattle boat, an experience that initiated or reinforced his love of the sea; several years earlier he had read Moby Dick "in a dusty Mechanics' Institute library".
- 1884 Graduated Bachelor of Arts, University of Toronto.
- 1884-86 Taught high school at Brockville and then at Galt, Ontario.
- 1886 In September he left Canada to enrol in the doctoral programme in modern languages at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore.
- 1887 Received a scholarship from Johns Hopkins University which supplemented his meagre savings.
- 1888 Received a Fellowship in English and German from Johns Hopkins University.
- 1889 Graduated from Johns Hopkins and was appointed George Munro Professor of English Language and Literature at Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Married Edith May Cowan, eldest daughter of D.A. Cowan. Published his doctoral dissertation, The Relation of Hans Sachs to the "Decameron".
- 1890 Became a member of the Nova Scotia Historical Society.
- 1893 Published James de Mille's posthumous poem Behind the Veil.
- 1896 His edition of Carlyle's Sartor Resartus appeared.
- 1899 Article on Moby Dick, entitled "The Best Sea Story Ever Written", published in the Queen's Quarterly.
- 1901 Book of essays, many of them written while he was an undergraduate, published under the title The Porter of Bagdad and Other Fantasies; his edition of Carlyle's On Heroes and Hero-Worship published.
- 1907 Publication of his edition of Tennyson's Select Poems.
- 1907-10 President of the Nova Scotia Historical Society.
- 1907 Begins his column, "The Dean's Window", for The Montreal Standard. This column ran for the next twenty-six years, ending only with his death. Also in this year he became co-editor with Sir Andrew MacPhail of the newly-founded University Magazine, which ran until 1919.

- 1911 In England for the coronation of King George V as a correspondent for The Halifax Morning Chronicle.
- 1914 Publication of a second book of essays, The Life of a Little College and Other Papers.
- 1916 Publication of The Winning of Popular Government and also of the "Thoreau" chapter of the Cambridge History of American Literature.
- 1917 December 6; the Halifax Explosion. MacMechan undertook a project involving research into the reasons for the disaster. Excited by this work, which he called "history at its sources", he became chairman of the Halifax Explosion Committee and completed twenty-four chapters of a manuscript based on first-hand accounts and facts gleaned from records. The findings of the committee were never published, and the enterprise gradually faded away after months of work on MacMechan's part.
- 1919 Centenary celebrations in New York for James Russell Lowell. MacMechan attended as a Canadian representative together with Pelham Edgar, James Cappon, and Duncan Campbell Scott.
- 1920 In May, MacMechan was awarded the degree of Doctor of Laws, Honoris Causa, from his alma mater, the University of Toronto.
- 1921 Formation of the Canadian Authors' Association in March with MacMechan as local president, Halifax branch. Publication of his controversial article, "Canada as a Vassal State".
- 1923 Publication of his first book of sea stories, Sagas of the Sea.
- 1924 Publication of Headwaters of Canadian Literature and Old Province Tales.
- 1925 Taught course in Victorian poetry at the Harvard summer school.
- 1926 Made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada.
- 1927 Publication of The Book of Ultima Thule.
- 1928 Publication of There Go the Ships.
- 1931 Awarded the Lorne Pierce medal for literature; spent the summer in England; retired from active teaching at Dalhousie.
- 1932 Publication of Red Snow on Grand Pre.
- 1933 Died suddenly, after a brief illness, August 8, 1933, at his home, 72 Victoria Road, Halifax.
- 1934 Posthumous publication of his book of poems, Late Harvest, by Lorne Pierce of Ryerson Press.

Chapter I

MacMechan as a Scholar

It was as a scholar of considerable promise that Archibald MacMechan obtained the post of George Munro Professor of English Language and Literature at Dalhousie University in August, 1889.¹ Though the focus of his interests changed as time went on, his work as a scholar remained central to his life and work until he died in Halifax on August 8, 1933. It was initially as a scholar that he was widely recognized in his own day, and his scholarly writings are of primary interest to a study of him in our own time. Among Canadian scholars of his day, he was eminent. One of MacMechan's colleagues has expressed his own idea of MacMechan's position in Canada's literary history by saying that while MacMechan was perhaps not as formidable a scholar as A.S.P. Woodhouse, or as creative a scholar as Northrop Frye, he was nevertheless of major significance as an internationally respected figure in Canadian scholarship.² In order to examine this question in more detail, it is necessary here to turn to MacMechan's doctoral dissertation, the first of his published scholarly writings.

Completed in 1888 when MacMechan was twenty-six and published in Halifax the following year,³ the dissertation is entitled "The Relation of Hans Sachs to the Decameron as shown in an examination of the thirteen Shrovetide plays drawn from that source." The dissertation had been the final step in the completion of MacMechan's doctoral degree in comparative philology from Johns Hopkins University. As MacMechan notes in the "Life" appended to the dissertation, the work for the degree had included "advanced courses in German, English and Old Norse" (82). Apparently his had been a course of study typical of the Germanic philology courses given at Johns

Hopkins in the 1880's, when that university was the seat of German philology in the United States. The importance of this influence on MacMechan's work cannot be underestimated, for it implies an approach to literature that was, in his phrase, "scientific". In an article on Robert Falconer, who became president of the University of Toronto in 1907, James S. Thomson has indicated some of the salient features of Germanic methods in the closing years of the nineteenth century.

It is difficult for us in our time to realize that much of the driving energy for this new learning, particularly in literary and historical criticism had its centre in Germany. In the declining decades of last century, the vigour of German scholarship, alike in its strength and its weakness was the most powerful intellectual force in the world. Thus it was inevitable that [Falconer] should find [himself] in Germany, particularly at Berlin, where Harnack, accounted by many the mightiest scholar in all Europe, was at the height of his powers. It was fortunate indeed for Canada that this new learning was interpreted for us by men such as Robert Falconer and his friends. These same intellectual influences came directly across the Atlantic to swamp the colleges and the universities of the United States without the tempering influences of an older tradition and a stabler intellectual life. This subtle, little recognized, but nevertheless real difference between the universities of the United States and Canada owes much to the Maritime provinces and the intellectual leadership therein nurtured and also to Scotland....

Falconer himself, writing in 1930, speaks of the Germanic post-graduate methods of scholarship that were introduced to Johns Hopkins in 1876 by Daniel Gilman. These methods, he says, included the introduction of the seminar, the thesis, and the Ph.D. degree in the humanities. He speaks of graduates of this system who later became influential in Canadian universities: "the Hopkins' ideals of scholarship were new to most Canadians and a renaissance in some universities was traceable to men, of whom unfortunately some have already passed from their active duties" -- and he goes on to cite MacMechan as one of these men. These words were certainly applicable to MacMechan who, in 1930, was on the verge of retirement. It is important to note Falconer's emphasis on the "renaissance" effected by men trained in the Germanic manner. As one would normally

associate the Germanic training with heavy, pedantic scholarship. MacMechan is something of an anomaly among such scholars, particularly among philologists. George Santayana, writing about Harvard of the 1890's, for example, makes a passing reference to a Professor of Comparative Literature who was "a good fellow, with a richer nature than most philologists"⁸. It is a point worth making here that while MacMechan would appear to be the sort of scholar about whom Santayana speaks, being both a philologist and a Harvard lecturer,⁹ he, too, seems to have had "a richer nature than most philologists", as this thesis will attempt to demonstrate. MacMechan is rarely pedantic, though his long friendship with W.P. Mustard, for example, indicates his sympathy with the narrowly academic life. Mustard's Classical Echoes in Tennyson (1901) is an example of the most desiccated of scholarship but is a book which MacMechan cites as "the last word on the subject"¹⁰. Letters from Mustard to MacMechan span nearly four decades and indicate the cordiality that existed between the two men. MacMechan's connection with Harvard will be taken up elsewhere in this thesis. For the moment, however, it is worth drawing attention to a letter to MacMechan from D.C. Harvey¹¹ in which Harvey quotes MacMechan's reference to himself as "the connecting link between Harvard and Dalhousie". MacMechan's correspondence with G.L. Kittredge and C.E. Norton would substantiate this claim. MacMechan appears to be on very friendly, easy terms with both men, and his recommendation apparently ensured a place at Harvard for several Dalhousie students.¹² Undoubtedly MacMechan prided himself on this connection with Harvard, especially on the entree it provided for Dalhousie students and the favourable reflection cast on the quality of instruction at Dalhousie. Presumably there was considerable rivalry between Nova Scotian universities for recognition of their students by Harvard. As early as 1877, for instance, the record of Acadia students at Harvard was so high that "President Charles W. Eliot

declared that in addition to being "young men of capacity and character," they had shown that the standard of their college was higher "than that of any other college in the Lower Provinces." ¹³ With this background in mind, we will now turn to MacMechan's dissertation itself.

For a dissertation in philology, the aims of the paper are not narrow. MacMechan says that, by studying the plays of Sachs, he hopes to "cast light on the German mind of the Sixteenth Century":

Previous handlings of the same material will be considered, as forming an intermediate step between the Decameron and Sachs, and attention will be called to any particular, however small, which may tend to elucidate Sachs' dramaturgical methods. By so doing, it is hoped to throw light upon the workings of the typical German mind of the Sixteenth Century and offer a small contribution to the history of German dramaturgy. 14

Unfortunately, this broad purpose is never achieved. The attention brought to the particulars of the plays is readily apparent; what is not apparent is any unifying principle in the study of the plays. Though they are heavily annotated and analyzed in terms of plot, characterization, and allusions, they remain, overall, in a diffuse state. MacMechan's most significant discovery in the paper appears to be that Sachs has bowdlerized Boccaccio in his adaptations of the Decameron: "Sachs has an innate repugnance to indecency his avowed purpose was to reform the licentious play of the time" (17). Perhaps the most original and innovative part of the dissertation is MacMechan's claim for Sachs' originality as a playwright. After analyzing one of Boccaccio's stories and commenting on Sachs' transmutation of it, MacMechan says "these changes are sufficient to show that Sachs is no wooden taker-over of plots, but that he picks and chooses and adapts his material to his stage, and is guided by the principles of stage-effect" (24). He also claims for Sachs "an unconscious approach of genius to the citizen comedy, so-called, anticipating Lessing by two centuries" (48). MacMechan notes Sachs' use of a plot similar to that of Voltaire's Malade Imaginaire: "In a word, Sachs has made the freest use of the

Boccaccian idea, changing the whole complexion of it, and adapting it in no unskillful way to the requirements of his own nature and his audience" (12). Later, writing of a one-act farce, he says "the wonder is that when Sachs came so near to the threshold of the Shakespearean drama, he did not take the single further necessary step" (13). He does not specify the type of Shakespearean drama he means, but one would infer that it is Shakespearean comedy of the early period -- Love's Labour's Lost, A Comedy of Errors, The Taming of the Shrew, for example -- he has in mind in making the comparison. From such general statements as these one must infer the illumination of the "typical Sixteenth Century mind" that MacMechan had proposed in the "Plan of Dissertation" (7).

His methodology in writing the dissertation is to choose from Sachs' eighty-one extant Shrovetide plays those with Boccaccian origins (the first thirteen) and to "lay each of these plays in turn side by side with its source, and point out the agreements, divergencies and omissions, both in fact and expression. The more important verbal correspondences will be arranged in parallel columns. Previous handlings of the same material will be considered, as forming an intermediate step between the Decameron and Sachs" (7). By this procedure, MacMechan reaches the following conclusions:

Throughout we have found certain constant forces and pervading tendencies.

I. His material has been made thoroughly his own. The plot of the novel has been first assimilated and has then taken a new shape. The fact that the same material is so often used for a schvank or mastersong before being made into a Fastnachtspiel proves this. He has made the freest use of his material. In some instances he has adhered closely to his source, again, he adds and omits largely, cuts and concentrates, or rounds out and expands his material.

II. The moral tendency is strong. This is seen most plainly in the epilogues, but is found also in certain situations and speeches, and in his consistent omission of the obscene.

III. The tendencies of these thirteen plays are dramatic. The plots selected are those with plenty of action, the "motivierung" is careful, often in his more serious plays, a character is strongly sketched, and the directions to the actors show him to be a practised stage-manager. The result is, for the age, an unusual degree of excellence (81).

From the dissertation it is evident that MacMechan is well-schooled in the minutiae of research, his eye for the "particulars, however small" is apparent in the elaborate detail that goes into the study of the fine points of the plays. His mastery of at least five languages is also evident throughout the dissertation. Further, his citing of Sachs as a precursor of Lessing and Shakespeare and his general familiarity with cross-references of a more broadly literary nature indicate MacMechan's general interest in comparative literature as distinct from more narrow philology. In short, the qualities of mind to be seen in this thesis indicate a scholar whose interests are often broadly based, while his scholar's love of truth dictates an exactitude in carrying through his more general plan. Perhaps in his dissertation one can discern the germ of a later appraisal of MacMechan as a "punctilious but mellow scholar". The accuracy of his appraisal is borne out if one traces MacMechan's scholarly career through from the strict demands of thesis-writing to what is probably his greatest scholarly achievement -- his 1896 edition of Sartor Resartus.

MacMechan's edition of Sartor Resartus, which appeared in 1896, was, until the publication of C.F. Harrold's 1937 edition, the standard text of Carlyle's book. Harrold says that MacMechan's edition is "a monument of research into the allusions of Sartor, to which all subsequent editions have been indebted. The Introduction is valuable for its analysis of Carlyle's style, personality, background, and his sources so far as they were then known." In his "Preface", MacMechan indicates some of

the problems he had encountered in his "pioneer" work:

The task of preparing this work, though thoroughly congenial, and taken up lightheartedly enough, proved heavier as it neared completion. Carlyle's course through the world of books is as incalculable as a bee's in a clover-field. He is besides a giant -- in seven-league boots, and Hop o' my Thumb's chances of keeping him in sight are not brilliant. Though I have striven to avoid the usual jeer at commentators and their farthing candles, I cannot hope that all readers will find 'each dark passage' sufficiently illuminated. There are still a few holes in Sartor's coat which remain to be neatly darned, and some regrettable gaps in my information. These are indicated in the hope that more learned critics may fill them up. As I have been forced to work without the aid of a modern, adequate library,²⁰ my references are not always made to the best or most accessible editions, though they are, I trust, clear and in every case to be relied on. To break a road through new country is rough work, and much may be forgiven the pioneer, if the way he opens up is found to be merely passable ("Preface", ix).²¹

He claims that his edition is the "first attempt to deal systematically with the difficulties the book presents" (viii). As may be inferred from his comments, MacMechan confined his editorial work largely to the explication of allusions in the text. His metaphor of the neat darning of Sartor's coat is particularly apt, for MacMechan's work is a painstaking catching up of particular words, phrases, and quotations with an expansion and explanation of them in their original contexts. His edition of Sartor does not deal with more general influences on Carlyle's thought (J.A.S. Barrett's 1897 edition was the "first to analyse Carlyle's ideas in the light of Hume, Kant, Goethe, and other influences.")²² In short, MacMechan's edition of Sartor Resartus reveals scholarly methods similar to those evident in the Hans Sachs thesis. Both are the work of a philologist tracing derivations, allusions, analogies, and constructs.

MacMechan's edition was published in Ginn's Atheneum Press Series of standard authors edited by established scholars. The Series was under the general editorship of C.T. Winchester of Wesleyan University and G.L. Kittredge of Harvard, the latter being personally acquainted with

MacMechan. The inclusion of MacMechan as an editor in the Series is significant, for it indicates the association he maintained with the academic world of New England, a point to which we will return later.

The "Series Announcement" states that

the "Athenaeum Press Series" includes the choicest works of English literature in editions carefully prepared for the use of schools, colleges, libraries, and the general reader. Each volume is edited by some scholar who has made a special study of an author and his period. The Introductions are biographical and critical. In particular they set forth the relation of the authors to their times and indicate their importance in the development of literature...²⁵

In his "Preface", MacMechan speaks of himself as an American scholar; it would be possible to interpret this as a reference to his graduate work at Johns Hopkins or, and what seems more probable, as a reference to his affiliation with the New England academic world. He stresses, in this "Preface", the connection between Carlyle and America: "it was from an American city, sixty years ago, that the first edition of Sartor Resartus issued in book form; and it is not unfitting that from the same city [Boston] should now come, this, the first attempt to deal systematically with the difficulties the book presents" (viii). He speaks of the connection between America and Carlyle: "America's part in Carlyle is not small" (viii), and goes on to trace the friendship between Emerson and Carlyle and to indicate the turning point this friendship marked for Carlyle's career. To elaborate on the point, he is making, that there exists a strong bond between Americans and Carlyle, he writes

"since [Carlyle's] death, an American man of letters has proved the truest friend of his reputation by putting in the way of everyone who cares to make the trial, those personal documents which correct the inadvertent errors, and downright distortions of Carlyle's great biographer and literary executor (viii).

He is, of course, referring to Charles Eliot Norton as the "truest friend" of Carlyle's reputation in the face of J.A. Froude's "downright distortions".²⁶ That MacMechan endorses Norton's part in the Norton-Froude controversy is made still more obvious: MacMechan's "Dedication" of Sartor reads "To/ Charles Eliot Norton/ as a mark of admiration/ for his character as a man of letters/ and/ his defense of Carlyle's memory".²⁷

Norton was the logical person to act as mentor and consultant for MacMechan's proposed edition of Sartor Resartus, for Norton had edited two volumes of Carlyle's letters, Early Letters of Thomas Carlyle, 1814-1826 (1886) and Letters of Thomas Carlyle, 1826-1836 (1889), and also Reminiscences by Thomas Carlyle (1887)²⁸ and Correspondence between Goethe and Carlyle (1887). MacMechan apparently wrote to Norton as early as the end of 1891 concerning the Sartor project, for on January 29, 1892, Norton writes

I am glad to learn of your design in regard to Sartor Resartus. The average young reader requires notes to it, to explain allusions of many sorts; and doubtless would often be pleased with illustrations of the thought drawn from Carlyle's other writings. Your work, well done, would be useful.²⁹

In reply to a query from MacMechan, he answers that there is no material at Harvard useful for such a project and advises that "illustrative passages must be taken from Carlyle's later works or from his letters, -- much from these last."³⁰ Two years later Norton comments on his interest in the progress of Sartor: "such an edition as MacMechan proposes would be of great value to students of Carlyle in throwing light upon the development and progress of his thought, as well as upon the methods of his work."³¹ A month later, Norton writes that he is "much honoured" by MacMechan's proposal to dedicate the book to him. He apparently feels that it would involve him in a conflict of interests to look at some pages

of the work before it is published; however, he takes, he says, "for granted with full confidence, the worth of ³² the offering." His confidence is apparently well-founded, for shortly after the publication of the book he writes that the "Introduction" is not only interesting but excellent in spirit and admirable in its statements and in its critical discussions: "it seems to me an essay of real value in the help which it will afford to its readers toward a true appreciation alike of Carlyle's thought and of his style." ³³ Of the "Notes" he says "I have gone thro' sic a great part of them and have found them what notes should be", and he concludes with a general compliment: "I congratulate you on the successful accomplishment of so difficult a task.... It is an especial satisfaction to have one's name connected with a work of which one has so high an estimate as I have of yours." ³⁴

MacMechan's association with Norton is remarkable for a number of reasons. For one thing, the endorsement of MacMechan's work by a scholar of Norton's stature and seniority (he was thirty-two years older than MacMechan) effectively ushered MacMechan into the international world of scholarship and fulfilled the promise of his doctoral work. Recognition of his work from this quarter established him in a world wider than the narrowly parochial one he occupied in Halifax. This point will be of considerable significance later on when MacMechan's interest in Canadian literature becomes evident, as such an interest was particularly open to charges of narrow, provincial thinking in the early ³⁵ part of the twentieth century. Secondly, MacMechan's association with New England indicates something of his calibre -- that he is a member of a respected intellectual community. It is from the perspective of a rather cosmopolitan, worldly detachment that some of his most successful later

essays are written, for example, Life of a Little College owes much of its effectiveness to the sort of tone such a stance is able to convey. For while he is not condescending about the size and significance of the college in which he is a prominent member, he nevertheless seems always to view it from a wider world, thus lending much of his work its characteristic irony and humour. ³⁶ Thirdly, MacMechan's relationship with Norton indicates something about the affinity between the two men. In dedicating this edition to Norton "for his character as a man of letters and his defense of Carlyle's memory", MacMechan reveals his admiration for Norton the man and the scholar. Not surprisingly, we find Norton's biographer emphasizing qualities that one might assume MacMechan found attractive. Preeminent among them are Norton's Puritan avoidance of anything scandalous, gossipy, or of ill repute, and his essentially moral approach to literature. In Vanderbilt's words, Norton's was "a corrective rather than a creative criticism". ³⁷ These qualities and certain biases concerning what constitutes good taste in literary matters came to a head in Norton's defence of Carlyle's memory. As Vanderbilt puts it, "more important than any personal dislike and jealousy of Froude...was Norton's enduring resentment toward modern society and its literary sleuths, with their fondness for peeping into the innermost privacies of a man's personal life." ³⁸ He quotes Norton as saying "we are losing the sense of the sacredness of the privacy of life." ³⁹ These attitudes were all of the sort to appeal to MacMechan. An essentially moral interest in literature and its interaction with society was basic to his concern with literature. It is apparently this moral force that draws both Norton and MacMechan to Carlyle as a "hero". ⁴⁰ Goethe had expressed this aspect of Carlyle's potential influence as early as 1827 when he indicated Carlyle's moral concerns: "It is admirable in Carlyle that, in his judgment of our German

authors, he has especially in view the mental and moral core as that which is really influential. Carlyle is a moral force of great importance. There is in him much for the future." Both Norton and MacMechan⁴¹ seem to illustrate to an extent T.S. Eliot's observation that "most critics have some creative interest -- it may be instead of an interest in an art, an interest (like Mr. Paul More's) in morals." For MacMechan,⁴² the greatest literature must possess moral qualities as guides to life, and throughout his life he sought mentors among literary figures -- a point that will be expanded when we come to a consideration of his edition of Tennyson.

MacMechan's affinity with Norton is clear from their mutual condemnation of Froude's "attacks" on Carlyle's reputation. One must infer MacMechan's attitude to Froude, however, mainly from the "Dedication" to Norton. It seems characteristic of MacMechan to avoid ad hominem argument, here as elsewhere. For example, his long-standing quarrel with J.D. Logan, which will be discussed elsewhere in this thesis, is an instance of MacMechan's moderation. His public statements concerning Logan were temperate, to say the least, particularly in comparison with Logan's immoderate public abuse of MacMechan, in, for example, Marjorie Pickthall: Her Poetic Genius and Art. MacMechan, if anything, damns Froude with faint praise in Sartor: "The biographies of Carlyle are so many and so easy to obtain, that I have not thought it well to load my introduction with any biographical facts but those which directly explain the origin of Sartor. After Froude's copious work, the best is Dr. Garnett's Life..."⁴³ In 1901, in his edition of On Heroes and Hero Worship, MacMechan is more explicit. Still, one sees his moderation: "see David Wilson, Mr. Froude and Carlyle (London, 1898), for a complete demolition of Froude, though the book cannot be commended without reserve for tone and temper. It would be most desirable if Professor Norton would write the

life of Carlyle, or at least publish his personal reminiscences of him." 44

A further indication of the sort of public comment to which MacMechan was given in correcting the errors of other critics comes from Heroes.

Speaking of Frederic Harrison's judgment of Carlyle, MacMechan is wry:

The "incoherence" is not Carlyle's. Indeed, 'incoherence' is hardly the term for such an error, but it is thus that criticism is written A similar error which tends to throw doubt on all that is good in the book is the egregious statement 'that no one of Shakespeare's plays was published with his name in his lifetime.'⁴⁵

Again, it is typical of MacMechan to let the facts speak for themselves without acrimonious comment from him. For MacMechan, the aversion to Froude seems to have stemmed both from his distaste for the exposure of personal matters of a particularly private nature and the will to retain unblemished a "hero" whom he could admire and revere. 46

Possibly part of Norton's appeal for MacMechan was the link he represented in the network of a bygone literary world. Norton had met Carlyle in 1869 when Carlyle was seventy-four. 47 Also, Norton was in touch with Alexander Carlyle, Carlyle's nephew. Apart from the sheer authority this kind of connection implied, MacMechan would probably have had considerable reverence for a man who had been close to Carlyle. Norton would represent for MacMechan a link with an age that had passed, and being, as he frequently said of himself, "a sentimental old Victorian", 48 MacMechan would certainly have held Norton in some awe simply for this connection. This is, of course, speculation, but it seems that given 49 MacMechan's temperament and his predisposition to "revere" various people, the kind of connection with Norton that is suggested here could be best conveyed by reference to a poem by Browning. In "Memorabilia", Browning indicates the powerful influence exerted upon him by a meeting with a stranger who mentioned having talked with Shelley. Browning adds, in a

note to the poem, "Suddenly the stranger paused, and burst into laughter as he observed me staring at him with blanched face....I still vividly remember how strangely the presence of a man who had seen and spoken with Shelley affected me." ⁵⁰ MacMechan's desire to be connected with other souls shines through something he wrote in 1895: "we are lonely creatures, we men and women. Apart we are helpless. we move in great darkness, and we like to know that our fellows are not far from us," ⁵¹ Of nothing could this be more true than his desire for closeness with his "heroes". Again, one is forced into speculation. It is tempting to see such comments as evidence of MacMechan's "spiritual" nature. Several people who knew him well have spoken of this quality in MacMechan. Max MacOdrum, for example, quotes his father, a Presbyterian minister, as referring to MacMechan as "the most spiritual man he had ever known." ⁵² F.M. Salter considered MacMechan his "spiritual father". ⁵³ MacMechan's idealism and reverence for what is fine and good constitute his essential high-mindedness and is a large part of what he means when he calls himself a "Victorian".

The importance of MacMechan's edition of Sartor Resartus ⁵⁴ lies mainly in its significance as a "pioneer work". Its distinguishing feature, when it is read now, eighty years after its publication, is MacMechan's clarification of Carlyle's sources, "as far as they were ⁵⁵ known." In most cases, the research into the allusion in the book takes the form of simple identification. A comparison between MacMechan's notes and Harrold's will perhaps illustrate the difference in emphasis in the two editions. For example, in the chapter "Natural Supernaturalism" occurs the line "'Custom,' continues the Professor, 'doth make dotards of us all.'" MacMechan's footnote, identifying the allusion, reads:

Custom.

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all: ⁵⁶
Hamlet, iii, I.

Harrold's footnote to the same line reads:

Cf. Hamlet, III, 1, 83: "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all." -- Carlyle's whole discussion of Custom in these paragraphs may be indirectly indebted to Hume, for whom custom was the 'ultimate principle' of all beliefs, reasoning, and judgement. (B) Custom as the enemy of wonder and religion places Carlyle among his contemporaries, for whom wonder and the fresh gaze of the child were among the chief marks of the romantic point of view.

MacMechan's note, then, simply identifies an allusion or an echo and, to those who are able to catch the reference unaided, the note seems almost gratuitous and pedantic. The meticulous identification of each allusion is the hallmark of this edition, and the overall effect of the edition is to present an annotated version of Carlyle's prose in which the letter if not the spirit of the book is preserved. This is not to suggest that MacMechan is pedantic and dry in his editing of Sartor, but that the very nature of the book -- MacMechan calls it a "prose-poem" -- makes any edition appear to be a rather pedestrian effort. The Series in which the book appeared was aimed at the general reader and at students, and certainly MacMechan's edition is exemplary in providing for the latter and is very well suited to be a college textbook. It accomplishes much the same purpose as W.P. Mustard's Classical Echoes in Tennyson, already cited as an example of scholarship at its driest or most "strict", in MacMechan's phrase. Both from a comparison of internal evidence in the two books and from MacMechan's own testimony (he calls Mustard's book "the last word on the subject") it is obvious that the two men had a similar passion for philologic investigation. However, MacMechan sometimes lapses into a sort of "impressionistic" footnoting -- that is, into the compiling of notes that serve no particular end save that of indicating MacMechan's own familiarity with a passage similar to the one being glossed in Carlyle. It is not always obvious that the analogous

passage is one which Carlyle might have had in mind. Indeed, sometimes MacMechan does not even make the implication, but merely supplies an analogy. One example of this tendency "will serve as well as a hundred", as MacMechan would say. The following passage comes from Sartor Resartus, Chapter VIII:

Readers of any intelligence are once more invited to favour us with their most concentrated attention: let these, after intense consideration, and not till then, pronounce, Whether on the utmost verge of our actual horizon there is not a looming as of Land, a promise of new Fortunate Islands, perhaps whole undiscovered Americas, for such as have canvas to sail thither (45-46).

MacMechan's footnote to the passage reads

utmost verge. For similar thought see Tennyson's Ulysses, the closing lines.

Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world,
...for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset and the baths
Of all the western stars until I die...
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles (307).

In this note it seems that the echo of a similar idea in Tennyson has touched off a somewhat dubious analogy in MacMechan's mind. Harrold's edition, for instance, does not gloss the passage at all. MacMechan himself notes that "Many passages of Sartor are simply mosaics of familiar texts."⁵⁹

Like his Notes to Sartor Resartus, MacMechan's Introduction is remarkable for its great familiarity with details of Carlyle's life and work. The Introduction consists of several parts: first, with the production of Sartor (xii-xix), with Carlyle's sources (xix-xxiii), with the relationship between Sartor and Carlyle's life (xxiii-xxvii), with the probable identification of Blumine (xxvii-xxxvi) and, finally, with a discussion of the genre of the book, its unique statue as a kind of prose-poem (lx-lxxi).

"Introduction" is almost a misnomer for what amounts to a long, appreciative, and frequently discursive essay on Carlyle, the man and the work. A tone of expansive admiration is the keynote of the essay. The following passage is typical of the style of the "Introduction" and its method of placing Carlyle in his time:

In his parable of "The Flower", Tennyson shows that he is quite aware that he had set the tune for all the minor singers of his day. It is a simple fact that his manner has dominated the poetry of the last forty years almost as absolutely as Pope's manner dominated the poetry of the eighteenth century. Carlyle's distinctive manner is much more strongly marked than Tennyson's, but possibly for that very reason has found no imitators. In some points, the eccentricities, as well as the excellences, of Browning and Mr. George Meredith resemble Carlyle's; but it would be difficult to make out a case of deliberate mimicry. Carlyle's style is the bow of Ulysses, the brand of Astur, a weapon for no feebler hand than his.... Though only a few of the noted names are assembled here to show his power over the minds of men, the list might be greatly increased, and to trace that power through all its subtle workings would require, not a paragraph, but a volume (lxx-lxxi).

This passage is indicative of a number of aspects of MacMechan's writing on Carlyle. The authority of tone illustrates his mastery of the subject: not only was MacMechan steeped in Carlyle, but Carlyle was a "hero" to him, and hero-worship is a potent force in MacMechan's appreciation of any subject. The passage also indicates what MacMechan took to be Carlyle's importance as an influence over a great part of nineteenth-century prose-writing. Thirdly, the passage is typical of MacMechan's own allusive style ("the bow of Ulysses, the brand of Astur"). These phrases are typical of MacMechan's writing in that it frequently seems to be addressed to an audience presumably familiar with his allusions and phraseology. His writing possesses a kind of intimacy to be seen most conspicuously in the later essays. This intimacy is perhaps the quality that makes them most compelling as familiar essays. Finally, the quotation

indicates MacMechan's humility in the face of what amounts to an almost superhuman task -- the tracing of "that power through all its subtle workings." His appreciation of the magnitude of Carlyle's influence is evident here, and it is perhaps not too exaggerated to compare this ending with that of another disciple who wrote that if the deeds of his master were to be properly chronicled, the book "would fill the whole world." ⁶⁰ It is the spirit of MacMechan's discipleship to which I wish to draw attention here: he is clearly in great awe of Carlyle, in a state of mind approaching reverence.

In summary, then, what might one say about the edition of Sartor Resartus? To compare it with other editions is instructive for the range is, chronologically, Traill's edition (1896), Barrett's (1897), Parr's (1913), Harrold's (1936) and, perhaps, W.H. Hudson's "Introduction" to the 1908 Everyman edition. Only Harrold's can compare with MacMechan's for scope of discussion, while Hudson's has a perspective and succinctness that MacMechan's more rambling, associative prose does not match. In short, the qualities of scholarship evident in MacMechan's edition of Sartor indicate what seems almost paradoxical in him: the "punctilious" scholar yoked with the genial, somewhat effusive, and "sentimental" essayist. It is this combination that makes the book so characteristic of MacMechan -- a lavish appreciation of Carlyle coupled with footnoting that becomes almost an end in itself and leans toward philology of the most desiccated kind. Possibly the "Introduction" is the best example we have of the free-flowing, scholarly prose MacMechan was capable of writing when familiar with his subject-matter and intent upon informing his reader: it is a "teacherly" piece of writing. Throughout, his tone is deferential. In contrast, his later edition of Carlyle's

Heroes and Hero-Worship is marked by his increased assurance and his almost casual air in some of the references. Sartor Resartus is the work of a scholar who is both diligent and junior in his profession, whereas the later book demonstrates a growing confidence in his own powers.

MacMechan's edition of Carlyle's On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History appeared in 1901, five years after the publication of his edition of Sartor Resartus. On Heroes had first been published in book form in 1841 after having been delivered as a series of lectures in 1837 and 1838. Several points about MacMechan's edition of On Heroes are immediately noticeable, perhaps the most outstanding being the indication of MacMechan's evident reputation as an editor of Carlyle. As will be indicated further along in this chapter, much internal evidence suggests MacMechan's own self-confidence in this later edition of Carlyle. Also, the title page of On Heroes reads in part "Edited by Archibald MacMechan, George Munro Professor of English Language and Literature in Dalhousie College" (this portion of the citation is repeated from the previous Carlyle edition) "Editor of Sartor Resartus". A later editor's acknowledged debt to MacMechan has been noted already. ⁶¹ Moreover, the choice of MacMechan as editor for a second volume in the Athenaeum Series would indicate the approval of the editors, Winchester and Kittredge, for MacMechan's edition of Sartor Resartus. Indeed, Kittredge seems to have taken a lively personal interest in MacMechan's work, for an entry in MacMechan's private journal in the summer of 1893 records a visit to Kittredge in Cambridge during which the two men sat up until well into ⁶² the morning discussing aspects of the Notes to Sartor Resartus.

MacMechan indicates his reasons for producing this edition of On Heroes, which is not the first, Edmund Gosse's (1896) and H.D. Traill's,

for example, having preceded it:

Neither Mr. Traill nor Mr. Gosse, [Carlyle's] latest editors...establish the relation between the spoken lectures and the written book. That it is now possible to do both is due to the courtesy of Mr. Alexander Carlyle, who has made for the present edition extracts from his great kinsman's unpublished letters, which place the matter beyond a doubt.⁶³

Also, MacMechan appears to want to counter, by means of his elaborate Introduction to the book, the rather disparaging view of both On Heroes and Carlyle the man as put forward by Traill and Gosse. He speaks of "the apologetic or patronizing air" both editors have adopted in treating the book, and he mentions as well what Gosse calls "the contrast between the 'squalid egotism' of Carlyle's character and the heroic doctrine he preached" (lxx). MacMechan's stance here is that of an authority on Carlyle, of someone capable of putting matters straight. Such authority is hardly surprising when one considers his edition of On Heroes in its context: at this time, MacMechan had held his doctorate for fifteen years, had established himself as a professor of English Language and Literature, and had edited what had become the standard text of Carlyle's most difficult work. It is to be expected, then, that On Heroes should show the marks of a scholar more self-confident, more at ease with his material, and more authoritative in the presentation of his findings than was the case with Sartor. MacMechan's own account of his work on Heroes indicates some of these qualities:

The task of the commentator on the trail of his facts is like that set the Irish herd-boy in the folk-tale, when he lost the heifers, namely, to search "every place likely and unlikely for them all to be in." The first part of this roving commission, it is possible, with time and luck, to execute; but to hunt the shy allusions, the remote quotations, the deep-lurking bits of information, through every "unlikely" covert, forms a too extensive programme. Indeed, the editor comes at last to a point, when he feels that nothing further can be effected by organized search. It is only by pure chance, when looking for other things, that he can hope to run across the fugitive erudition which will make his commentary as full,

as it should be.' This is sadly true of any one who would edit Carlyle. In annotating Heroes, I have aimed at compression, and striven, as in Sartor Resartus, to make the author supply the comment on his own work. Some things which would tend to enlightenment I have not been able to find, and I have said so in my Notes, in the hope that better scholars will discover them. Only after many toilsome hours did I give over the pursuit of any one. Fortunately Heroes needs little explanation, the difficulties are few (vii).

One can perceive from this comment the similarity in intent to the editing of Sartor -- the "roving commission" of Heroes is similar to the quest of "Hop o' my Thumb" for the giant in seven league boots in Sartor. As MacMechan points out, however, the editing of Sartor was much the greater task. A simple comparison of the bulk of the Notes indicates the truth of this assertion: Heroes has 292 pages of text and 77 pages of notes, while Sartor has 271 pages of text and 126 pages of notes. In Heroes, however, it is not the general meaning and intent of the work that it is the editor's task to illuminate -- it is, rather, the identification of various references which are, on the whole, more readily accessible than those of Sartor. From the "Preface" it seems that MacMechan's intention in editing the book is clearer in his own mind than was his intention in Sartor, which often veers between being a text-book for students and a work of allusion-hunting for the sheer love of it. In the "Preface", with characteristic irony and wit, MacMechan indicates his purpose in editing Heroes:

In the Introduction, I have tried, by using contemporary evidence, to show what Carlyle was like as a lecturer, and to recover his audience. The whole story is, I believe, told here for the first time. Thanks to a member of the Carlyle clan, it has been possible to establish also for the first time, the relation between Heroes, the lectures delivered, after careful preparation, without notes, and Heroes, the elaborated book. As a book, it is, perhaps, the hastiest and slightest of his works, and contains a large number of petty errors which can lessen its value only in the bisson conspectivities of niggling pedants. Still, in the interests of the undergraduate, for the safe-guarding of his literary morals, these errors must be exposed. The young bow too readily to the authority of the printed page. Certain points in the bibliography of Heroes, previously obscure, are now made clear. These are the chief results of two years' study (viii).

This paragraph is interesting for what one takes to have been MacMechan's interest in the genesis of Heroes as a book. Here, and elsewhere in the Introduction, he writes with energy and sympathy of the problems of lecturing in general and of transmitting the spoken word to print:

The thing written to be read differs widely from the thing written to be spoken. The eye is a more exacting critic than the ear, and the spoken word that stirred the blood often looks pitiable enough in cold print. The thing to be read must have finish, if it is to be read more than once, but finish tends to make the spoken thing ring hollow. Besides, as every one knows who has tried it, the process of recasting a lecture into an essay is slow and disagreeable (lii).

MacMechan's own Virgil An Essay is an example of the latter process of recasting a lecture into an essay and underscores his firsthand knowledge of what he claims here. He continues:

Every one who gives a course of lectures knows how familiar material, by dint of frequent handling, loses its freshness, how the sharp angles and clear lines are worn down and out, until the fact which looks the same, and seems to be the same as of yore, has become by imperceptible degrees not the same. Carlyle worked fast, trusted to his memory and did not take pains to verify every reference (lxv).

MacMechan's appreciation of the difficulties of lecturing are interestingly supplemented by his own extant lecture notes. These reveal how, early in his career, he wrote carefully annotated, organized lectures that were apparently meant to be delivered verbatim but gradually evolved into a more casual, general method of prompting himself. Also, in the passage quoted above, one can discern MacMechan's form of pedantic wit. His comment on "the bisson conspectivities of niggling pedants" is typical of the sort of verbal "overkill" he uses when ridiculing pedantry by means of a sort of parody of its diction. His essay "Clamming", to be considered later, is possibly his most sustained example of this form of wit.

Like the Introduction to Sartor Resartus, MacMechan's Introduction to On Heroes and Hero-Worship is prodigiously long. MacMechan divides

the Introduction into six main parts: "I. Carlyle as a Lecturer; II. Heroes (as lectures), III. Heroes (as book), IV. Carlyle's Style; V. Carlyle's Ideas, VI. Value and Influence of Heroes" (ix). A large section of the Introduction is given over to background information on the transition of Heroes from lecture series to book. In providing this background MacMechan relies for his information on Mrs. Carlyle's letters as well as on notes taken during the lectures by a T.C. Anstey, by Leigh Hunt (in The Examiner), and by Caroline Fox. From these sources he is able to provide the reader with contemporary estimates of Carlyle's lecture series. One notes here a rare instance of MacMechan's repeating of a disparaging personal remark. He refers to Hunt's "Skimpolean disclaimers" (xxx). A recent editor of Bleak House has provided a gloss for this comment:

Harold Skimpole [is] the most famous example of how unkind and unjust a generous man may sometimes allow himself to appear.... The "ugly" parts of Skimpole are added to him as a "contrivance".... They have not, and never had, any association whatever with Leigh Hunt.... The general public will always assume the meanness and cruelty below the surface, which was not there, in the man. ⁶⁶

It is unusual to find MacMechan promulgating ideas of this nature. Of Caroline Fox, MacMechan says that the great pity is that she attended only the last few of Carlyle's lectures, for her Journals catch most closely of all the reported lectures, Carlyle's speech as it actually was. "She had eager eyes and a ready pen, and she makes such good use of them, recording much in her diary, but never a mean or ungenerous thought, that the professed Carlylean sighs to think she was not able to attend the whole course" (xlv). One notes here both MacMechan's aversion to "mean or ungenerous" thinking and the reference to himself as a "professed Carlylean".

Also, like the Introduction to Sartor Resartus, the Introduction to Heroes is conspicuous in demonstrating MacMechan's great familiarity with his subject-matter: like Carlyle's own proce, the Introduction can

frequently was heavily allusive in a manner indicating MacMechan's intimate knowledge of Carlyle. MacMechan's own comments on allusions are worth quoting at some length, if only to show that, well-acquainted with the use of allusion as a teacher's tic, he is able to appreciate its subtle use in Carlyle's writing:

Allusion is a schoolmaster's trick, and must be always more or less puzzling. In popular discourse the device must be used sparingly, and it must not be far-fet, or it will perplex and obscure, instead of aiding and enlightening the understanding. In Heroes the references, open and veiled, to things the speaker and the audience both have in common are, as compared with those in Santor, few and scanty. They are generally references to what educated Londoners might be supposed to know, or to matters dealt with in the earlier lectures of the course. The allusions to the Bible are perhaps the most frequent (lx1).

MacMechan frequently refers to himself as a "Carlylean", and the minute details he obviously has at his fingertips animate this Introduction so that it becomes, in part, something MacMechan often writes -- a portrait in prose. ⁶⁷ His description of the scene of Carlyle's first lecture in this Introduction is typical of MacMechan the essayist, in the impressionistic, detailed way in which it attempts to carry the reader into the emotion of the hour:

Learning, taste, nobility, family, wit and beauty were all represented in that assembly; "composed of mere quality and notabilities," says Carlyle. It is easy to figure the scene, the men all clean shaven, in the clumsy coats, high collars, and enormous neck-cloths of the period, the ladies, and there were naturally more ladies than men, following the vagaries of fashion in "bishop" sleeves and the "pretty church-and-state bonnets," that seemed to Hunt, at times, "to think through all their ribbons." We call that kind of bonnet "coal-scuttle" now, but MacClise's portrait of Lady Morgan trying hers on before a glass justifies Hunt's epithet. The lecturer was the lean, wiry type of Scot, within an inch of six feet. In face, he was not the bearded, broken-down, broken-hearted Carlyle of the Fry photograph, but the younger Carlyle of the Emerson portrait. Clean-shaven, as was then the fashion, the determination of the lower jaw lying bare, the thick black hair, brushed carelessly and coming down low on the bony, jutting forehead, violet-blue eyes, deep-set and alert, the whole face shows the Scot and the peasant in every line. It was a striking face, the union of black hair, blue eyes, and, usually, ruddy color on the high cheek bones, "as if painted...at the plough's tail," Lady Eastlake remarked, and she was an artist (xix).

In the following quotation, MacMechan's familiarity with the details of Carlyle's life gives the description its poignancy for him, if to us it seems rather sentimental. That MacMechan could be unabashedly sentimental to the point of being lugubrious is amply illustrated in some of his early writing, ⁶⁸ In the description of Carlyle, he begins by quoting Mrs. Carlyle's description of the success of the lecture given by her husband and goes on to sketch in for the reader the significance of the scene she has described:

In short, we left the concern in a sort of whirlwind of "glory," not without "bread." She notes a carriage with the Royal arms and liveries, which had brought a court-official to Portman Square, and, in sad contrast to her triumph, the widow of Edward Irving sitting opposite in her weeds. As a girl, she had loved Irving herself; this woman had taken him from her, Irving had had his brief day of glory, and now he was beyond it all. The letter ends sadly; the sun has gone under a cloud (xxxv).

Such details and such obvious knowledge of the nuances of things pertaining to the Carlyles serve to introduce Heroes to the reader in highly animated form. As MacMechan himself says, "to appreciate the power and freshness of such a book [as Heroes], we must put ourselves in the place of Carlyle's audience and his first readers" (lxxx). This his Introduction surely does.

His Introduction also indicates the value MacMechan places on Heroes. Having called it "the slightest of Carlyle's works", he goes on to appraise it as a sort of history. From his appraisal it is possible, once again, to see the "mellow" scholar, one who appreciates the vivifying word and idea as opposed to the dry, sterile writing of "specialists":

The value of history as the first requisite of culture is too well known to be insisted upon....History gives us background, perspective, prevents us from being merely temporal people,

living only in the present, and so helps to form the broader, more open mind, which marks the man of true cultivation. There is, then, a great and manifest advantage in going to a teacher who professes to give us, not the flesh and outward coverings, much less the dry bones, of history, but the "very marrow" of it. If he is able to fulfill his large promises, he will not only shorten the time of learning most difficult lessons, especially if we come to him early in our intellectual rise and progress, but he will make us "lords of truth," by which we shall live and grow. Few things can be better worth knowing than the inner meaning of what the race has done upon this planet.... To call Heroes an introduction to the study of history would be an injustice. The name suggests the dry, cautious handbooks of the specialists, intended for the use of students; but an introduction to the study of history it is none the less. It is meant for all classes whose reading extends beyond the newspaper and the novel. For all but the severe student its value must long be undiminished. Error it contains of the lesser kind in matters of fact, but they spring from haste and over-familiarity with the subject, never from ignorance or shallow study.... The results in Heroes were gathered slowly through long years of study; and the student brought to his work the patience of the scholar and the strange endowment we call genius (lxxviii-lxxxix).

His summary of the book's ultimate worth is similarly indicative of his own generosity of spirit:

To go to Heroes for minute, solid, moderate statements, as one would go to Gardiner or von Ranke, is a mistake, but for suggestion, and stimulus to seek further into the spiritual history of the race, there is simply no one book like it (lxxxix).

Throughout the Introduction to Heroes passages like those just quoted suggest that though MacMechan was familiar with and respected the "patience of the scholar", he was rather contemptuous of narrow and "severe" scholarship that dealt only with "the flesh or outward coverings" or, worse still, the "dry bones" of a subject.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the Introduction, for the purposes of this thesis, is what it reveals about MacMechan as a maturing scholar. Possibly, because it is so much the less inspired work, Heroes admits of a more pedestrian editorial treatment than does Sartor. Possibly, too, the combination of MacMechan's successful editing of Sartor coupled with his growing experience as a teacher has altered

his tone as an editor of Carlyle. For whatever reason, MacMechan's tone in both the Introduction and Notes is quite often that of a schoolmaster correcting errors in composition. For example, referring to Carlyle's mistaken etymology at one point, MacMechan, clearly considering himself competent to speak on the matter, writes

Carlyle was capable of misquoting, of mistaking one word for another, of confusing Plato with Aristotle, and "euphuism" with "euphemism." He was not in advance of his age, in his knowledge of Norse, for instance, he is fond of convenient etymologies, and supports and opposes the fancies of Grimm in no scientific fashion. Sometimes he fails in matter of fact (lxv).

His rationale in pointing to these errors in Carlyle he had previously offered:

In spite of its name, the texture of Sartor is closely woven and firm; but it is not so with Heroes. Compared with the masterpieces, it is almost flimsy. It is an ungrateful task to discover the skirts of the master; but a critical edition is like Iago, nothing if not critical. Wherever errors on matter of fact have been discernible, they have been brought to book in note or various reading, and, as far as possible, corrected. The curious may find them in the proper places, they are not few; but they shall not be mustered and paraded together by the present editor. Comparison with the earlier texts shows that Carlyle, like any other man working at speed, would blunder now and then (lxiv).

The point to establish here is the spirit in which MacMechan is criticizing Carlyle: given the circumstances he has indicated, he is quite willing to allow for one sort of "error". Certain of Carlyle's other "errors", however, he treats sternly:

The errors in matters of fact are not really important. They do not detract from the value of the book as a whole, or modify in any way its teaching. But there is another class of error which cannot be passed over so easily. Carlyle was anything but a worshipper of use and wont; and it is therefore not surprising that in Heroes he takes liberties with the code of usage we call English grammar. In an edition of this kind, intended chiefly for readers in their pupilage, when the authority of print is rarely questioned, it becomes a plain duty to note such deviations from rule (lxv).

He continues, indicating the sort of "deviations from rule" he has in mind:

Intentionally pitching the style low, and trying to make it 'as like talk as possible,' Carlyle becomes colloquial. His Letters show that he was fond of the common illegitimate use of 'get', and it frequently blemishes the text. Such examples as 'when one soul has...got its sin and misery left behind,' 'Luther could not get lived in honesty for it,' 'it will never rest till it get to work free,' can hardly be justified. He is fond of such expressions as 'this of,' 'that of,' 'the like' and 'suchlike', for example, 'It has always seemed to me extremely curious this of Voltaire.' ...How Carlyle would justify or defend them, I do not know. Even Johnson's defence of the way he defined 'pastern' is barred him (lxv-lxvi).

His attitude to this general pattern of idiosyncratic modes of expression in Carlyle is apparent in his concluding comments on Carlyle's use of conventional grammar:

...in hurried, eager speech, imperfections in the structure of the sentences may not only be forgiven, they may even be welcomed, as tokens of sincerity. The speaker is so intent upon his meaning that he will not stop to pick and choose his words, and build his sentences by rule. But when he sets forth his burning words in ordered and deliberate prose, he must submit to the laws that govern that method of expression. But these laws Carlyle, in Heroes, cannot, or, more probably, will not obey. The gerund-grinder finds, on laying the ordinary measuring rod of grammar to Carlyle's sentences, that many are, properly speaking, not sentences at all, but the unorganized material for sentences. There is inner coherence, the meaning is clear, but too often they are bundles of phrases from which sentences are made. For example, the third sentence of the first lecture, though conveying a plain enough meaning, conforms to no grammatical definition: "A large topic; indeed, an illimitable one; wide as Universal History." Such fragmentary, abrupt, irregular, exclamatory sentences abound. Perhaps the climax in abruptness is the last sentence in Lecture V, on Burns. Of the nine sentences which make up the portrait of Dante's face and soul, four contain no verb, assert nothing. The picture will not out of the memory, and yet a fundamental law of usage is violated. The gerund-grinder feels his conventional world of grammar crumbling around him. . . . He can only conclude that the laws of grammar are no more binding on genius than the laws of morality. . . . Another form of apology suggests itself. Our author defended Mahomet, on good Goethean grounds, namely, that restriction in one direction excuses greater indulgence on all other sides; and the argument fits the matter in hand. Carlyle restricted himself on many sides; but he took his license in the fields of, -- grammar (lxvi-lxvii).

One might detect here a certain delight in MacMechan's perception of Carlyle's disregard of convention. It is unclear from the passage quoted whether MacMechan considers himself a prosaic "gerund-grinder" or part of a select group exempt from convention to the extent of at least being able to appreciate the liberties genius is free to take. It is perhaps typical of MacMechan in general that, while he himself is very much bound by rules and conventions, he is able to live vicariously through various "heroes" whether they be literary figures or men of action, sea-faring men in particular.

The point of including these long quotations in this chapter is to indicate the tone MacMechan adopts in editing Heroes and Hero-Worship. It is possible to discern a change from the tone of Sartor Resartus, where the editor appeared to be very much a disciple following with deference the utterances of a great man. In Heroes, for example, MacMechan even goes so far as to question Carlyle's choice of one "hero", putting forward a candidate he deems more worthy of inclusion:

If the sphere of heroism is widened to include the world of letters, for example, is not the 'great and gallant Scott' a truer hero in that kind than Goethe, or Johnson, or Burns, or Rousseau? Does he not meet the requirements of Greek tragedy, -- the just man, for some flaw in character, struck down by Fate in his prosperity, and moving all who behold the spectacle to terror and pity? If Carlyle wanted a hero, surely 'the old struggler,' who was so true to the fighting Border blood he came of, and died like one of his own spearmen at Flodden, for honor, in the lost battle he would never own was lost, is a nobler figure than the comfortable Hofrath, the weak-willed gauger, the 'dusty, irascible pedagogue,' or the half-mad mate of the cretinous Levasseur. If 'hero' implies ethical dignity and lofty bearing in time of deadliest trial, Scott deserves the title (lxxxiii).

As MacMechan would be the first to admit, however, most of these criticisms of Carlyle do not for a moment obscure the greatness of his mind: as MacMechan puts it, "but all such blemishes are not more than spots upon the sun, hardly seen by the unassisted eye, and in no way hindering the radiation of light and life" (lxxvii). The concluding portion

of the Introduction is typical of his tone throughout:

'The field is the world.' Hume cast a chance word carelessly into the great seed-field. In the fullness of time it found lodgment in the brain of a brother Scot, and bore fruit in a new thought about history, a new impulse to earnest life. The new thought was given by word of mouth to a handful of people in a London room. It was spread abroad the next year and the next in the form of a printed book. From England it crossed the sea to New England. It helped to shape the lives of at least three great men who had power to teach their fellows. And year by year, the readers spread abroad in ever-expanding circles. Such is the history of Heroes.

'It is a goustous determined speaking out of the truth about several things,' was the final judgment of Carlyle on the work of his hand. True words spoken with determination do not lose themselves in the air. Carlyle appeals to the young and to the young in heart. His trumpet call is what the unspoiled nature eagerly responds to, for whoever else bids crouch, he bids aspire (lxxxviii).

What is remarkable about this edition of Carlyle generally is the sense one has, in reading it, that the editor has enjoyed his task and that, while he admires Carlyle to the point of hero-worship, he nevertheless feels able to reply to some of his statements. One frequently senses, in this edition, two minds parrying ideas. His corrections of Carlyle can be almost facetious at times, while at other times MacMechan adopts an Olympian tone that seems almost tongue-in-cheek. In all, the notable effect of MacMechan's corrections of Carlyle is the spirit of camaraderie conveyed. MacMechan does not seem to be intimidated by Carlyle's learning, but instead follows the workings of his mind with sympathy, affection, and humour. He finds Carlyle guilty of slips ranging from what he calls "common errors" to incomplete and even confused comprehension, and in correcting Carlyle, he even explains what Carlyle "must have had in mind", going on to fill out Carlyle's probable intention. All these corrections are made in an exacting and painstaking manner; but there is nothing of pettiness or pedantry about them. Another technique of correcting inaccuracies in Carlyle is MacMechan's way of restating, and often understating, a matter Carlyle has dealt with in such a way that Carlyle's explication is made to appear somewhat exag-

gerated. Analogous to this method of commenting on Carlyle's use of material is MacMechan's habit of going directly to Carlyle's sources, appraising and commenting on Carlyle's use of them. In this MacMechan maintains a distance from Carlyle's enthusiasms, and his Notes frequently furnish the reader with counterweighted argument and so offset Carlyle's eloquence to a degree.

In summary, then, this volume is of particular significance as the high-water mark of MacMechan's scholarly career. Except for one other piece that might be termed scholarly,⁶⁹ On Heroes and Hero-Worship appears to be a turning-point in his academic career: after the publication of this volume, MacMechan increasingly turns to work of a more creative nature. One can only conclude that such work was more congenial to him than was "severe" or strict scholarship. Several reasons might be offered for this move away from the demands made on his time by life in a small college where in some respects he was a general factotum. Possibly, too, the effect of being out of the mainstream of academic life affected his production of scholarly writing simply by the absence of a stimulating milieu. It is also significant that the four main scholarly projects of his life -- his dissertation, the two editions of Carlyle, the Thoreau article -- were connected with and probably written at the instigation of American scholars. Possibly, too, the effect of being an omniscient figure in a relatively small community dissipated his energies. As we shall see later on, MacMechan involved himself in a number of community interests beyond the confines of the university circle. For whatever reason or combination of reasons, it remains a fact that he turned more and more to the production of more personal and, one would suspect, more enjoyable writing. Like so many first-rate teachers who have inspired students with a love of their subject through lively classroom teaching, MacMechan's energies for scholarly work appear to have been spent in

this ephemeral way. A distinct change in attitude is perceptible in the edition of Tennyson which appeared in 1907.

MacMechan's edition of Tennyson's Select Poems (1907) came six years after the publication of his edition of On Heroes and Hero-Worship. Compared with the two Carlyle editions, this is a peculiar performance indeed. One notices at once that the dedication and prefatory note are somewhat fulsome and parochial. The "Notes" to the edition are not strenuously compiled, if one compares them with those to the Carlyle editions. Indeed, the book conveys a sense of the editor's complacency. What was, in previous volumes, an authoritative editorial voice speaking on narrow topics here becomes a rather pompous voice uttering general truths in a somewhat condescending manner.

In his "Prefatory Note" MacMechan indicates his attitude to the selection of poems in the book:

This volume of selections from the poetry of Tennyson has been compiled first for the delectation of all true lovers of noble verse, by a Tennysonian who can scarcely be brought to admit that the King can do wrong....In choosing poems for such a volume as this, the editor can be guided by the taste of the judicious few and by the hearty approval of the multitude of readers. He need include nothing of doubtful value, nothing of unacknowledged excellence. I hope I have done so (Prefatory Note, p. v).

The commentary which accompanies the poems, he says, makes no pretense at completeness; "it is personal; it would be interpretive and suggestive. It implies access to ordinary works of reference; and it is written for Tennysonians only" (p. v).

MacMechan's assumption throughout this edition is that Tennyson's eminence is unquestioned. One wonders how typical this was of critical attitudes in 1907. According to one critic, Tennyson's reputation had reached its "nadir...say about 1910".⁷⁰ MacMechan, apparently, was one whose loyalty to Tennyson had never flagged: a middle-aged man in 1907,

MacMechan had been profoundly affected by Tennyson's death fifteen years earlier. His feeling for Tennyson seems similar to that of Carlyle's biographer, J.A. Froude, who, though a generation older than MacMechan, shared many attitudes with him, not the least of which was an attitude of reverence for Tennyson:

The best and bravest of my own contemporaries determined to have done with insincerity, to find ground under their feet, to let the uncertain remain the uncertain, but to learn how much and what we could honestly regard as true, and believe and live by it. Tennyson became the voice of this feeling in poetry, Carlyle in what was called prose. Tennyson's poems, the group of poems which closed with In Memoriam, became to many of us what the Christian Year was to orthodox churchmen.... Those who were growing up, but were not yet grown up, in 1842, can hardly know how much of their ideal in life they owe to Tennyson, and how much to the innate bias of their own character. They only know that they owe him very much of the imaginative scenery of their own minds, much of their political preference for "ordered freedom", and much, too, of their fastidious discrimination between the various notes of tender and pathetic song.⁷¹

This description of Tennyson's influence could very well apply to MacMechan: though he comes a generation later than Froude, MacMechan considered himself a "Victorian". His three chief influences in aesthetic, moral, and literary matters were Carlyle, Ruskin, and Tennyson, and these three figures represented for him a leadership in things of the spirit and mind for which he was unable to find a substitute in later life. The desolation he expresses at the death of Tennyson is illustrative of the power these men possessed for him: "This is the most sordid age in history.... Carlyle is gone, Tennyson is gone, the fiery purity of Ruskin's mind is in eclipse. The world is darker than it was. Who is there that we can reverence?"⁷² For MacMechan, then, Tennyson was a figure to whom he could unreservedly give reverence. Both his personal inclination to do so and his desire to champion Tennyson in a period of Tennyson's declining

reputation might help one account for the curious tone of this edition of poems.

In his Introduction MacMechan sets out his "fourfold" purpose: "to emphasize the exotic character of Tennyson's verse, to set forth his artistic methods, to define the specially new note in his work, and to sketch his relation to his own age" (v). Possibly the most interesting part of the Introduction, for what it indicates about MacMechan's later critical position, is his emphasis on the "exotic" nature of Tennyson's poetry: "To us who were born and bred on this, the hither side, of the Atlantic, the poetry of Tennyson is, and must needs be, exotic" (xv). This emphasis is the keynote to his selection of Tennyson's poems and seems to catalyze two of MacMechan's interests -- his love of scholarly explication and his incipient literary nationalism. His awareness of the foreignness of things English to a non-English audience had not really been stressed in either of the Carlyle editions. Of Tennyson's verse, he says that readers who are not English "may catch the air, but ...miss the overtones" (xv). He offers an example of what he means:

The organization of the church, the system of education which Tennyson knew, cannot, without special study, be understood by Americans. The very landscape he describes, the very fauna and flora of his verse are strange and foreign to us. Indeed the literature of the daisy, the primrose, the daffodil, the cowslip, the violet must always remain but half comprehended by all who have not known those flowers from childhood. For us these common English wild-flowers, almost weeds, are lovely exotics.

One such example will do as well as a hundred. The appeal of such a verse as this falls absolutely dead on American ears.

The smell of violets, hidden in the green
Pour'd back into my empty soul and frame
The times when I remember to have been
Joyful and free from blame.

In the first place we do not see the picture; "violets hidden in the green." Our native violets have faint colour and no perfume. English violets fill English meadows. Here they are nursed tenderly in hothouses. Few of us have been so fortunate as to gather the shy blue blossoms in an English May from the grass

they hide among, while the hot sun fills the whole air with their delicate, intoxicating odor. In the next place, our associations with these flowers, no matter how intimately we know them, must be different from those who have seen them come every spring since childhood.... The very last thing they could suggest to us is the child's Eden, the time of our innocence. For Tennyson, as for many of his English readers, the chain of association between the two is indissoluble (xvi-xvii).

Here MacMechan stresses Tennyson's essentially "exotic" quality for a non-English and specifically American audience. His emphasis on the "exotic" quality of Tennyson's poetry reminds one of Froude's observation that Tennyson supplied his readers, as it were subliminally, with their "imaginative scenery". Undoubtedly MacMechan realized the influence Tennyson's poetry had exerted over his own imagination, and probably he was anxious to establish himself as one to whom England was essentially foreign, or "exotic". In isolating the "exotic" qualities of Tennyson's poetry, MacMechan sets himself apart from English readers, though he allies himself with American readers, and the second point to note here is MacMechan's apparent identification of himself with America. It is interesting to observe that throughout the volume he calls himself an "American" scholar and addresses himself to an "American" audience. Whether this is to make the term conveniently broad, possibly for an overseas readership, or whether he had not at the time of writing developed his later sense of Canadian identity is a moot point.

MacMechan next moves to a consideration of Tennyson as "artist". He says that although Tennyson has been praised as a moral philosopher and a religious teacher, he is primarily an artist. To account for his genius, as the critic must try to do, MacMechan continues, an "equation" must be employed: this equation is "original endowment + race + environment = x" (xxiv). Readers and critics must attempt to identify and appraise this "x". The remainder of the Introduction is largely an attempt to do this, as MacMechan goes on to give details of Tennyson's biography, to enumerate influences on his work, to discuss the work's development,

and to attempt to account for Tennyson's popularity in terms of his time and place in history. Here he deals in some detail with the influence of Keats on Tennyson. MacMechan was by no means the first to perceive this influence. Arthur Hallam in The Englishman's Magazine of August, 1831, had originally pointed to it:

Hallam argued for the superiority of poetry of sensation, exemplified by Shelley and Keats, over that of reflection, typified by Wordsworth. He identified Tennyson as a poet of sensation and enumerated five qualities of excellence in his work; namely, "his luxuriance of imagination," "His power of embodying himself in ideal characters," "his vivid, picturesque delineation of objects," "the variety of his lyrical measures," and "his elevated habits of thought."⁷³

MacMechan next turns to a definition of poetry which is worth quoting in full for its relation to MacMechan's criticism in general:

A definition of poetry that finds universal acceptance is still to seek. It may be "a criticism of life," or, "the suggestion by the imagination of noble grounds for the noble emotions," or any other of the hundred that the wit of man has framed: but, whatever it includes or omits, poetry must possess two things -- beauty and harmony. Beauty and harmony, harmony and beauty -- these are the two principles without which poetry cannot exist, these are the pillars of the poets' universe. Poetry, to be poetry, must possess harmony and beauty, and harmony and beauty inform the poetry of Tennyson and are the law of its being.... Tennyson set himself humbly to obey eternal and unchanging law, for the principle of beauty inheres as firmly in the universe as the law of gravitation.... Nobility of thought, beauty of vision, harmony of word and phrase and stanza, just proportion in the whole, -- at these Tennyson aims, and to these he succeeds in attaining. His first appeal is to the ear; his verse wins its way as music does, the most democratic of all the fine arts, and the most masterful in its power to stir the human heart. The poet's limitations, his narrow outlook, his imperfect sympathies matter not. Music speaks a universal language; and the poetry that comes nearest to music is surest to reach the widest audience (li-lll).

This emphatic statement of the importance of "beauty and harmony" in poetry, together with its mellifluous qualities which make it like music, the art to which all others aspire, is as clearly-defined an

aesthetic statement as MacMechan ever offers and is the one he retains throughout most of his critical writings. For him, the qualities inherent in "just proportion in the whole" and the "principle of beauty" are self-evident laws about which disagreement is scarcely possible. That he is deaf to the "beauty" in cacaphony and deliberate disproportion evident in much of the poetry of the early years of the twentieth century we shall see in the following chapter.

MacMechan concludes his Introduction to the Select Poems by placing Tennyson in his time as the greatest poetic influence of the nineteenth century. He emphasises the fact that, although Tennyson was primarily an artist and as such was influenced profoundly by Keats, he did not subscribe to Keats' "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty" aesthetic. Moreover, though Tennyson was the obvious forerunner of the Decadents and their "Art pour l'Art" aesthetic, Tennyson also avoided this commitment. The reason MacMechan offers for Tennyson's eschewing of both these rather superficial doctrines is that Tennyson is essentially of a reverent, religious nature. In Memoriam is most typical of him, as a testament of faith triumphant. It seems clear from all this that Tennyson's appeal for MacMechan, in addition to the Tennysonian "music" he finds so compelling, is based on the religious and moral qualities in the poetry. Like Carlyle, Tennyson appears to have provided for MacMechan a leader, both aesthetically and morally-- indeed, for MacMechan these two terms are indistinguishable at times. An attempt to define more closely the appeal Tennyson's work held for MacMechan might also draw attention to Tennyson's moral strength coupled with a certain melancholy that MacMechan calls "Wortherness". Clearly this combination is temperamentally close to MacMechan, as his general comment

on the poetry suggests: "The beauty of the form makes us forget the eternal note of sadness in it all. Tennyson's sadness is the melancholy of the North, which is quite compatible with a gift of humor. His humor is deep and rich, if rather quiet!... (lvi) Echoes here of the "Northern sea" of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" and Tennyson's feeling for the northern mood of melancholy evoke in MacMechan a ready response. His comment on Browning further emphasizes the kinship he feels with Tennyson's "Northernness": "to realize the general sadness of tone in Tennyson, a short dip into Browning is necessary, some brief contact with his high spirits, his unbounded cheerfulness, his robust assertion that God's in His Heaven" (lvii).

MacMechan's emphasis on the quality he calls "Northernness" in various writers makes one assume that he is indebted to Ruskin, particularly to his "Savageness of Gothic Architecture" in The Stones of Venice. The passage that comes to mind when reading MacMechan's comments would have been so well-known to any student of Victorian literature that it is difficult not to believe that MacMechan's ideas of "Northernness" were partially formed by it:

Let us, for a moment, try to raise ourselves even above the level of birds flight, and imagine the Mediterranean lying beneath us like an irregular lake, and all its ancient promontories sleeping in the sun: here and there an angry spot of thunder, a gray stain of storm, moving upon the burning field, and here and there a fixed wreath of white volcano smoke, surrounded by its circle of ashes, but for the most part a great peacefulness of light, Syria and Greece, Italy and Spain, laid like pieces of a golden pavement into the sea-blue, chased, as we stoop nearer to them, with bossy beacen work of mountain chains, and glowing softly with terraced gardens, and flowers heavy with frankincense, mixed among masses of laurel, and orange, and plummy palm, that abate with their gray-green shadows the burning of the marble rocks, and of the ledges of porphyry, sloping under lucent sand. Then let us pass farther towards the north, until we see the orient colors change gradually into a vast belt of rainy green, where the pastures of Switzerland, and poplar valleys of France, and dark

forests of the Danube and Carpathians stretch from the mouths of the Loire to those of the Volga, seen through clefts in gray swirls of rain cloud and flaky veils of the mist of the brooks, spreading low along the pasture lands and then, farther north still, to see the earth heave into mighty masses of leaden rock and heathy moor, bordering with a broad waste of gloomy purple that belt of field and wood, and splintering into irregular and grisly islands amidst the northern seas, beaten by storm, and chilled by ice drifts and tormented by furious pulses of contending tide, until the roots of the last forests fail from among the hill ravines, and the hunger of the north wind bites their peaks into barrenness, and, at last, the wall of ice, durable like iron, sets, deathlike, its white teeth against us out of the polar twilight (Volume II, Chapter 6).

In concluding the Introduction, MacMechan offers a summary and comment on the general drift of the nineteenth century, noting that his generation is too close to the previous century to be at all objective about it. He reaffirms his Arnoldian view of poetry as a "criticism of life" and ends by giving his reason for esteeming poets as he does -- they offer, he claims, religious and moral values to their readers:

For poetry is not an amusement, a recreation. It is truly a "criticism of life". We turn to our poets instinctively for guidance in matters of faith. Not in vain do we come to Tennyson. He may not offer a very certain hope, but he does

"Teach high faith and honourable words
And courtliness and the desire of fame
And love of truth --" (lviii).

When one reads this view of the function of poetry, it becomes obvious why the second half of MacMechan's life was an attempt to discover a substitute for the mentors of his youth. Carlyle, Scott, and Tennyson in particular had no real successors and so, in MacMechan's view, the literary world of the early twentieth century lacked both leadership and direction. The Introduction to this volume, then, is interesting chiefly for its indication of some of MacMechan's own critical positions.

The selection of poems in the volume consists mainly of well-known excerpts from Tennyson's longer poems such as Mariana, The Princess,

Idylls of the King, and In Memoriam. Obviously, most are included for the "delectation" of "true lovers of noble verse", and the volume is highly conventional in its inclusion of familiar pieces concluding, for example, with "Crossing the Bar" in deference to Tennyson's express wish. One notes an absence of ambiguity in the poetry represented. For example, selections from The Princess are confined to the lyrics, and the ambiguity of the poem in its entirety is ignored. Even so obvious a choice as "The Charge of the Light Brigade" is omitted from the selection, possibly because of its implicit criticism of the military system. The overriding impression from reading MacMechan's selection of poems is of the musical qualities of Tennyson's verse -- its mellifluousness and its sonority. Poems of an equivocal nature -- some of the darker passages of In Memoriam, for instance -- appear to have been omitted, and the result is a homogenous and bland collection of rather "pretty" verse. If one assumes this selection to have represented MacMechan's taste in poetry, his later discomfort with early twentieth-century poetry is hardly surprising.

His "Notes" are concerned largely with glossing lines which contain possible ambiguities and with providing analogies for other lines. He relies for his classical allusions chiefly on W.P. Mustard's Classical Echoes in Tennyson (1901). His own knowledge of German is conspicuous, and he frequently cites Heine, Rilke, and Goethe. To the extent that he provides such references, these "Notes" are similar to those in the Carlyle editions. What distinguishes them from the Carlyle "Notes" is their increased personal bias. Several of MacMechan's enthusiasms emerge clearly. One of these is his allegiance to Carlylean "Duty". His note on "The Northern Farmer" is typical of the kind of personal, dogmatic statement to be found throughout this edition: "Pitiful no doubt is this antique loyalty to an employer and devotion to his interests: pitiful

and obsolete is the man. Obsolete like the dialect seems to be the worship of duty as duty: but it made England what she was" (264). A similar conviction sounds in his note on the "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington": "Wellington at one end of the scale, the old style northern farmer at the other, are one in their devotion to duty, one of the soundest traits in British character. Has Duty been defied by any other nation as in Wordsworth's Ode, or in Nelson's last signal at Trafalgar?" (262). The irony, the rhetorical questions, the general querulousness evident in these passages were not conspicuous in his earlier editions. One suspects that here is the note of what many of his contemporaries called his "conservatism" beginning to appear in his writing. Often in this volume he speaks from the position of one who, "a stranger and afraid", finds himself in an alien epoch in which he is far from being at ease. Often in these notes he speaks as if his values are old-fashioned and held in contempt by his contemporaries. He writes defensively of these values, implying -- and often stating -- that they were the values that in the past have moulded great men.

Another of MacMechan's preoccupations in later life becomes apparent in reading this volume. His love of the sea and his admiration for actions he considered heroic which took place on the sea are both evident in his comments. His interest in the topic is apparent both in the choice of poetry and from the commentary on several poems, notably in his notes on Tennyson's "The Revenge". It is curious, and perhaps significant, that the far better known "Charge of the Light Brigade" is omitted from the selection while "The Revenge" is included. The choice in itself implies MacMechan's preference for naval heroics. The note to the poem incorporates both MacMechan's type of hero-worship and his concept of Duty:

Grenville's last words are reported by Linsschoten, who was at Tercera during the action: but they are plainly dressed up. The significant phrase is "that hath done his dutie, as he was bound to do." One thinks of dying Nelson in the cockpit of the Victory, with his backbone shot through, repeating "Thank God, I have done my duty"(281).

This passage is typical of the kind of gloss MacMechan provides in this book. His scholarship in general here seems much less exact, much more personal, and somewhat more impressionistic than it had been in his earlier work. In the passage quoted above, one can also detect the dramatic style in which MacMechan frequently indulged, a style which becomes a hallmark of his later tales of the sea. Also obvious here is what one might construe as a form of vicarious living. As we shall see later on in this thesis, MacMechan's great enthusiasm for the life of action stemmed in part, doubtless, from a physical disability of his own. His lameness, which was not pronounced enough to impair his actions significantly, was nevertheless a source of some anguish for him, at least in the earlier years of his life. For instance, his private journal for 1893 contains the following passage:

"sometimes, on awakening after a sound day sleep, my mind seems a tabula rasa. I have forgotten that I am lame, my body is in its childhood again before desire was born; it is sometime [sic] before I recall disagreeable things. May not death be such a sleep and such an awaking?" This infirmity, in conjunction with the life of retirement he describes himself as living ⁷⁶ as a scholar in an ivory tower of sorts, often appears to make the life of action very attractive to MacMechan. To what extent his way of life was dictated by physical necessity it is impossible at this distance to establish. The significance of the lameness, however, often seems central to an understanding of MacMechan's enthusiasms, as will become apparent in subsequent chapters.

The hand of MacMechan the scholar is evident in a number of aspects of his edition of Tennyson. Throughout there appears the kind of Teutonic scholarship one associates with his work as a philologist. The tone of tamped-down hero-worship is familiar from both Sartor and Heroes. The Introduction to the Tennyson edition is akin to the two Carlyle Introductions in that all three deal with men the editor admires enormously and whose work he knows almost from memory. All three Introductions are written with near-passionate deference for the two "heroes". Perhaps the most striking feature of the Tennyson edition, however, is the evidence of a certain parochialism creeping into MacMechan's scholarly work. From the outset the tone quite often verges on the preachy. This phenomenon was not evident in his earlier work, and therefore it would seem fair to say that the edition of Tennyson is the work of a man by now well-established as an academic, sure of his audience, and somewhat dogmatic in his statements. A certain complacency has crept into his work, and this complacency, along with a less rigorous form of scholarship in general, appears to pave the way for his falling away from scholarly work generally and his moving into what seems to have been his true vocation -- popular writing in various forms.

¹ See Testimonials of Archibald MacMechan, B.A., (Toronto), Submitted with an application for the Chair of English at Queen's College, Kingston (Baltimore, Maryland, 1888), Public Archives of Nova Scotia. (Subsequent references to this source will be abbreviated to PANS).

² C.L. Bennet in private conversation, August 17, 1976. See also C.L. Bennet, "Archibald MacMechan", Dalhousie Review, X(1933), p. 379.

³ By the Nova Scotia Printing Company, 1889.

⁴ See MacMechan's article, "How They Learn at the Johns Hopkins University", New York Sun, May 13, 1889 for an account of the seminar method.

⁵ For an account of the philosophy behind the founding of Johns Hopkins University, see Daniel Gilman, The Launching of a University (New York, 1906). See also D.J. Palmer, The Rise of English Studies (Oxford, 1965): "The swing away from 'language and literature' towards 'area studies' reflects the growth of such modern fields of study as comparative linguistics, comparative literature...in each of which American scholarship has taken the initiative" (163).

⁶ James S. Thomson, "Sir Robert A. Falconer", Dalhousie Review, XXX(1951), pp. 362-3.

⁷ Robert Falconer, Proceedings of the Royal Society of Canada, 3rd Series, Vol. XXIV, Section II, p. 33.

⁸ George Santayana, "The Harvard Yard", Persons and Places (New York, 1944), p. 189.

⁹ MacMechan taught at several summer schools at Harvard during the 1920's.

¹⁰ See below, footnote 45.

¹¹ October 20, c. 1922.

¹² Garnet Sedgewick was one of these. See letter to MacMechan from G.L. Kittredge [undated: c. 1923], MacMechan Papers, Dalhousie Special Collections. (Subsequent references to this source will be abbreviated to DSC.)

¹³ R.S. Longley, Acadia University, 1838-1938 (Wolfville, 1939), p. 85.

¹⁴ P. 7. Subsequent references to the thesis will be in parentheses at the end of quotations. Hans Sachs (1494-1576), one of Germany's best-known Meistersingers and the central figure of Richard Wagner's Die Meistersinger von Nurnburg, is the subject of the thesis.

¹⁵ His ample knowledge of German, Latin, Italian, and Old Norse is evident throughout.

16 The scope of the thesis in general depends on the broad knowledge of literature. MacMechan's aim, through his obviously detailed writing of the thesis, is to place Sachs in his context within the larger context of German cultural history, with which MacMechan is obviously conversant.

17 Watson Kirkconnell, A Slice of Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), p. 234.

18 The other editions were those of H.D. Traill (1896), J.A.S. Barrett (1897), and P.C. Parr (1913). As definitive a reference work as Albert C. Baugh, ed., A Literary History of England (New York: Appleton, 1948) cites MacMechan's edition as standard. See p. 1316.

19 Harrold, Sartor Resartus, p. lxiii.

20 This comment is significant in the light of MacMechan's active interest in the Dalhousie library. That this insufficiency was not peculiar to Dalhousie, or, indeed, to Canadian or even American universities, is suggested by a quotation from Charles Eliot Norton pertaining to libraries in New England generally at the end of the nineteenth century: "Our libraries were insufficiently stocked with older books essential for thorough investigation in any department of learning, and not one of them possessed the means of securing a regular provision of those new books which might enable the student at home to keep up with the progress of learning from year to year in other lands." (Quoted in Kermit Vanderbilt, Charles Eliot Norton, p. 143).

21 Subsequent page references to MacMechan, ed., Sartor Resartus (Boston, 1896) will be in parentheses at the end of the quotations.

22 Harrold, p. lxiv. The statement requires some qualification, for, while MacMechan did not indicate the influences on Carlyle in their chronological order, he is certainly aware of them. For example, see his Notes, p. 308 (14 and 48). Here he offers Carlyle's own exposition of the influence of German idealism via Fichte and Kant.

23 See MacMechan, Sartor Resartus, 437 (unnumbered); other editors listed in the "Advertisement" to the Series include Emerson, Phelps, Bronson, and Dowden.

24 See letters from Kittredge to MacMechan for the tone of their relationship; it is one of great cordiality. See also MacMechan's review, "The Diversions of Kittredge", The Weekly Review, December, 1920.

25 MacMechan, Sartor, p. 11 (unnumbered).

26 The phrase is Norton's. His viewpoint is obviously shared by MacMechan, who sees Norton as Carlyle's champion in a controversy that jeopardized Carlyle's reputation. For details of the Norton-Froude altercation, any standard literary history will suffice. For the purpose of this thesis, it is perhaps enough to say that two books (W.H. Dunn's Froude and Carlyle and K. Vanderbilt's Charles Eliot Norton) seem to agree

on the pettiness that went into the dispute on Norton's side, particularly in his published list of errors to be found in Froude's work. The sort of spitefulness this compilation implies is echoed in a letter from Norton to MacMechan, April 19, 1894: "There has been such small sale of the volumes which I edited that the publishers are not ready to issue anything more. I should be very glad if this were not the case. Froude has done irremediable wrong to Carlyle's memory and the only partial corrective would be the publication ... of his letters of later years ungarbled and unperverted."

²⁷One it tempted to speculate on the sheer flattery implicit in this, for MacMechan's knowledge of Norton as a scholar was apparently at times off-base. A letter to MacMechan from Norton (September 12, 1892) is rather amusing on this score, for it is a sharp reprimand to MacMechan for having attributed a mistake-ridden edition of Last Words of Thomas Carlyle to Norton. From this, one is inclined to question MacMechan's actual knowledge of Norton as a "man of letters". Also, recent critical opinion of Norton's competence as an editor has been rather tepid, as indicated by this comment: "Norton was a fairly good editor...usually though not always trustworthy as to text" (Sanders and Fielding, eds., Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle, p. xix). Moreover, comments in books such as Kate Stephens' A Curious History in Book Editing (New York: Antigone Press, 1927) have cast considerable doubt on Norton's objectivity and integrity in matters in which he was biased.

²⁸Norton's Reminiscences (1887) were published specifically to correct errors in Froude's Reminiscences (1881).

²⁹Letter to MacMechan, January 29, 1892, DSC.

³⁰Letter to MacMechan, January 29, 1892. This instruction MacMechan follows assiduously in the "Notes" to his edition. See, for example, his first note, p. 275.

³¹Letter to MacMechan, April 19, 1894, DSC.

³²Letter to MacMechan, May 1, 1894, DSC.

³³Letter to MacMechan, February 24, 1897, DSC.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Critics of the calibre of J.D. Logan and V.B. Rhodenizer do much to strengthen this charge.

³⁶Many of the essays in Life of a Little College are typical of this manner. Perhaps the best example of his mock-seriousness and spoof-pedantry is the essay "Clammung".

³⁷Vanderbilt, Charles Eliot Norton, 168.

³⁸Vanderbilt, 169.

³⁹Vanderbilt, 170.

⁴⁰The word "hero" is MacMechan's own and is often used by him to indicate admiration for various attributes. See, for instance, the "Dedication" to his edition of On Heroes and Hero-Worship: "To My Father who first taught me by word and deed the meaning of 'heroic'". His father was the Reverend John MacMechan, a Presbyterian minister.

⁴¹Quoted in Emery Neff, Carlyle, p. 105. Also by MacMechan, On Heroes and Hero-Worship, p. lxxxv.

⁴²T.S. Eliot, The Sacred Wood (London: Methuen, 1960), p. 38. In this connection, it is interesting to note More's inclusion of Charles Eliot Norton as one of his subjects in The Shelburne Essays.

⁴³MacMechan, Sartor Resartus, p. xlii.

⁴⁴MacMechan, On Heroes and Hero-Worship, p. lxxix.

⁴⁵MacMechan, On Heroes and Hero-Worship, p. lxxiv.

⁴⁶See below, p. 38.

⁴⁷Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. XII, p. 570.

⁴⁸See below, Chapter III.

⁴⁹D.C. Harvey observes this trait in MacMechan, particularly as it relates to his attitude towards Tennyson. See Harvey, "Notes and Comments", Canadian Historical Review, XIV (1933), p. 343.

⁵⁰Quoted in The Norton Anthology of English Literature, 3rd ed., M.H. Abrams, gen. ed., Vol. 2 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1974), p. 1147.

⁵¹The Week, January 4, 1895.

⁵²Letter to MacMechan, [undated, c. 1927], DSC.

⁵³Letter to MacMechan, October 22, 1925, DSC.

⁵⁴MacMechan's own phrase in his edition of Sartor Resartus, p. ix.

⁵⁵Harrold's phrase, Sartor Resartus, p. lxiii. He also comments on MacMechan's work as valuable to later editors. J.A.S. Barrett's 1897 edition, for example, is "a scholarly edition produced independently of MacMechan, some of whose findings were incorporated in the Addenda in later reprints and editions...." (lxiv).

⁵⁶MacMechan, 382.

⁵⁷Harrold, 259. "(B)" is J.A.S. Barrett.

58 MacMechan, Select Poems of Tennyson, p. 249.

59 MacMechan, Sartor Resartus, p. llll.

60 St. John 21: 25. "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."

61 See above, note 55.

62 MacMechan, Private Journals, September 30, 1894, DSC.

63 MacMechan, On Heroes and Hero-Worship, p. xxxvi. All subsequent references to this edition will be given in parentheses at the conclusion of the passage in the text.

64 See lecture notes covering a span of thirty years, 1889-1919, DSC.

65 The Introduction to Sartor is 58 pages long, that to Heroes is 77.

66 R. Brimley Johnson, "Introduction", Bleak House, (Collins: London and Glasgow, 1953), p. 13.

67 See, for example, his "Portrait from Fortuny". Characteristically, MacMechan's daughter, writing about her father, entitled her essay "A Portrait in Prose". See Jean MacMechan/Willetts, "A Portrait in Prose", unpublished manuscript, DSC.

68 See especially "A North End Tragedy", "Old Lovers", and The Porter of Bagdad.

69 His article, "Thoreau", in the Cambridge History of American Literature (1918).

70 Percy Baum, Tennyson Sixty Years After, p. 3.

71 Quoted in Baum, Tennyson Sixty Years After, p. 15. The Christian Year is a cycle of devotional poems published anonymously in 1827 by John Keble.

72 The Week, January 4, 1895.

73 Quoted in E.F. Shannon, Jr., Tennyson and the Reviewers, p. 7.

74 Hallam Tennyson, Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir (New York: MacMillan, 1898), pp. 366-367.

75 MacMechan, Private Journals, July 26th, 1893, DSC.

76 See below, Chapter III.

Chapter II

MacMechan as Critic of Poetry

Praise of Tennyson is meat and drink to me, for I grew up under his benign influence, and the newer comets and meteors and strange flaring will-o'-the-wisps and rockets that shoot across the literary heavens never dim that clear-shining steadfast star. They have their little day and cease to be, after their disappearance, he is still as radiant as ever. To me ... Tennyson's is the great poetic name of the century just closed: no modern bard can take his place. That is the advantage of growing old. You do not shift and change: the allegiance once given remains unaltered.¹

This passage, which was written in 1908 when MacMechan had become an established scholar and teacher, and which therefore presumably reflects his mature judgment, might well serve to focus a discussion of MacMechan as a critic of poetry. The passage contains one of the ideas central to his criticism of poetry and contains, also, a key to the consistency one finds throughout his writings on poetry. The "allegiance" to which he refers here is typical of MacMechan, for it would appear that in at least one other notable instance, the reading he did in his youth formed the basis for his later criticism, which simply expanded on his earlier enthusiasm for an author. As we will see, ² Melville's Moby Dick was just such a case, and the reading MacMechan did "as a youth in a Mechanics' Institute Library" remained important for him throughout his lifetime.

³ As MacMechan himself would be the first to admit, his values, tastes, and opinions were largely formed during the nineteenth century, and as we have seen in the previous chapter, his mentors were chiefly the great Victorian "sages" -- Carlyle, Ruskin, and, in poetry, Tennyson. While the influence of Carlyle and Tennyson is readily discernible in MacMechan's writings, Ruskin's influence is perhaps more difficult to isolate, but at several points MacMechan refers to Ruskin as his "Mentor".⁴ The term "sage" is that used by John Holloway in The Victorian Sage:

Studies in Argument, in which Holloway speaks of Carlyle, Arnold, and George Eliot as sages, all of whom "sought (among other things) to express notions about the world, man's situation in it, and how he should live. Their work reflects an outlook on life, an outlook which for most or perhaps all of them was partly philosophical and partly moral." ⁵ Significantly, this "philosophical and moral" bias, so conspicuous in much of the literature that may be assumed to have formed MacMechan's mind, is strikingly absent from most British literature of the early twentieth century. As we have seen in the previous chapter, MacMechan clearly felt at a loss for a moral guide upon the death of Tennyson. For MacMechan, morals and aesthetics were intimately related:

it may reasonably be doubted, even if we could stop to-day the manufacture of doctors and doctors' dissertations at Harvard and Johns Hopkins and turn the whole myopic band of pedanticules out to play, whether they would ever make any notable contributions to the Literature of Power. . . . You cannot have literature without religion, even if the religion exists only to be denied and fought against...the only men who ever wrote books worth reading were men of firm and fixed belief.⁶

The phrase "Literature of Power" he uses in Headwaters of Canadian Literature (1924) and first adopts in 1908. ⁷ For MacMechan, "Literature of Power" is that which can move the reader and depends for its strength upon the author's belief in some value system. Because of the formative influence of Victorian literature on MacMechan's literary tastes, then, he was never really comfortable with the direction poetry in Canada was taking in the 1920's.

Moreover, MacMechan's career as a critic was effectively coming to a close as the "modernist" movement gained momentum in Canada during those years. Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski, in The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada (1970), have indicated the climate of poetic taste in Canada during the 1920's when they write that

in the 1920's, before modern poetry was properly established in Canada, and before there was any critical understanding on the part of the public as to what modern poetry should be like, a demand was raised for a set of firm critical standards for Canadian literature. The general public was accused of shoddy taste, and of a sentimental and patriotic preference for the second-rate, while reviewers and critics alike, were condemned for their weak partiality for the same kind of condemned pabulum. The Canadian Bookman (1919-1939) was especially open to criticism for such literary "boosterism" chiefly because of its editor's close connections with the Canadian Authors' Association.

The point to be made here is that the 1920's mark a distinct change in the mood of Canadian criticism of poetry, and that MacMechan's work as a critic of poetry was coming to an end at this time: Headwaters of Canadian Literature virtually marks the conclusion of his original criticism of Canadian literature generally. Moreover, the book is largely a compilation of some of his earlier criticism. For example, his appraisal of W.W. Campbell's poetry is practically unchanged from 1893 to 1924. In The Week of September, 1893, MacMechan had written

It ["Out of Pompeii"] is not a perfect piece of verse by any means, the third stanza ends tamely; there are little stop-gap phrases here and there; but it is ungrateful to mention the faults of a poem suffused by genuine poetic feeling and celebrating a situation genuinely poetic.

In Headwaters he wrote

[Campbell's] work is serious and thoughtful; but singularly lacking in technique. Nor did he show any inclination to listen to his critics and profit by their counsel. He seemed to hold that thought and emotion will redeem all faults in the construction of a poem.... [he quotes "Indian Summer"]. Had Campbell written often, thus, it had been vain to blame, and useless to praise him.

Unable, as well as unwilling, to alter his tastes in poetry, MacMechan appears to us to-day as something of an "old-fashioned romantic" whose judgments are, for the most part, quite dated. He is often quite unabashed as well as facetious on this matter. Using "Victorian" and "sentimental" synonymously, as he often did, he writes, for example, in 1908 of his tastes in poetry:

"sentimental" and "sentimentality" are ponderous and crushing missiles to hurl at anyone, especially among Anglo-Saxon peoples. The present cult of stolidity brands every expression of natural human feeling as "sentimental". Perhaps it is because I am so old /he was at this time forty-six/, with all my vicious tendencies so thoroughly ingrained as to be past reform, that I confess myself a sentimentalist.¹¹

In order for us to come to an understanding of him as a critic of poetry, it is necessary to try to establish the criteria upon which MacMechan's judgments rested and, secondly, to assess the general climate of opinion prevailing in literary circles at the time in which he wrote. For convenience, this period of time can be defined as that between the years 1890 and 1930.

MacMechan's values in poetry can be derived in large measure from what he wrote of Tennyson's poetry. For MacMechan, Tennyson's work served as what Matthew Arnold would have called a "touchstone" of critical values. To judge from MacMechan's selections in his edition of Tennyson's poems, MacMechan emphasised the more secure aspects of the poet, omitting much of Tennyson the doubter.¹² In MacMechan's edition, the felicities of the verse are stressed, as is implied in the "Prefatory Note" in which MacMechan observes that the selection has been made for the "delectation of all true lovers of Tennyson".¹³ The strengths MacMechan appreciated in Tennyson's work are outlined in his Introduction to the Select Poems, and the "excellencies" which he discerns in the poetry are qualities he consistently seeks in other poetry. In his Introduction to the Select Poems, MacMechan essentially endorses Arthur Hallam's verdict on Tennyson's work and his spirited explanation of Hallam's terms reveals his own convictions quite clearly. The five distinctive "excellencies" Hallam (and MacMechan) perceive in Tennyson's poetry are as follows. First is Tennyson's "luxuriance of imagination".¹⁴

MacMechan offers an extremely brief explanation of the term "imagination" as "the prophetic [his italics] faculty of the mind which out of a mass of ideas seizes on those which, separately are disagreeable, but in combination are harmonious." ¹⁵ Secondly, Tennyson possesses the "power of embodying himself in ideal characters, or rather moods of character."

The emphasis here is on the "ideal" in Tennyson's depiction, and, again, registers MacMechan's belief in the necessary high-mindedness of poetry. Thirdly, Tennyson's "power of description" is praised. In elaborating on this point, MacMechan echoes Hallam's enthusiasm for Tennyson's "vivid, picturesque delineation of objects, and the peculiar skill with which he holds all of them fused [Hallam's italics] ... in a medium of strong emotion." MacMechan goes on to compare Tennyson with Wordsworth, for in "their description of small things they are alike in simple truth of perception and directness of expression." Tennyson's fourth "excellency" is his "excellency of technique". Combined with Tennyson's lyrical gift ("his verse makes first the appeal of music; it wins its way by its delicate harmony") was Tennyson's "mission ... to show how strong and genuine emotion could not only co-exist with careful workmanship but furnish ¹⁶ its motive power." The fifth and final point "touches one great source of Tennyson's power" and is "the elevated habits of thought implied in these compositions." Tennyson's nature, MacMechan says, is deeply religious. The five qualities indicated here characterize Tennyson's poetry and make up, by inference, the implied standard by which MacMechan is to assess poetry generally, and particularly Canadian poetry.

It is interesting to compare this paradigm of what constitutes "excellencies" in poetry with MacMechan's appreciation of the poetry in Canada which most nearly approximates to this ideal -- the poetry of Marjorie Pickthall. In Headwaters MacMechan defines as her greatest asset her technical perfection in combination with her lyrical gift:

if technical perfection were all, The Drift of Pinions would stand alone in Canadian literature beside Low Tide on Grand Pré, but the verbal music is only the accompaniment of inner harmonies which these true poems release... Her poems are essentially songs, the purest form of poetry, "purest" meaning "freest from admixture of anything else." These lyrics are not of the earth Apart and aloof from everyday cares, she sits and weaves her spells, admitting within the magic circle of her verse nothing harsh, nothing ugly, nothing common or unclean.

In this description of Pickthall's verse one can perceive the Tennysonian virtues MacMechan has clearly in mind. Attention, too, to this five-fold criterion of what he found most admirable in poetry frequently casts light on some of MacMechan's more eccentric criticisms, such as his omission of Duncan Campbell Scott and Isabella Valency Crawford from consideration in Headwaters.¹⁸ Frequently, too, one facet of this paradigm will compensate for a lack of the other requisite qualities in the poetry he praises. For example, the presence of musical effects in a given poem apparently compensates for the absence of certain other qualities, in MacMechan's view. In short, his estimate of Tennyson provides us with MacMechan's own criterion for poetry and is vital to a consideration of MacMechan as a critic of poetry.

From the particular instance of Tennyson, one might now turn to MacMechan's broader attitudes to criticism of poetry in general. Clearly, MacMechan admired the criticism of Matthew Arnold and modelled his own on Arnold's. In 1907, he asserts "Arnold's 'endeavor to propagate the best that has been thought and known' is my figurehead",¹⁹ and three years later he expands on this declaration:

English criticism is supposed to have died with Matthew Arnold... criticism of the right kind means book-tasting and book-testing. It means judgement based on knowledge and experience-- it means discrimination not only between the good and the bad, but between the good and the not so good and the indifferent. It means guidance, awakening of interest, kindling of enthusiasm, deeper and sounder appreciation of what is already known and loved. Humble though it be, criticism is a necessary part of modern life,²⁰

From these and other statements, it is possible to extrapolate some of MacMechan's critical attitudes which are specifically modelled on Arnold's critical principles, specifically as the latter are articulated in "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" and "The Study of Poetry". MacMechan's emphasis on the guidance given by criticism, on the basis of criticism in discrimination, and on the connection between criticism and modern life comes directly from Arnold's view of the "disinterestedness" of criticism:

And how is criticism to show disinterestedness? By keeping aloof from what is called 'the practical view of things'; by resolutely following the law of its own nature, which is to be a free play of the mind on all subjects which it touches. By steadily refusing to lend itself to any of those ulterior, political, practical considerations about ideas, which plenty of people will be sure to attach to them, which perhaps ought often to be attached to them, which in this country at any rate are certain to be attached to them quite sufficiently, but which criticism has really nothing to do with. Its business is, as I have said, simply to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and by in its turn making this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas.²¹

MacMechan's advocacy of "book-testing" is also clearly modelled on Arnold's concept of "touchstones" in poetry:

Indeed there can be no more useful help for discovering what poetry belongs to the class of the truly excellent, and can therefore do us most good, than to have always in one's mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other good poetry. Of course we are not to require this other poetry to resemble them; it may be very dissimilar. But if we have any tact we shall find them, when we have lodged them well in our minds, an infallible touchstone for detecting the presence or absence of high poetic quality, and also the degree of this quality, in all other poetry which we may place beside them. Short passages, even single lines, will serve our turn quite sufficiently.²²

Various other points for which MacMechan is indebted to Arnold might be subsumed under the general statement by Arnold -- with which MacMechan would concur -- to the effect that poetry is a criticism of life. In elucidating this phrase, Lionel Trilling has written

There is a famous phrase of Arnold's which, like so many of his phrases that caught the mind of his contemporary readers, has been much worried by the critics of our time: Arnold said that poetry -- or literature in general -- is a criticism of life, and the objection which is usually made is that poetry is so much more immediate and intense an experience than is suggested by the phrase, that it does so much more than criticize. But what Arnold meant is that literature -- although it does indeed, in one of its activities, say what is wrong with life -- characteristically discharges its critical function by possessing in a high degree the qualities that we may properly look for in life but which we are likely to find there in all too small an amount -- such qualities as coherence, energy, and brightness; and in its possession of these qualities literature stands as the mute measure of what life may be and is not.²³

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As we shall see later on, MacMechan's thought as a critic of poetry is deeply indebted to Arnold's writings. As late as 1921, MacMechan reiterates his aim as a book reviewer, and, therefore as critic, by quoting Arnold's exhortation "to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and by in its turn making this known to create a current of true and fresh ideas."²⁵

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The audience MacMechan addressed as critic consisted mainly of the general public -- readers of The Week, The Halifax Herald, and The Montreal Standard in the early years of his work as book reviewer. Throughout MacMechan's career, one can detect his concern with carrying the effects of literary education beyond the narrow confines of the academy and into the wider world. And again, one can discern Arnold's influence in this attempt on MacMechan's part to reach a wide audience with his views. MacMechan normally describes himself modestly as a "bookman" rather than as an academic. For academics, he has considerable contempt, and he frequently equates them with pedants. Compare these two comments, one on "bookmen", the other on "pedants":

How few are the wants of a bookman! A table, a chair, a book, paper and ink, -- give him these and he can be happy. To think, to range one's thoughts in order, winning a little, well-made world out of the chaos of thick-coming fancies, to fix them for yourself and for others by the magic of black marks on white paper, is a joy that never palls.²⁶

It is a real affliction to be a pedant. Pretentious displays of inexact knowledge annoy you, like grit in your porridge or gravel in your shoes.²⁷

It would seem that MacMechan's love of instructing and teaching was called into play as a critic of poetry, and that his primary aim was to inform a lay public before writing for members of his own profession. For example, his years of reviewing for the general public are condensed and distilled when he comes to write Headwaters of Canadian Literature. Thus his comment on the "humble" nature of criticism is not disingenuous -- he appears to have conceived of the critic's task as essentially secondary to the author's original activity and as a task that ought to be carried out responsibly and with as much objectivity and fairness as possible. The critic's task, as he sees it, is to offer to less well-informed readers, in as judicious and dispassionate a manner as possible, the qualities he perceives in a given piece of writing. Always wary of pedantry in scholarly writing, MacMechan is no less alive to pedantic effects in critical writing:

There is a kind of critic that always rasps my nerves; the Superior Person, the School-master, the Literary Advisor. He is like the darning-needle in Anderson's fable that was 'so fine! so fine!' There is no pleasing him. He perches on his author's shoulder to create, if possible, the impression that he is the greater man. If he had only condescended to set his magnificent mind to work, he would have given the world a flawless Hamlet....²⁸

This attitude might be expected from what one knows of MacMechan as a scholar. There is, throughout his life and work, a consistency of purpose and attitude that one might call, broadly, sincerity. It consists of an avoidance of sham of any sort and is perhaps the one quality that led someone who knew him well to call him "essentially a simple man."²⁹ MacMechan's ideal of truth in scholarly pursuits, his own basic humility, and this sincerity or earnestness are all parts of his bias as a critic. In addition, he brought to bear on his critical work his wide knowledge of literature, his training as a philologist,

and his basic humanity and common sense. This combination of qualities fitted him admirably for his role as critic and made him an outstanding critic in Canada at the time.

His plain-spoken attitude to criticism, particularly to criticism in Canada, appeared as early as January, 1895, in The Week where he speaks of the function of criticism in Canada at the present time, concluding his comments with "by virtue of his office, the Canadian critic must have knowledge and honesty; but next to these his special duty at the present time is to speak out" in order to contradict the general critical conspiracy which insists that "all our native geese are swans." Three years earlier he had deplored the complacency of the Canadian public, asking "when will we Canadians give up publishing these substitutes for poetry, these imitations of verse." It is important to note that, as part of his general interest in literary criticism, he very early takes an interest in Canadian writing in particular.

The period in which MacMechan practised literary criticism was not propitious for the genre, as Claude Bissell has pointed out: "it is well to remember that the task of the literary critic during the last three decades of the nineteenth century was a particularly difficult one. Most of the old Victorian masters had departed and the stage was now crowded with a multitude of clever aspirants for their roles."

MacMechan's critical work was undertaken at the time to which Bissell refers, and this fact, together with the fact that MacMechan's work was done in Canada and was to deal largely with Canadian material, is central to an understanding of his position as critic. MacMechan was a pioneer, working in something of a void with few guidelines other than his own standards and tastes, and feeling himself very much in limbo, bereft of the mentors of his youth and in the midst of what he called "the most sordid age in history," presumably in reference to the loss of values

evident in post-Victorian life. In order to appreciate the singularity of MacMechan's insistence on standards to be met in Canadian writing, and his genuine concern with the state of Canadian writing in general, it is necessary here to offer a brief summary of the climate of critical opinion in Canada between 1890 and 1930.

In considering this period of Canadian literary history, most scholars agree that Canadian criticism, where it existed, was adulatory and consisted largely of boosterism. What Dudek and Gnarowski write of the 1920's in Canada could be applied more generally to the period in which MacMechan wrote: "the general public was accused by radical, 'modernist', critics of shoddy taste, and of a sentimental and patriotic preference for the second-rate, while reviewers and critics alike, were condemned for their weak partiality for the same kind of condemned pabulum.

The Canadian Bookman...was especially open to criticism for such literary

'boosterism'...." ³⁴ Desmond Pacey, for example, writes of the paucity of scholars during the early years of the century who had "sufficiently high an opinion of Canadian writing to consider it worthy of book-length study." ³⁵

Indeed, book-length studies of Canadian literary history were to be numbered on one hand during the years of MacMechan's career. Two early volumes were in existence by the time MacMechan contemplated what became Headwaters. Archibald MacMurchy's Handbook of Canadian Literature (1906), actually a modified anthology, and T.G. Marquis's History of English-Canadian Literature (1913) and its companion volume, Camille Roy's History of French-Canadian Literature (1913), were the only full surveys.

Roy Palmer Baker's Canadian Literature to the Confederation, a more circumscribed work, and apparently written with MacMechan's advice and approval, ³⁶ appeared in 1920. (MacMechan, in 1924, calls Baker's history ³⁷

"the best" of those that have so far appeared.) J.D. Logan's later

Highways of Canadian Literature (1924), published in the same year as Headwaters, was its rival in the book market. Beyond these books, there is little to note of a comprehensive nature, other than Pelham Edgar's brief chapter in the Cambridge History of English Literature (1916) on Canadian literature. MacMechan and Edgar stand out as the two most original literary critics in Canada at the time (1900-1925). Possibly the fact that both men were trained at Johns Hopkins suggests the quality and type of approach both utilized -- both were essentially interested in comparative studies.

A brief list of subsequent books dealing with Canadian literature will perhaps emphasise the unique position MacMechan's Headwaters occupies in Canadian literary history. During the 1920's, there occurred in Canada an unprecedented interest in "nativist" writing. Lionel Stevenson's Approaches to Canadian Literature (1927) was an innovative and refreshing survey which broke new ground in isolating examples of what Stevenson perceived as the "Canadian imagination". Lorne Pierce's Outline of Canadian Literature (1927) had as its unique feature the parallel placing of French and English authors. In the "Foreword" Pierce writes

An Outline of Canadian Literature is not an exhaustive history of our literature, neither is it in any way an essay in literary criticism. For it we claim several merits.

1. This Outline is the first attempt at a history of our literature placing both French and English authors side by side. Hereafter they must share equally in any attempt to trace the evolution of our national spirit.³⁹

Marquis and Roy had kept the two literatures apart, and MacMechan had segregated French-Canadian literature from English-Canadian literature in two chapters, "In Quebec" and "In Montreal". V.B. Rhodenizer's Handbook of Canadian Literature (1930) and W.E. Collin's White Savannas (1936) complete the list of books on Canadian literature to emerge before

what Pacey calls the "turning point" in the study of Canadian literature -- the year 1943.⁴¹ In that year, E.K. Brown's On Canadian Poetry and A.J.M. Smith's Book of Canadian Poetry appeared, marking a new era in Canadian literary studies and ushering in the sort of critical standards MacMechan had been advocating fifty years earlier.

It is obvious then, that before the publication of Brown's book there were very few others with any claim to incisive, personal value judgements in treating Canadian writing: MacMechan is obviously an unusual figure in the Canadian literary world at the time in which he wrote. At about the time of the publication of Headwaters, the newly-founded Canadian Forum carried letters and articles relevant to the state of Canadian criticism at the time. According to some of the participants in the Forum debate, Canadian criticism ranged from blandness (at best) to puffery (at worst).⁴² E.K. Broadus, for instance, in an article entitled "Puffery or Criticism?" (October, 1922), criticized sharply the tendency of critics to overpraise and inflate Canadian products simply because of their "Canadianness". In the same year Douglas Bush published an article entitled "A Plea for Original Sin" (December, 1922) in which he made many of the same points. This article contains several of the points he takes up four years later in "Making Literature Hum" (October, 1926),⁴³ an expostulation that drew much critical comment. All three articles are typical of a mood that found expression in castigating the flaccidity and puerility of most criticism of Canadian literary work then appearing. From these articles and the controversy that begins with them, one can follow, through the pages of The Canadian Forum, the trend in Canadian writing that led directly to the founding of the McGill Fortnightly Review in 1925 and the modernist movement generally in Canadian poetry.

MacMechan's interest in the Forum discussions is evident from his attitude to Bush's second article, "Making Literature Hum". Though MacMechan would appear to have been increasingly less involved with the criticism of poetry after the publication of Headwaters in 1924, it is evident that he was observing trends in Canadian poetry closely. Bush's article was one in a series of provocative articles published in the Forum. His in particular was "painfully trenchant".⁴⁴ As well, it was flippant and clever, and this combination of qualities evoked widespread reaction. Bush said, in part,

in the literary way, Canada is probably the most backward country, for its population, in the civilized world, and the quickest way to get rid of this unpleasant family skeleton is to abolish critical standards and be a booster. We don't know what to write, but by jingo if we do we have the pen, we have the ink, we have the paper too. And so we have bulky histories of Canadian literature appraising the product of every citizen who ever held a pen, bulky anthologies preserving almost everything metrical that has sprung from a Canadian brain; little books celebrating the genius of people who in another country would not get beyond the poetry corner of the local newspaper, reprints of Canadian "classics" which not even antiquity can render tolerable, respectful consideration of inferior Zane Greys as literature -- in short, an earnest and sincere desire to establish a completely parochial scale of values.⁴⁵

One reply to this article came from Watson Kirkconnell, who wrote a sharp letter to the editor in January, 1927, taking issue with Bush. In the letter he speaks of the "superciliousness of smart ignorance" and goes on to mention MacMechan in Halifax, "whose teaching and work have set forth with equal penetration and far more sanity and balance, the cultural ideal for which Bush pleads." He calls Bush's article "a distorted conception which is perhaps natural to an ex-Canadian, writing from an exalted seclusion among the Brahmins of Massachusetts" and "a most regrettable libel." That MacMechan did not share Kirkconnell's attitude is evident from the notice he gives Bush's article in "The Dean's Window" of January 22, 1927. In this review, MacMechan draws attention

to an anonymous article which had recently appeared in the Times Literary Supplement. It, like Bush's article, had criticised the parochial nature of Canadian literary criticism. MacMechan writes that the Times article "coincides with the fiercely amusing diatribe of Douglas Bush in The Canadian Forum" and goes on to observe that

both [writers] agree in thinking our authors lacking in distinction, though our Canadian critic in partibus fidelum is more outspoken than our polite English cousin... Mr. Bush thinks 'The salvation of Canadian literature would be a nation-wide attack of writer's cramp, lasting at least a decade.' The Supplement critic puts in a good word for the Canadian women.

The point here is that MacMechan has obviously kept a sense of proportion or objectivity in his study of Canadian literature. Consequently, he is able to appreciate the accuracy and the wit of Bush's "diatribe". MacMechan seems to share Bush's sense of mischievousness concerning the article. That Bush intended his article to be somewhat outrageous is clear from a letter from him to MacMechan, January 4, [1927?]: "My little piece seems to have set a number of people by the ears. I was thinking, of course, of such weird compilations as those of Logan and French...and Garvin."

From this one instance of MacMechan's involvement with literary criticism during the 1920's in Canada, it is apparent that his responses on any given issue are sometimes difficult to predict and often quite paradoxical. One might have expected him, for example, to have shared Kirkconnell's high-minded attitude in this instance. Instead, there is in MacMechan a streak of humour that allows him to appreciate incongruities in unexpected places. Many of MacMechan's contemporaries have remarked on his sense of humour. One of the most conspicuous comments, made by W.A. Deacon in Foteen (1926), a witty potpourri of essays on Canadian cultural weaknesses, concerns MacMechan's rich sense of humour. Perhaps one of MacMechan's own remarks might well gloss this incident: "Nothing

differentiates people so much as the things they laugh at." It should be noted in this context, however, that there were some areas in which MacMechan was sensitive to criticism and would not brook it. For example, a student article appearing in The Dalhousie Gazette of October, 1929, entitled "Pen Pictures Portraying Popular Profs" drew his wrath. The article contained a rather inoffensive and probably accurate caricature of some of his well-known mannerisms and was rather cleverly written. To MacMechan, however, such a topic was apparently no laughing matter, and his letter to the editor in the following issue assumes a supercilious tone which fails to conceal the irritation of the writer.

Although an account of the development of "modernist" poetry in Canada is not germane to this discussion, it is nevertheless important to observe MacMechan's position as a critic of poetry in the light of later developments in Canadian poetry -- above all, to notice that while he could scarcely be more alien to much of what constituted the new and avant-garde poetry of the post-World War I period, several of his major convictions are taken up approvingly by later critics. Broadus and Bush, for example, say what MacMechan had been saying for at least thirty years -- that Canadian criticism was adolescent and provincial and that, by refusing to apply strict standards of criticism to poetry, Canadian critics were doing a disservice to the cause of poetry in Canada; they were vitiating it through facile and unreserved praise. It is also surprising to note that MacMechan, a member, one would have supposed, of the "establishment" so strongly criticized by A.J.M. Smith and F.R. Scott as reactionary and conservative, should have anticipated their criticisms in many fields. Specifically, MacMechan anticipates Smith's deleted 1936 "Preface" that calls for something "obscene" to jolt Canadians from

their provincialism. MacMechan repeatedly argues that Canadian critics must stop wearing "a fig-leaf over their mouths." One example is this remark made in 1921: "my usual quarrel with our young poets is that they are too prudish". He does not define what he means by "prudish" here, but one can infer from what he writes elsewhere that it is their general "tepidity" that he dislikes and the lack of fresh perceptions in terms of human relationships that he finds absent from their poetry. Northrop Frye offers what appears to be a development and clarification of this idea: "the colonial position of Canada is... a frostbite at the roots of the Canadian imagination, and it produces a disease for which I think the best name is prudery. By this I do not mean reticence in sexual matters: I mean the instinct to seek a conventional or commonplace expression of an idea."

MacMechan also asserts that Canadian criticism will remain infantile until the word "whore" can be re-admitted to the language. Even though he would not find such diction acceptable in poetry, the fact that he would accept it in prose is revealing. In general, he repeatedly isolated diffidence as the distinguishing characteristic of Canadians, and he is sardonic about the tepidity of Canadian poetry in general, and especially love poetry:

as for the strains that young Eros inspires, such wild notions never seem to cross their [Canadian poets'] cold and orthodox imagination. They languidly adjust their vapid vegetable loves with milk-weed and yarrow and arillium, with the lakes and the woods. From their verses you would never gather that a woman was anything more than a bundle of clothes.

The point to emphasize here is that though MacMechan did not agree with the means taken by the new poets and critics to alter Canadian poetry during the post-War period, he would certainly have agreed to the end toward which change was aimed. This end, put most simply, was that of achieving a poetry that was "Canadian", and so reflected concerns and lives peculiar to Canada in a manner well able to hold its own in any

company, without apology or puffery. This concern with the creation of Canadian or "nativist" "literature of power" leads MacMechan to attempt a classification of authors into Canadian and non-Canadian that has been criticized for its arbitrary nature. For instance, Marjorie Pickthall was not a birthright Canadian, and yet the discussion of her poetry occupies a disproportionate section of Headwaters. While his application of the term might appear arbitrary and idiosyncratic at times, MacMechan's genuine concern with the problem of what constitutes a native literature was central to his interest in Canadian literature.

To turn, for a moment, to a further consideration of this matter of "Canadianism" is to go to the core of MacMechan's writing as a critic of poetry. As we have seen in Chapter I, MacMechan's concern with "nativist" writing is implied in his comments on the "exotic" nature of Tennyson's poetry to a reader not bred in England and familiar with the peculiarities of the English landscape. At the time of the publication of the Select Poems of Tennyson (1907), MacMechan had been submitting literary reviews and articles to newspapers for nearly a dozen years, and through these it is possible to trace his developing interest in what constitutes "Canadian" writing. The definition was important to any critic writing at the time we are considering, for its implications could be interpreted very differently according to the application of the term "Canadian". As a term of approval, it often covered the patriotic content of a poem to the exclusion of its intrinsic worth, and as a term of abuse, "Canadian" was often used synonymously for "adolescent" or "non-British". Something MacMechan wrote near the end of his life illustrates the point and applies in general to the period under consideration:

Canadian Literature has always suffered from the falsehood of extremes, over praise and unjust disparagement. A small clique of Superior Persons, most of them impotent academics, who have never produced anything, deny the existence of

Canadian Literature, with the Thing Itself before their eyes. Or else they sneer. It is easier, and safer, to sneer, than to be at the pains of bringing forth a book which might be subject to criticism. On the other hand, the far more common fault is praising everything written by Canadians, often in terms which would have to be modified if applied to Tennyson or Thackeray. Canadian critics are too soft-hearted (or soft-headed). They either are unable to discriminate between good and bad, or else, for various reasons, creditable or discreditable, refrain from doing so. And then the Canadian public is urged to buy books, irrespective of their intrinsic worth. The Canadian public is good-natured and patient after long experience in buying literary gold bricks, 57

Again, MacMechan's comments seem strangely pertinent to conditions at present in Canadian literary circles. A recent article in Canadian Literature sounds curiously similar to MacMechan's observations made in the 1920's:

One often hears the story about the president of Harvard University who, when asked how long it takes to make a great university, replied, "Three hundred years". This same observation might be applied to the creation of a great literary tradition. And that is precisely what we lack in this country. As a result it seems to me that the outstanding quality of the average Canadian reviewer might be described as failure of nerve. When confronted with the sparkling new literature of his own country, he tends to be timorous, hesitant, or evasive; or, at the opposite extreme, he becomes truculent, contemptuous, or vitriolic. If we can count on him for any consistency, it is an almost undeviating lack of enthusiasm for anything Canadian. Why, heavens, it might stamp him as being chauvinistic or provincial! This is just a single instance of our genius -- for this is what it almost amounts to -- for demeaning ourselves, a manifestation of our infinitely boring inferiority complex. The contemptible attitude of a great many Canadians to one of our most distinguished original thinkers, Marshall McLuhan, is a case in point. 58

It is perhaps in his consideration of this problem of "Canadianness" that MacMechan seems most contemporary to-day. The question of what constitutes a Canadian writer has been under discussion for most of the present century. Pelham Edgar takes it up in 1916, saying of cases that are in question that

the criterion in these doubtful cases must surely be an identification with the interest of the country so complete that a Canadian character is stamped upon the work, or, in default of that, a commanding influence exercised by the author upon the development of the country's literature.⁵⁹

Elsewhere, Edgar has written of the Canadian imagination and of how it is necessarily stimulated by contact with England.

I cannot imagine an Englishman emotionally stirred by his first contact with King or Yonge Street, Toronto. He lacks the background: It is reasonably different when a Canadian first treads the pavement of Fleet Street or Piccadilly. His experience has behind it a long and starved initiation, and his appetite is stimulated by a sharp hunger.⁶⁰

Instances of similar considerations of the topic could be multiplied many times, for the topic is still, apparently, central to Canadian writing. James Reaney's "The Canadian Poet's Predicament" (1957) is one of the more recent and more eloquent of these considerations:

You can stand anywhere in Canada -- in the country, the wilderness, or the city; you can stand in the British Museum Reading Room, you can stand in the Toronto Reference Library on College Street. If you look at our native poetic tradition in the British Museum, it all seems so pitiful; when you put pen to paper in Canada, say attempt to write a poem in the Reference Library on College Street, the native tradition becomes ancestral, important, and haunting.⁶¹

The point to be made in considering all of these comments is that the problem of "nativist" writing loomed large for MacMechan and for his more thoughtful contemporaries, of whom Edgar was one of the most eminent. Far from being simply a convenient way of sorting writers into categories (Canadian and non-Canadian), the term had (and has) to do with an elusive quality of mind reflected in the work of a given writer and is involved with the writer's relationship to his environment. This relationship, MacMechan would claim, subtly colours the writing of a particular author and reflects a specific place in time and space. Again, MacMechan anticipates later criticism, for the point he consistently made -- that

"a country comes into existence only as it is written about" -- is taken up some twenty years later by E.K. Brown. In 1943 Brown writes

A great art is fostered by artists and audience possessing in common a passionate and peculiar interest in the kind of life that exists in the country where they live. If this interest exists in the artist he will try to give it adequate expression; if it exists in the audience they will be alert for any imaginative work which expresses it from a new angle and with a new clearness. From what was said a moment ago it will be obvious that in a colonial or semi-colonial community neither artist nor audience will have the passionate and peculiar interest in their immediate surroundings that is required. Canada is a state in which such an interest exists only among a few. I have pointed out how Mr. Callaghan and Miss de la Roche have written as they could not have written if they had possessed such interest. It is the same with Canadian readers. A novel which presents the farms of the prairie, or the industrial towns of south-western Ontario, or the fishing villages in the Maritime Provinces will arouse no more interest in the general reader than a novel which is set in Surrey or in the suburbs of Chicago. Canadian undergraduates are much less likely than Americans to write stories about their immediate environment: their fancies take them to night-clubs in Vienna (rather than Montreal), islands in the South Seas (rather than in the St. Lawrence), foggy nights in London (rather than Halifax). It is almost impossible to persuade Canadians that an imaginative representation of the group in which they live could clarify for the reader his own nature and those of his associates. To the typical Canadian reader such a notion is arty folly. I give this as a fact, and I offer as a partial interpretation, at least, that most Canadians continue to be culturally colonial, that they set their great good place somewhere beyond their own borders.⁶²

It is clear that Brown and MacMechan are in agreement on many general critical points. In one particular instance their congruity is striking, for both single out Willa Cather's Shadows on the Rock as an interesting instance of an outsider's vision of a place being far superior to anything produced by "nativist" writers.⁶³

From the quotation above, then; it is evident that, in the ten years that had elapsed between MacMechan's death in 1933 and the publication of Brown's On Canadian Poetry in 1943, very little had changed in the Canadian consciousness as reflected in imaginative writing, or "the Literature of Power", as MacMechan would call it. Indeed, as has been

shown earlier in this chapter, MacMechan's perception of the situation antedated that of the "modernist" Brown by over three decades. In an article, "Have We a Literature?", published in 1910,⁶⁴ MacMechan makes a number of observations that he retains, virtually unchanged, for the remainder of his life: several are present in slightly altered form in Headwaters. MacMechan speaks, in the article, of having watched the development of Canadian literature: "I sat by the cradle of our national literature, and I have followed its growth for more than twenty years." What he now sees is that "Canada is still in the nervous, half-grown, hobbledehoy stage of nationhood" and has not matured sufficiently to be said to have produced a literature. "When [a nation] attains its full stature and strength, the literature comes, for a literature is simply the voice of a people, the most sympathetic and complete expression of the national life. Like many other good things, it does not come with observation." His prediction about what will survive in poetry is interesting to observe in retrospect, both because of its accuracy and because it is virtually unchanged in Headwaters, demonstrating how little MacMechan's ideas had changed in the intervening years. MacMechan names Gerin Lajoie's "Un Canadien Errant", Cremazie's "Drapeau de Carillon",⁶⁵ parts of Haliburton's work, W.H. Drummond's poetry, some of Sara Jeannette Duncan (particularly The Imperialist), some of the "more sincere" work of Lampman, Roberts, and Carman: he concludes this rather brief list with a peremptory, and refreshing, pronouncement -- "the rest must go." Here, in 1910, one sees an example of his astringent and personal criticism: one of the canons upon which that criticism is based is that, in poetry, "the half is greater than the whole", as he repeatedly says.

Almost a corollary to this assertion is MacMechan's repeated injunction to Canadian poets to "adopt the anvil theory of poetry." His

image is vivid here, for in it is contained his implied understanding of the making of poetry. One thinks of the components of the image and their relationship to the creation of poetry. Clearly MacMechan has the Greek root "poieo" -- to make -- in mind, for the image relates to how the poet-maker, like a smith, creates verbal artifacts, through acquired skill and industry, from material that is normally recalcitrant when not handled under conditions of great intensity or "heat". MacMechan consistently employs this image in his discussion of Canadian poetry, indicating that, if native poets are not to adopt this "anvil theory", much -- in fact, most -- of Canadian poetry "must go". MacMechan's year-end summary of developments in Canadian literature for 1910 -- and, by inference, during the twenty-odd years he has been an observer -- reinforces what he says in "Have We a Literature?":

At home, the intellectual movement has not been marked by the appearance of any work of imagination of even fifth-rate importance. Any Canadian fiction I have seen during the past year is jejune, and any verse either crude or spasmodic. We seem to have lost for ever the clear, sweet melody of Lampman, the Keatsian color of Roberts, and the haunting lyric snatches of Carman....Lozeau and Nelligan seem to have no successors.⁶⁶

What he writes in 1910 changes very little in succeeding years: the central points in his criticism of poetry were established early, and his career as a critic was an attempt to discover and foster Canadian poetry. What he had expressed in 1895, concerning the critic's duty -- that of "speaking out" -- is consistently stressed in the bulk of his writing. One could wish that MacMechan had pursued one of the projects left unfinished at his death, that of compiling an anthology of verse, for it presumably would have been as personal and as engagingly frank in the originality of his choice as Headwaters was later to be. In 1912,

MacMechan writes "One of these days I must compile The Canadian Book of Verse. None of the anthologies I know gives the real spirit of Canada." ⁶⁷

Among the topics revealing the "real spirit" of Canada, MacMechan

frequently cited the effect of winter on the life of Canadians:

Canadian poetry is nature-worship, following generally Wordsworth's mild pantheism, but the note of humanity is rarely sounded and the note of passion, one may almost say, never. Nature-worship is found in the poetry of the hot climates, but, in addition, the deeper strain of passion is conspicuously absent from Canadian verse... Now the winter of Canada is cold. We should boast of it, for forty-below is one of our national assets, making it impossible for wasters and sluggards to live in the country. And it is also vain to deny that long continued cold does not get into the very marrow and that it can depress the spirits horribly. Stead has voiced this depression in a little poem in The Canadian Magazine, but very little (none I might be bold to say) has got into our poetry as a whole. The unclouded winter sun in the clear blue sky, the ermine blanket of the snow, the mere physical brightness is bound to react upon the spirits of the whole people. It is our winter much more than our summer which makes Canadians a race of optimists. Depression cannot hold out against the brilliancy of winter sunshine. He goes on to quote Pickthall's "Frost Song". ⁶⁸

From this rather novel approach to one aspect of Canadian life -- and poetry -- one can infer some of the originality that might have been evident in an anthology such as the one he proposed to compile. The "real spirit of Canada" which he seems to have perceived can be postulated from some of his known biases and ideas. Certainly he would have considered the "mild pantheism" of much Canadian nature poetry a manifestation of this "spirit", and in addition, he would surely have included love poetry where he could find it in the "cold and orthodox" imaginations of Canadian poets. In addition, his "spirit of Canada" would certainly include poetry of identifiable locale -- "Low Tide on Grand Pré" and "Panoramia Revisited" were instances of the sort of poetry MacMechan considered fine in articulating a specific and highly localized sense of place in Canadian writing. Certainly, too, his "spirit of Canada" would

embrace French-Canadian writing and, in addition to the poetry of several French-Canadians whom he admired -- Lozeau, Nelligan, Paul Morin, for instance -- MacMechan would undoubtedly have included the dialect-poetry of William Henry Drummond. For perhaps in the figure of Drummond, above all others, MacMechan saw what he would have defined as what was best in the "spirit of Canada" -- the author's career as a medical doctor, to which the writing of poetry was tangential, illustrated for MacMechan the happy union of life and art. He was fond of pointing out that, often, medical men "beat the literary fellows at their own game",⁶⁹ that is, they wrote poetry as an adjunct to an active, humanitarian life lived separate from their life of introspection and writing. Moreover, Drummond's life and writing occurred within the context of French Canada, with which he was familiar and in which he served a vital role, and his affectionate understanding of French Canada shines through his poetry. What has been written of Tennyson might apply, with modifications, to W.H. Drummond:

Just before the war I asked an acute young critic of the generation which is leading the return to Tennyson, on what special quality he considered the poet's claim to immortality most firmly founded. To my surprise, instead of referring to his supreme artistry, his command of verbal music, or his unique power of painting for that "inward eye which is the bliss of solitude," my friend said, "Tennyson will always rank amongst the first, because he is the most human of the great poets." That is, I think, a verdict with which Tennyson himself would have been well content.⁷⁰

Perhaps in the person of W.H. Drummond, more clearly than in any other single poet, MacMechan perceived qualities he might have summarized as illustrating the "real spirit of Canada". One can only regret that MacMechan's anthology never appeared, for one suspects that such an anthology would have served, in part, to contradict the dour thesis familiar from books such as Margaret Atwood's Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature (1972) that Canadian literature reflects the grim,

and joyless achievement of simply surviving in what appears to most Canadian writers to be a hostile environment.

The publication of John Garvin's anthology, Canadian Poets (1916) afforded MacMechan an opportunity to apply to a particular instance his general complaints about Canadian criticism in general. MacMechan and Garvin obviously had very different biases in their poetic preferences: Garvin's edition of the poetry of Isabella Valency Crawford is perhaps the most conspicuous example of the gulf that separated the two critics. Whereas Garvin writes effusively of her, MacMechan totally ignores her in Headwaters, and his few comments about her are dismissive at best. For example, he writes in 1928,

The terms "poet" and "poetry" must have new definitions if the selections in this volume /A.M. Stephen's anthology, The Golden Treasury of Canadian Verse/ are "poetry" and the writers of them "poets". By what straining of plain dictionary meanings, by what exercise of Christian charity, by what drugging of the critical faculty can Isabella Valency Crawford, Charles Mair, George Frederick Cameron, E. Pauline Johnson, Robert W. Service, to name only a few, be rated "poets"? 71

Garvin's comments on the various contributors to his anthology are remarkable for their fulsome praise. For example, he writes extended and effusive introductions to the work of various "poetesses" whose names are forgotten to-day and whose poetic talents appear, from Garvin's biographical notes, to have been at least equalled, in his estimation; by their rank in society. Perhaps the most flagrant instance of this sort of dubious praise from Garvin is to be seen in his extended treatment of the work of his wife, "Katherine Hale", in the 1926 revised edition. His remarks on her poetry are supplemented by gratuitous, and rather embarrassing, tributes to her talents in areas quite unrelated to her writing of poetry. 72

In the case of Isabella Crawford, time would seem to have vindicated Garvin

and made MacMechan's attitude to her seem the curious one. However, on the whole, MacMechan's criticisms of Garvin's anthology seem to-day to be accurate and trenchant. He takes exception to the anonymous (and presumably Garvin's own) "criticisms" of individual authors in the anthology:

The criticism is Mr. Garvin's I suppose, where the name of the critic is not appended to the extract. No one can complain of being under-estimated. "Empty praise" is the most a poet gets for his work as a rule, unless he is a Tennyson, or -- a Service. No one will begrudge our native songsters such a guerdon of thistledown.⁷³

The reference here to Robert Service is typical of MacMechan, who frequently deplores the popularity of Service's "vulgar" writing.⁷⁴

He continues, giving his customary cautionary words about Canadian poetry in general:

I honestly wish that I could endorse all these pretty compliments; but I must utter a warning note. It is the ungracious duty of a patriotic critic who is proud of these achievements and essays in the domain of literature to assure our authors that they have not yet attained, neither are already perfect. I read on and on, waiting to hear the note of distinction; I turn page after page looking for the sincere, fine, piercing phrase, for the remoulding of the old elements of thought, emotion and expression which betoken the highly sensitized, individual soul with its special consciousness of Man and Nature. Rarely do I find what I am seeking for. Of minor faults, the old familiar faults of musicians performing before they have mastered their instrument, perhaps the chief is want of proportion. Rarely do I find the intense concentration of language which betrays true passion. Poe held that a long poem is a contradiction in terms. Our poets need to cultivate the epigram, to learn that "the half is greater than the whole," and to ponder the wise old saying which entraps the secret of Art, "nothing-too much." Sic cogitavit.

Increasingly, after about 1915, MacMechan emphasises his personal preferences for restraint, harmony, and beauty in verse. He had long insisted that "whatever else poetry has, it must possess beauty and truth"⁷⁵ if it is to be poetry of the highest order. MacMechan, apparently feeling

himself increasingly alien to the currents beginning to appear in Canadian poetry in the form of "modernist" writing, entrenches himself more firmly as a "Victorian" and recapitulates his ideal for art and literature:

When I want something to correct my judgment of modern art or literature, I have only to lift my eyes from the paper I scrawl so industriously, and let them rest on the little earthen woman that stands on my table, in the light of my study lamp. A little fragment of the infinite Greek "charis", sent by a kind heart across the sea, she stands there eternally fastening her peplus over her left shoulder and never finishing her charming task. There is simplicity and dignity of design, endless harmony of details duly subordinated to the whole, -- a complete and precious thing, ever satisfying and ever new. By quiet harmony she wins her way: yet she is anything but cold or dead. The truth of colour is one, and the truth of the "round" is another. So some living and lovely Greek girl... stood in some forgotten statuary's studio ages ago.⁷⁷

This statue represents for MacMechan a form of artistic accomplishment that is for him an ideal and perhaps most closely approximates to the Greek ideal of beauty. It represents for him values he perceives in "great" poetry -- simplicity, dignity of design, harmony of parts in subordination to the whole, the moment arrested in time -- all of which are aspects of poetry MacMechan would call "great". This paradigm also represents for him a point of departure for his basic incompatibility with "modernist" poets, for example, with T.S. Eliot.

Much of such poetry, MacMechan feels, contains subject matter alien to the precepts of his mentor, Ruskin: "My master Ruskin, discredited critic though he be, taught me that 'It is an insult to what is really great in art to suppose that it in any way addresses itself to mean or uncultivated faculties.'" On this ground, as well as on the ground of its inappropriate form, MacMechan finds Robert Frost's "Cow in Apple Time" an incredibly bizarre instance of modernist "poetry":

For another taste! "Gentle Reader, please tell me how you like Robert Frost's rustic vignette / Here he quotes the poem/. No. This is not a comic poem. He is a serious-minded person, "intent on high designs." The picture of the distressed animal is undoubtedly true to life, but somehow I want to laugh. And I think of

The friendly cow all red and white,
(I love with all my heart:)

She gives me cream with all her might,
To eat with apple-tart.

Personally I prefer Tusitala's point of view. 79

T.S. Eliot's poetry seems to have irritated MacMechan on several grounds. Eliot's subject-matter, for one thing, often displeased MacMechan, and his pedantic allusions appear to have done likewise. Both of these irritants are present in the following parody of Eliot's "Burbank"; written by MacMechan in 1933:

Elijah paid his little bill
Contacted at the Grand Hotel
When Junius Brutus made his will,
He moaned like Caesar as he fell.

Consumptive sculpture in the sky
Passes skyward where the radios pine
Meanly, but Odin's single eye
Had pierced the sand-eel's radiant spine;

The oxen in a double yoke
Had hauled the cart the whole seaway
From Downing Street. And then it broke,
So Ancient Pistol had to pay.

The explication which follows the poem parodies both Eliot and the earnest source-hunting and sense-hunting critics:

Let me follow the shining example of the Great Elucidator /presumably Theodore/Spencer. My poem is about Halifax, the Warden of the Honor of the North, the Eastern Gateway of Canada. The first stanza is merely expository ... Elijah with his biblical praenomen is plainly a rustic, a yokel from Ecum Secum, or Kedgemakoogee. There are two grand hotels in Halifax. Probably responding to the urge of local patriotism, Elijah put up at the Novascotian. Naturally, after having paid his bill in part, he made his will, assigning all his remaining property to the hotel aforesaid. Life held nothing more for him. Caesar moaned, "Et tu, Brute?" as he fell at the foot of Pompey's statue. So did Elijah, making his will. The reference in "Et" to the consumption of food in the hotel is

unmistakable and very subtle.

And so on. The intelligent reader only needs a hunt here and there to unravel the rare significance of this lovely, lovely poem If this exposition does not satisfy the inquiring mind, I have half a dozen more up my sleeve. The beauty of poetry like Mr. T.S. Eliot's (and mine) is you can have a score of interpretations of it, no two alike, and all equally plausible.

Earlier, he had spoken out against modernist poetry in general, with its "imagist puerility" and the "recent fads, such as the rampant
81 adjective." "Vers libre" he finds unimpressive, quoting Heine's "You could have said all that in good prose." He goes on to observe that though the broken lines of the form have a "certain stabbing effect", and though "the abrupt lines take on rhythm of their own", after Matthew Arnold's experiments in the same form (such as "Rugby Chapel" and "Empedocles on Etna") "there is no reason to get excited over the
82 'modernism' of vers libres." His remarks on an anthology of "new poetry" in 1917, though not blindly intolerant, indicate his basic reasons for preferring "traditional" poetry:

So, with a mental reservation, I stretch out a hand of welcome to The New Poetry (Macmillans in Canada), an anthology edited by Harriet Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson. There are all kinds of verse in it, good, bad, indifferent. There are well known names like Rupert Brooke, and those not so well known like Ezra Pound.... There are old models and old subjects; there are new subjects (like turbines and steam-shovels) treated in new ways. So every one may take what he likes from the feast, and reject what he chooses. My mental reservation is implied in these words: "No man having drunk old wine straightway desireth new; for he saith, the old is better." 83

In many ways, this summary statement comes as close as it is possible to come to MacMechan's reasons for disliking much of modernist poetry. It would seem that MacMechan was too old at the time of the inception of such poetry to change his tastes, and he makes no apology for not changing: he, in effect, maintains a "to each his own" attitude

towards preferences in poetry, though he is often goaded into comment by a particularly irksome appraisal of modern poetry. One interesting instance of this tendency comes from an entry in his journal, which records that he attended a conference in Ottawa in May, 1920, at which his respected colleague Pelham Edgar presented a paper on modern poetry:

Papers in the morning. I could hardly keep my chair while Pelham Edgar gave what he called a paper on the poetry of the twentieth century, relating everything to Hardy and the Shropshire Lad. His manner was hesitating and his reading of poems unimpressive. Had no chance to reply, but took notes. Told him afterwards that I was going to Victoria /Victoria College, where Edgar taught/ and nail up my 95 theses to the door.⁸⁵

It is possibly in relation to the poetry to emerge from World War I that a reader to-day sees MacMechan's attitudes to poetry as those of a bygone age. His position as a critic of poetry becomes increasingly difficult to maintain, as this comment might suggest: "One unforeseen product of the war was an unusual crop of poets. This fact should be weighed against the prevailing pessimism: for poetry, if it means anything, means presentation of the ideal."⁸⁶ Apparently, for MacMechan, the most significant poetry to emerge from the war was poetry of the sort John McCrae wrote in "In Flanders Field". MacMechan frequently cites this poem as the sort of idealistic and positive presentation of one aspect of the war that appeals to his Carlylean sense of Duty. In contrast to such poetry was the "realistic" poetry of, for example, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, who wrote of the horror, waste, and futility of the war. Such "negativism", devoid of idealism of any sort, no matter how well-written, would naturally bother MacMechan, and he therefore excludes such poetry from his consideration. He had long maintained that poetry's function is "to communicate joy"⁸⁷ and to present an ideal that "enables us to enjoy life, or endure it."⁸⁸ "In Flanders Fields" meets both these requirements for him.

MacMechan frequently offers an account of the sort of solace poetry is capable of providing for readers. His favorite instance of this consoling function of poetry is his account of a simple man, a weaver in Lancashire, who, having suffered the loss of his wife and a favorite son, is able to recite from memory Tennyson's In Memoriam. This feat, especially as achieved by an unlettered person, speaks to MacMechan of the power of poetry to help us transcend our unfortunate circumstances and bring us peace of mind. It is not surprising, then, that given this bias in his appreciation of poetry, MacMechan should find much of the poetry to emerge from the First World War very distressing: its pessimism, its realism, its diction all went very much against the grain of what he would style "poetic". It is in this sphere of his criticism that MacMechan's judgments of poetry seem to-day most dated, for in attempting to preserve an "ideal beauty" in the face of the sordid realities of the war and the general milieu of his latter years, MacMechan takes on a sort of falsetto voice -- one is not convinced by what he writes, and has the uncomfortable sensation that he himself was not, either.

There seems to be a forced optimism in his writing pertaining to the War that indicates a tendency MacMechan occasionally manifests of appearing publicly to adhere to ideals of which he is privately less sure. His emphatic comments on the wisdom and goodness of the Canadian public in accepting the poetry of Marjorie Pickthall with enthusiasm is but one example: "As a patriotic Canadian, I consider the instant popularity of Miss Pickthall's first volume proof positive that our people are sound at heart and every additional indication that she is read and enjoyed confirms my belief." ⁸⁹ Another instance of something slightly false

in his criticism, is his public insistence on the "glory" of the War. In his journal he is far less convinced of this glory and often questions the whole enterprise, while noting that he must keep up the appearance of confidence, so as not to undermine the morale of those around him. Related to this tendency in him is the fact to emerge from MacMechan's correspondence with one veteran of the war that by 1929, at least, MacMechan was familiar with and close to one ex-soldier's complete disillusionment with the war and its aims. F.M. Salter, in a long series of letters to MacMechan, indicates his disgust and hatred of the war. Furthermore, it is apparent from these letters that Salter had, in MacMechan, a sympathetic audience for his views. The point here is that MacMechan, in rejecting some modernist poetry, particularly in rejecting most war poetry, cut himself off from much imaginative writing emerging from the conditions of the time in which he was living.

While one can understand, and to some extent sympathize with, his distaste for this form of poetry, one can also perceive clearly MacMechan's limitations as a critic of poetry. His avowed chief accomplishments as a critic enhance this view, for the two literary "finds" of his career were Marjorie Pickthall and Paul Morin, both of whom seem heavily "romantic" today. Writing in December, 1924, MacMechan expresses unequivocally this judgment of the worth of the two writers:

And yet there are some infidels who refuse to believe in the existence of a Canadian Literature. We began with nothing a century ago, and not only have we produced a multitude of books in French and English in prose and verse; but a considerable body of criticism on that literature. No one can call it "great", but, if "The Drift of Pinions" and "Le Paon d'Email", to cite typical cases, are not poetry, where is poetry to be found?⁹²

His concluding rhetorical question might to-day be answered in ways he would hardly have expected. Nevertheless, this quotation indicates

MacMechan's position as a critic very clearly, for in championing the type of poetry he preferred and appreciated, he was outspoken, knowledgeable, and rare in Canada. His criticisms of poetry, formed in a vanished age, were applicable to a relatively small area of modern life. As he himself asserted, the age in which he lived was "sordid"; to discover the place of poetry in such an age was no easy task, and it would appear that the criterion he applied -- in general, a love of Beauty, Truth, and Goodness -- was a luxury in a world without fixed beliefs. While some of his judgments, then, seem justified to to-day's readers, many others seem arbitrary and old-fashioned -- that is to say, they seem to place poetry at a remove from ordinary life, making of it a guide to a higher life. In this attitude -- which we, and MacMechan himself, readily identify as "Victorian" -- he seems quite outdated. A.J.M. Smith has singled out this fundamental tenet of the old tradition in MacMechan's writing when, in his Introduction to Masks of Poetry (1962), he writes

the present collection of essays, I am afraid, will emphasise -- and this may not be the least of its services -- the lack of any single unified but comprehensive survey of our literature. We have never had one that was really adequate. Perhaps the nearest approach to it was Archibald MacMechan's Headwaters of Canadian Literature; but that was written thirty-five years ago, and though it is graceful and enlightened it is interesting now chiefly as a still impressive monument to the genteel tradition that used to dominate the Maritimes and Ontario.

What, then, is MacMechan's place as a critic of poetry in Canadian literary history? In order to assess his place as it might fairly be seen to-day, it is useful to consider his criticism in four categories -- the standards of his criticism, its originality, its scope and, finally, its influence.

From the foregoing quotations it is apparent that MacMechan, in his day, was aware of what George Woodcock has called the "double standard"

in Canadian criticism, by which a book tended at one time to be immoderately praised (or sometimes damned) because of its Canadian origin. Woodcock notes that "except in the columns of provincial newspapers, the tendency is almost a thing of the past. But only of the recent past." ⁹⁴ Certainly such a statement as the following, written in 1905, required qualifications.

"Avant tous, je suis Canadien," is my motto, as well as Sir Francis Hincks's, though not quite in his sense. The chief reason for the existence of this causerie is to keep one journal's The Montreal Standard's constituency in touch with all manifestations of literary activity in our Canadians. As a causer, I am a Canadian, and I count nothing Canadian as foreign to myself. I assume (and I think I am safe in assuming) that my readers feel this interest as much as I do. ⁹⁵

MacMechan here appears to be defending himself against possible charges of being narrowly chauvinistic, as well as proclaiming his ebullient nationalism. His concern with maintaining a position between these two extremes is evident in much that he wrote. In 1912, for example, he speaks of the insularity of Canadians:

I greatly fear that we have become comparatively indifferent to the blame or praise of the distinguished and intelligent foreigner. We are too busy; we have too many big things on hand which must be carried through. It is only just to add that very few travellers at any time have been severe upon our faults and failings. We have never been criticized as harshly as our neighbours south of the line. Canada has never had its Basil Halls and Mrs. Trollopes and Charles Dickens's. Possibly we are too vague even to arouse criticism.... ⁹⁶

In 1914 he expands on this idea:

Outside opinion, an external standard of taste should be called in to redress the balance of conflicting provincial views in criticism. If a Canadian work does not please London and New York, it may be assumed that some essential quality is lacking. There is an absolute standard by which literature, Canadian, or any other, can be judged. ⁹⁷

By the end of 1923 he is confident enough of the quantity, if not the quality, of Canadian work to remark "I wish I could confine myself to the

work of Canadians; and I wish I could do nothing but praise." ⁹⁸ Here we see a critic who is eager to foster what he finds worthy in a native literature, while at the same time keeping firmly in mind standards of excellence that should hold sway within the native country as well as without. In this emphasis on the necessity for international standards in Canadian criticism MacMechan was something of a lone voice at the time of his main critical writing -- an observation that leads into a consideration of the second point, the originality of his criticism.

That his criticism was original and personal is evident to-day simply by comparing it with much of what was being written at about the same time. Archibald MacMurchy's "criticism" in his Handbook to Canadian Literature consisted largely of biographical information about contributors, while J.D. Logan and John W. Garvin both wrote bombastic prose that is to-day embarrassingly fulsome, and Lorne Pierce, in his Outline of Canadian Literature, simply gave a catalogue of Canadian writers. MacMechan's work, by comparison, is personal, fresh, and trenchant. What Millar MacLure wrote of MacMechan is relevant here. He says "there were giants in the land in those days, but they were primarily great teachers; their bibliographies are short, but the memory of them is long. Such were W.J. Alexander (1855-1944) of Toronto [and MacMechan's predecessor at Dalhousie], whose only important published work is An Introduction to the Poetry of Robert Browning (1889), [and] Archibald MacMechan (1862-1933) of Dalhousie." ⁹⁹

In saying "I count nothing Canadian as foreign to myself," MacMechan reveals the breadth of his critical activities. In devoting a great portion of his life's work to the inculcation of values in Canadian poetry, he attempted to see Canadian writing as a whole, as distinct from the two great bodies of English poetry that impinged on it and influenced

it -- the literature of Britain and the United States. Although he was emotionally responsive to both countries, he nevertheless attempted to hold his critical faculties apart from any specifically national ties. He would have claimed that the sort of objectivity he practised is simply the exercise of objective judgment and is one of the critic's foremost duties. MacMechan's emotional ties with Britain came, obviously, from his whole literary background. Various articles written by him are suffused with an attachment to things British, particularly with an attachment to two institutions, the universities and the monarchy. His "Oxford for a Day", ¹⁰⁰ for example, offers a rhapsodic and highly romantic account of his visit to D.C. Harvey in Oxford in 1911 when Harvey was there as a Rhodes scholar. MacMechan's articles written for the Halifax Herald covering the coronation of George V in the same year are also instances of ¹⁰¹ this vein of anglophilia in MacMechan. As for the American side, his ties with the United States, particularly with the New England universities, gave him an understanding and a respect for one aspect of American life. But about what he perceived as American crassness and materialism and slipshod standards as applied to word usage (he deplored American slang) he is very definite -- he believed this sort of "Americanization" was a ¹⁰² pernicious and dangerously subtle influence on Canadian life. Moreover, in attempting to survey Canadian literature; and especially Canadian poetry, MacMechan took into account French-Canadian writing to a degree shared by few of his contemporaries. In his conscientious championing of several French-Canadian poets (particularly in Headwaters) and his dutiful translation of them, a task he perceived as incumbent on him as a fully "Canadian" critic, MacMechan took on a critical task few other critics before or since have shared with him.

Finally, one comes to the most difficult task, the assessment of MacMechan's influence as a critic of poetry. Perhaps his influence

can be appraised as accurately as possible on the evidence of personal letters to him from readers of his critical writings. A list of eminent literary figures who appreciated his writing, specifically his criticism of poetry, will indicate the scope of his influence. Ray Palmer Baker speaks, in a letter, of having come under MacMechan's influence as a critic. ¹⁰³

As we have already seen, Douglas Bush heartily endorses MacMechan's work as a critic of poetry. ¹⁰⁴ G.H. Clarke expresses his high

opinion of Headwaters, in contrast to his low opinion of Logan's Highways; adding, in a subsequent letter, "I have always felt aware of you at your post in Nova Scotia as a sane, capable, dependable critic and teacher, and as the respected and beloved Dean in the teaching of English in the Dominion of Canada." ¹⁰⁵

Carl Y. Connor, having read Headwaters, writes "You seem to have kept your own viewpoint without being over-influenced by conventional criticism. It is interesting to see your emphasis on the French-Canadians...." ¹⁰⁶

W.A. Deacon, one of those to remark on the "eastern" bias in Headwaters, and one of the most outspoken critics of MacMechan's omission of outstanding names in it, nevertheless writes privately of his appreciation of the book. ¹⁰⁷ Robert Falconer (a highly regarded friend of

MacMechan's -- he had dedicated The Winning of Popular Government [1915] to him) wrote, generally endorsing Headwaters, with the rider "I notice some omissions, the one which struck me most being that of D.C. Scott's poetry which [Pelham] Edgar thinks very good indeed, and [W.S.] Milner ¹⁰⁸

admires the accurate style." Lorne Pierce, too, though misspelling "Headwaters" as "Headquarters", speaks of his regard for MacMechan's work in general. ¹⁰⁹

B.K. Sandwell, upon hearing rumours of MacMechan's retirement from teaching, writes "if so, I have no doubt that you are retiring

pour mieux sauter to your real vocation of critical authorship." Malcolm

W. Wallace feels that MacMechan, in Headwaters, has "done a really valu-

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able service to Canadian literature." These comments readily establish

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some individual responses to at least one facet of MacMechan's work.

Perhaps the comments, already quoted, by Desmond Pacey and A.J.M. Smith

will serve to provide a general estimate of the significance of MacMechan's

work as it appears to-day to two contemporary critics and scholars. Of

MacMechan's influence as it can be inferred from the list of his students

who later became prominent in the arts, C.L. Bennet has written the most

complete and succinct account.

A teacher must be judged not only by the generality of his students; but also, and professionally this is the acid test, by the select few who proceed to advanced work in his subject. Here again, Dalhousie has a good record for . . . MacMechan set by himself a standard that has called for the best efforts of his successors. I have mentioned Garnet Sedgwick, who came to Dalhousie in 1898, took Honours in Greek and English, went to Harvard for his Ph.D. and influenced the teaching of English in British Columbia for over forty years. To Harvard also he sent two students who remained as Professors: K.G.T. Webster, the medievalist whose special library is now one of the prized possessions of the Dalhousie Library, and John Tucker Murray, whose work on the Elizabethan dramatic companies is still the standard. Also in drama, Roy MacKenzie, better known for his pioneer work on Nova Scotia ballads, wrote a scholarly history of the English morality plays, and James W. Tupper, who recently endowed a post-graduate scholarship in English for Dalhousieans going on to higher degrees elsewhere, became an authority on the drama of the Restoration. Moving from these examples to my own time, we shared, among others, Arthur Jewitt and Max MacOdrum, both of whom became university presidents as well as recognized scholars, Roy Wiles, now Head of English at McMaster and author of the standard Canadian guide to research-writing in the Humanities and the late Harold Wilson, who though he took only a pass B.A., obtained from MacMechan's last year (as I recall) of English 2 the passport to a course under Kittredge of Harvard that ultimately led him to a high place in Canadian scholarship. 113

Perhaps these comments give some perspective to a consideration of MacMechan's influence.

To-day, his judgments are interesting in revealing his breadth of understanding as well as his high critical standards, both of which he applied sedulously to Canadian literature for over forty years. A comment he made toward the end of his life sums up the attitudes one can perceive to-day in his criticisms of poetry, where, though he attempted to maintain standards he recognized as "dated", he nevertheless reveals a wide vision of the critic's task. "Privately, my belief is that the challenge of the new school to the unthinking adherents of the old school and the ensuing battle are all to the good. Frank differences of opinion properly fought out are better than what the Germans call 'graveyard peace'." 114

As a critic of poetry, MacMechan was certainly a tireless and vocal participant in the "frank differences of opinion" that characterized the early years of Canadian literary criticism.

Notes to Chapter II

- ¹DW, May 9, 1908.
- ²See below, Chapter III.
- ³See references throughout this thesis to himself as "Victorian".
- ⁴DW, November 29, 1913. Also DW, February 24, 1917.
- ⁵John Holloway, The Victorian Sage: Studies in Argument (London: Macmillan, 1953), p. 1.
- ⁶DW, June 6, 1908.
- ⁷DW, June 6, 1908. The phrase is derived from De Quincey's "Literature of Knowledge", which has the power to instruct, as opposed to "Literature of Power", which has the power to move the reader.
- ⁸Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski, The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada (Toronto: Ryerson, 1970), p. 25.
- ⁹MacMechan, Headwaters, p. 135.
- ¹⁰This is a phrase he very often applied to himself. Note, however, that MacMechan's most recent editor considers it as a possible misnomer. See M.G. Parks, ed., Headwaters of Canadian Literature, p. xii.
- ¹¹DW, February 29, 1908.
- ¹²One of the few exceptions to this comment is MacMechan's inclusion of "Nature Pitiless" from In Memoriam. However, in its context with the other more affirmative selections from the poem, the effect of lines such as "Nature red in tooth and claw" is considerably tempered.
- ¹³MacMechan, Selections from Tennyson, xlii.
- ¹⁴MacMechan, pp. xl-xlviii. For an extended consideration of Hallam's criticism, see Frederick S. Boas, "Arthur Henry Hallam", Queen's Quarterly, XLI(1934), pp. 203-204.
- ¹⁵MacMechan, Select Poems of Tennyson, xlii.
- ¹⁶This point provides him with the basis for what is perhaps his most often repeated criticism of Canadian verse -- that it demonstrates the poet's disregard for the craft of verse. Only by 1923 is he able to detect an improvement: "it seems to me that our Canadian poets are improving in technique" (DW, February 3, 1923).
- ¹⁷MacMechan, Headwaters, pp. 223-226. Note here that even the image of the poetess appears to be taken from Tennyson's "Lady of Shallot".

18 See Appendix A.

19 DW, November 16, 1907.

20 DW, December 17, 1910.

21 Matthew Arnold, "The Function of Criticism", in The Portable Matthew Arnold, ed. Lionel Trilling (New York: The Viking Press, 1949), pp. 248-249.

22 Matthew Arnold, "The Study of Poetry", op. cit., pp. 307-308.

23 Lionel Trilling, Introduction, The Portable Matthew Arnold, p. 23.

24 See below, Chapter III.

25 DW, July 23, 1921.

26 DW, June 24, 1911.

27 DW, January 14, 1928. "Pedantry" is actually not a display of "inexact" knowledge so much as a display of superfluous or irrelevant or inappropriate knowledge, MacMechan's use of the term is eccentric here.

28 DW, April 25, 1908. An entry in his journal for March 14, 1918, also indicates his essential humility: "Talked too much, and about my own work, of which I am always ashamed."

29 C.L. Bennet, private letter, April, 1976.

30 The Week, October 1, 1892.

31 Claude Bissell, "Literary Taste in Central Canada During the late Nineteenth Century", Canadian Historical Review, Vol. XXXI (1950), p. 243.

32 Desmond Pacey refers to Headwaters of Canadian Literature as "a pioneer study" in "The Study of Canadian Literature", The Journal of Canadian Fiction, Vol. 2, (1973), p. 68.

33 The Week, October 8, 1892.

34 See above, note 8.

35 Pacey, "The Study of Canadian Literature", p. 67.

36 MacMechan's response to the histories of Marquis and Roy is interesting. Reviewing them in DW, April 18, 1914, MacMechan is obviously stimulated in his own project of writing a history, as he mentions for the first time in his published writings an idea that will take shape as Headwaters. Speaking of Marquis' history, MacMechan says that books of Canadian interest "cannot escape notice from a critic who watches" eagerly all stirrings of the Canadian spirit, through his loophole of retreat . . . My own tendency in writing an account of Canadian literature would be to throw up the really conspicuous achievements against a dull drab background of tentative mediocrity. I would set quality always

before quantity. I would heighten the lights and darken the shadows. I would give more space and detailed criticism to the really good things, and less to the inferior." Reviewing R.P. Baker's A History of English Canadian Literature to the Confederation (DW, February 19, 1921), MacMechan virtually gives three cheers for the book, which, unlike most Canadian books, is decidedly not "diffident". ("Diffidence" is the quality most characteristic of Canadians, MacMechan repeatedly claims.) In this review, he offers as an image of Canadian literature the double stream of the Ottawa and St. Lawrence rivers mingling to form one. This is, presumably the germ of his use of the image in Headwaters.

³⁷ DW, January 19, 1924.

³⁸ For an account of this influence on Canadian academics, see the article by Robert Falconer cited above, Chapter I, note 7.

³⁹ Lorne Pierce, An Outline of Canadian Literature (Toronto: Ryerson, 1927), p. 3.

⁴⁰ MacMechan calls both Baker and Rhodenizer "competent men" (DW, December 17, 1927).

⁴¹ Pacey, "The Study of Canadian Literature", p. 68.

⁴² The Canadian Forum was founded in 1920. For a good discussion of some of the central issues of its early years, see a recent article by Sandra Djwa, "The Canadian Forum: Literary Catalyst", Studies in Canadian Literature (Winter, 1976), pp. 7-25. Djwa speaks of the "flood of Canadiana" appearing in the 1920's, "a tide of activity augmented by the Canadian Authors' Association and not to be rivalled until the 1960's" (p. 18). One is reminded, here, of MacMechan's great enthusiasm for the potential worth of the Canadian Authors' Association. In 1921, he cites the formation of the Association as "the event of 1921", and later he expresses his belief in the Association's influence in creating "national unity": "The C.A.A. has undoubtedly excited a widespread interest in the work of our own writers, and there is no doubt in my mind that this movement makes for national unity. British Columbia reads Sam Slick, and Nova Scotia reads The Prairie Child, and the English-speaking provinces read Maria Chapdelaine even in translation and the foundation for a common understanding is being laid. Of the C.A.A. let us say 'Esto perpetua!'" (DW, April 19, 1923).

⁴³ See Dudek and Gnarowski (pp. 24-27) for a discussion of this article. DW, September 9, 1923: "Some time ago one of our clever young university men complained in the Forum about the lack of original sin in Canadian life, and consequently in Canadian fiction. Being ironical, his plea was naturally misunderstood and several Superior Persons took him solemnly to task for attempting to undermine public morals. But he was quite right...."

⁴⁴ The phrase is from Dudek and Gnarowski, p. 25.

⁴⁵ Bush, "Making Literature Hum", The Canadian Forum (October, 1926).

⁴⁶MacMechan's review of Poteen appeared in DW, Jan. 1, 1927. See W.A. Deacon, Poteen (Ottawa: Graphics, 1926), pp. 209-211. Also see letter Sept. 26, 1932 in which he asserts "you have a peculiar genius for the humorous reflective type of writing".

⁴⁷DW, October 1, 1921.

⁴⁸This article is reproduced in Appendix B simply because, like many caricatures, this one contains a grain of truth that is perhaps nowhere else to be found. The article reveals aspects of MacMechan's mannerisms that have been alluded to by many people who remember him. Ernest Buckler, in a private letter (August 27, 1976), referring to MacMechan's public self, writes "I'm sorry that I can't recall any particular instances which might serve to illuminate his 'persona'. Which was nevertheless rich, varied, and unique to an extent which sometimes eclipsed his pen."

⁴⁹The letter is signed "One Who Knows Better", but from internal evidence it would appear to have been written by MacMechan.

⁵⁰One thinks immediately of Scott's well-known poem, "The Canadian Authors Meet", and associates it with MacMechan, who was local president of the Canadian Authors' Association at the time of its formation on March 16, 1921, until October 11, 1929. See Helen Creighton, A Life in Folklore (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1975), p. 45, for an account of the Halifax branch and MacMechan's influence in it.

⁵¹Reprinted in Dudek and Gnarowski, pp. 38-41.

⁵²DW, March 7, 1908.

⁵³DW, February 5, 1921.

⁵⁴Frye, "Canada and its Poetry", Canadian Forum (December, 1943). Reprinted in Dudek and Gnarowski, p. 86.

⁵⁵DW, March 21, 1914.

⁵⁶DW, March 7, 1908.

⁵⁷DW, July 27, 1929.

⁵⁸Phyllis Grosskurth, "The Canadian Critic", Canadian Literature, #46 (Autumn, 1970), p. 57.

⁵⁹Edgar, "English-Canadian Literature" in Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. 14, p. 343.

⁶⁰Edgar, Across My Bath (Toronto: Ryerson, 1952), p. 24.

⁶¹James Reaney, "The Canadian Poet's Predicament", University of Toronto Quarterly, Vol. XXVI, #3, April, 1957. Reprinted in Masks of Poetry edited by A.J.M. Smith (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962), p. 111.

62 E.K. Brown, On Canadian Poetry (Toronto: Ryerson, 1943), p. 14.

63 MacMechan says this repeatedly. See, for example, DW, February 29, 1932. See E.K. Brown, Willa Cather: A Biographical Study, completed by Leon Edel (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), pp. 266-286.

64 "Have We a Literature?", The Montreal Standard, March 19, 1910.

65 In general, MacMechan was out of sympathy with Haliburton and much preferred the writings of Joseph Howe. See letter to D.C. Harvey, Easter Sunday, 1925.

66 DW, January 7, 1911.

67 DW, June 7, 1913.

68 DW, June 7, 1913.

69 DW, May 29, 1926.

70 Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson (London: MacMillan, 1968), p. 541.

71 DW, August 11, 1928.

72 See John W. Garvin, ed., Canadian Poets (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1926), pp. 280-281.

73 DW, March 3, 1917.

74 See his extended comments on Service in Headwaters, pp. 219-220. See also DW, December 9, 1916.

75 "For one reared in the true faith, that poetry, whatever else it has or has not, must possess beauty and harmony, such 'poems' are not poetry at all." DW, February 12, 1910.

76 He reiterates this point many times. See, for example, DW, June 6, 1925: "I am an old fossil, a Victorian sentimentalist."

77 DW, March 16, 1917.

78 DW, February 24, 1917.

79 DW, October 4, 1919.

80 DW, February 18, 1933.

81 DW, September 30, 1916.

82 DW, September 30, 1916.

83 DW, May 26, 1917.

84 DW, May 26, 1917.

85 MacMechan, private journal, May 21, 1920.

86 DW, January 28, 1921.

87 DW, June 19, 1926.

88 BB, May 25, 1907.

89 DW, May 23, 1914.

90 See his private journals, Winter, 1916, for many examples of his reticence.

91 A portion of one of Salter's letters will underscore this comment. In an undated letter [c. 1929] he writes of an experience in the trenches: "I broke, cried, couldn't stop crying, [the major] gave me rum to buck me up, but it was hours before the racking sobs left me -- and the major's arm over my shoulder, and his kind voice trying to comfort me. Comfort couldn't help me -- I didn't know what I was crying about! I hadn't the faintest idea why I should be crying, but the tears continued to burn down my cheeks. More and more, as I read the papers on Armistice day I think of that affair; and the heart-broken child sobbing his heart out there in the dug-out, and not even knowing why he was crying, symbolizes the utter futility of the whole thing. Somé day perhaps I shall find the words and the voice to stop the hideous mockery that Armistice Day means. Two minutes while the vacuous faces look yest and continue chewing gum! The world must be told that the thing to do on Armistice Day is to go about its business, and not even think of such a thing as war on that day or any other." See Appendix C for MacMechan's review of Robert Graves' Good-Bye to All That. Written in 1930, it indicates that in his latter years MacMechan's views on the war had altered somewhat in that he speaks quite frankly of its stupidity and futility.

92 DW, December 13, 1924. For an interesting comment on Pickthall's romanticism as having been possibly a stage in what might have been her later development as a serious poet, see Northrop Frye, The Bush Garden (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), pp. 86-87.

93 A.J.M. Smith, Masks of Poetry, p. x.

94 George Woodcock, A Choice of Critics (Toronto: Oxford, 1966), p. xvi.

95 BB, September 8, 1905.

96 DW, November 18, 1911.

97 DW, May 2, 1914.

98 DW, December 29, 1923.

⁹⁹Millar MacLure, "Literary Scholarship", in Literary History of Canada, gen. ed. Carl F. Klinck, pp. 533-534.

¹⁰⁰"Oxford for a Day", The Canadian Magazine, August, 1912. The tenor of this article can be perceived from something he wrote to Harvey in a letter of March 10, 1912. Speaking of his visit to Harvey at Queen's College, Oxford, MacMechan says "I tried to immortalize that day I spent within Queen's hospitable walls. I'll show you the result some time, if you're good!"

¹⁰¹The following articles appeared in The Halifax Chronicle: "King George Goes to be Crowned" (June 23, 1911), "Hallowed the King" (July 11, 1911), "The Royal Progress" (July 13, 1911), and "The Strength and Splendor of England's War" (July 17, 1911). Later, in July, 1925, MacMechan indicates his belief that a wistfulness toward the Mother Land is inevitable and right, but cramping for "nativist" sensibilities (DW, July 18, 1925).

¹⁰²MacMechan is eloquent on what he sees as the American influence. In DW, March 18, 1911, he speaks of "the murrain of American vulgarity disseminated broadcast by means of moving pictures, posters, illustrated newspaper supplements, prints, post-cards, and cheap magazines. Vulgarity and commonness are earmarks of American vulgarity, and "New York is the home of vulgarity...America has no art; the commercial atmosphere is fatal to it." In 1916 he speaks of the necessity of Canada's independence of American influence; "our tacit ideal is to become...a smug greasy replica of the United States, wallowing in a warm mire of materialism. The sooner Canada declares her independence /of the United States/ the better" ("Declaring our Independence", The Canadian Courier, December 2, 1916).

¹⁰³Ray Palmer Baker (b. 1883); author of A History of English-Canadian Literature to the Confederation (1920). Letter to MacMechan, May 2, 1922.

¹⁰⁴Douglas Bush, letter to MacMechan (undated, c. February, 1927).

¹⁰⁵George Herbert Clarke (1873-1953), head of the Department of English, Queen's University, 1925-1943; chairman of the editorial board of the Queen's Quarterly. Letter to MacMechan, April 21, 1930, February 5, 1931.

¹⁰⁶Carl Yoder Connor (b. 1890), author of Archibald Lampman: Canadian Poet of Nature (1929). Letter to MacMechan, March 23, 1925.

¹⁰⁷William Arthur Deacon (b. 1890), literary editor of Saturday Night, 1922-28; reviewer for Mail and Empire, Toronto (Globe and Mail), 1928-59, author of several books of humorous essays. Letter to MacMechan, December 30, 1924.

¹⁰⁸Robert Alexander Falconer (1867-1943), president of the University of Toronto, 1907-1932. "Milner" is William Stafford Milner (1861-1931), professor of Greek and Roman history at University College, Toronto. Falconer, letter to MacMechan, December 8, 1924. See also MacMechan's "President of Toronto University", Canadian Magazine, July, 1910.

109 Lorne Pierce (1890-1961), editor of the Ryerson Press "from 1920 to 1960; donated the Lorne Pierce medal of the Royal Society of Canada to be awarded in recognition of distinguished service to Canadian literature; initiated the Makers of Canadian Literature series (1923). Letter to MacMechan, March 8, 1928.

110 Bernard Keble Sandwell (1876-1954), head of the Department of English at Queen's University, 1923-25; editor of Saturday Night, 1932-51; one of the organizers of the Canadian Authors' Association, and its first secretary. Letter to MacMechan, October 25, 1924.

111 Malcolm William Wallace (1873-1960), author of English Character and the English Literary Tradition (1952), and The Life of Sir Philip Sidney (1915), member and head of the Department of English, University College, Toronto, 1904-44, became principal of University College, 1928.. (See MacMechan's review of Wallace's Life of Sir Philip Sidney, DW, May 5, 1916). Letter to MacMechan, December 5, 1924. See also Wallace's review of Headwaters, in University Monthly, November, 1924.

112 Three other reviews of Headwaters might be noted. Bliss Carman's favorable review appeared in The Commonweal, February 11, 1925, Wilson MacDonald's critical review appeared in the Kingston Whig, November 8, 1924; and John W. Garvin's predictably unfavourable review appeared in the Canadian Bookman, January, 1925.

113 C.L. Bennet, "Archibald MacMechan", Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada, 1964, 20.

114 DW, August 25, 1924.

Chapter III

MacMechan's Critic of Prose Fiction

It seems likely that Victorian intellectuals still considered the novel a vulgar form to which anything was permitted. But serious poetry was for them another matter, once the poet-prophet donned his singing robes his expression assumed a special sanctity, and was to be saved for noble and earnest pronouncement.¹

This quotation suggests a reason for what seems paradoxical, in MacMechan's critical writing taken as a whole -- namely, the very different standards he appears to apply in his criticism of poetry and of prose fiction.

From even a cursory reading of his criticism of the two genres as it exists, for instance, in Headwaters of Canadian Literature, it is obvious that MacMechan looked for and appreciated very different qualities in the poetry and the prose he criticised. One might wonder, on reading Headwaters, what critical standards could enable the same man to write enthusiastically of both Marjorie Pickthall and Sara Jeannette Duncan, writers who seem to be poles apart temperamentally and stylistically. The answer lies in part, at least, in the quotation above: MacMechan was typically "Victorian" in applying very different standards to poetry and to prose fiction, probably for the reason suggested above -- that the novel was still considered by most intellectuals to be a relatively vulgar form to which anything was permitted, while poetry was the most elevated of literary forms. To begin a discussion of his work as a critic of prose fiction, then, is not to make an arbitrary division of his work into convenient compartments, but to underscore the two literary forms as different and thus to emphasise the very different standards of criticism he applied to the two. Such a division clarifies some of his judgments and resolves some of the apparent contradictions in his critical standards.

One might begin such a discussion chronologically, with MacMechan's first published article of serious prose criticism, the one for which he

is perhaps best remembered to-day. His article on Herman Melville's Moby Dick, "The Best Sea Story Ever Written", appeared in "the Queen's Quarterly" in October, 1899. The article is remarkable as an early appreciation of the novel, and antedates the revival of interest in Melville by almost thirty years. Many scholars have commented on the unique position MacMechan's article holds. For example, William Lyon Phelps, Lampson Professor of English at Yale University, wrote in 1929

Ambrose Bierce and Herman Melville are running a race for posthumous recognition. Lewis Mumford's biography of Melville, both in its thoroughness and in its appraisal, is a sign of the times. It is pleasant to see that he is aware of the fact that Archibald MacMechan, Professor of English Literature at Dalhousie College, Halifax, called attention to Melville after he had been completely forgotten by the world; so that MacMechan should be remembered now in the heyday of Melville's fame.

Some night you'll fail us, when afar
You rise, remember one man saw you,
Knew you, and named a star.

V.L.O Chittick wrote "when it comes to pointing out Melville's most memorable descriptions and...many other things in Moby Dick, Archie ⁴ 'led all the rest'." Northrop Frye says flatly that MacMechan was the ⁵ first critic to appreciate Melville. In The Recognition of Herman Melville (1967), Hershel Parker outlines the state of Melville's obscurity at the time MacMechan's article was published and reprints MacMechan's article in its entirety in the section "Academic Neglect and Prophecies of Renown: 1884-1912". In outlining the plan of his book, Parker sketches in the background in a way which makes one appreciate the originality of MacMechan's article:

In The Recognition of Herman Melville there are no selections for 1877-83, when Melville was only perfunctorily mentioned in textbooks, encyclopedias, magazines, and newspapers. The second section, "Academic Neglect and Prophecies of Renown, 1884-1912", covers the period of Melville's near-oblivion in America and his growing recognition.

in England by a few literary men. Apparently, his books were passed lovingly from friend to friend among groups of English writers James Thomson introduced John W. Barrs to Melville, and Barrs' friend Henry S. Salt "was brought into touch with Herman Melville" through his biography of Thomson. Salt then introduced Moby-Dick to William Morris, who began quoting it with "huge gusto and delight". The leading critics of America's age of gentility were not fitted to appreciate Melville, but by the 1890's a few Americans were enthusiastic about Moby-Dick as well as Typee and Omoo and were beginning to communicate their excitement to their friends.⁶

From this general comment one can appreciate something of MacMechan's originality in writing of Moby-Dick when he did. That his uniqueness was recognized by at least one of the group of "literary men" of whom Parker speaks is evident from a letter written to MacMechan by H.S. Salt in February, 1900:

It is delightful to read so hearty an appreciation of "The Whale". accustomed as one is to hear people say that they "have never heard" of Melville! Still, there are some good judges and real lovers of literature who have done justice to Melville's greatness, e.g. J.W. Stedman, in New York and Robert Buchanan in England. William Morris, I happen to know, delighted in the "Whale".

MacMechan's interest in Moby Dick dated back to his adolescence -- that is, to a time somewhere before 1880, in all probability. He speaks of having read the book in "a dusty Mechanics' Institute library of a little Ontario hamlet",⁸ presumably referring to Picton, Ontario, where the MacMechan family lived before Archibald MacMechan's enrollment at the University of Toronto in 1880. As early as 1889 MacMechan had written to Melville that he was "anxious to set the merits of [his] books before the public"⁹ and had received a reply from Melville apologizing for not being able to send MacMechan particulars of his biography:

I beg you to overlook my delay in acknowledging yours of the 12th ult. It was unavoidable. Your note gave me pleasure, as how should it not, written in such a spirit. But you do not know, perhaps, that I have entered my

eight decade. After twenty years nearly, as an Outdoor Customs House officer, I have latterly come into possession of unobstructed leisure, but only just as, in the course of nature, my vigor sensibly declines. What little of it is left I husband for certain matters as yet incomplete, and which indeed may never be completed.

I appreciated, quite as much as you would have me, your friendly good will, and shrink from any appearance to the contrary.

Thinking that you will take all this, and what it implies, in the same spirit that prompts it, I am very truly yours,

10

Herman Melville

When MacMechan's article was published in 1899, his enthusiasm for Moby Dick was therefore a conviction that he had held for some twenty years. While the article itself will be taken up elsewhere, it is important to establish at this point that it represents an instance of MacMechan's critical acumen -- idiosyncratic, personal, and independent of prevailing opinion. This sort of judgment is the basis, for better and for worse, of much that he wrote, and Headwaters of Canadian Literature, for example, has been both praised and blamed for its critical attitude. In his view of Melville, MacMechan's judgment has proved "prophetic", to use Parker's word, for time has amply vindicated both Melville and MacMechan. While it may be argued that mere co-incidence of personal taste and chance led MacMechan to his pioneer writings on Melville, yet this wise judgment is actually typical of his evaluation of writers. One is apt to be misled by the fact that many of his critical judgments have become so commonly accepted that their originality in his day is forgotten. To indicate some of these attitudes and judgments is to get at the heart of MacMechan's position as a critic.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, MacMechan's avowed vocation of critic was explicitly modelled on Matthew Arnold's work. Like Arnold, MacMechan sought to preserve and present to an essentially "Philistine" public the best that has been thought and said, and in this

way to set standards, by means of "touchstones" of great writing, in an age he perceived as one of unparalleled materialism. MacMechan's Weltanschauung did not really modify with age, indeed, if anything, it grew more grim. In 1933, just weeks before his death, he appears to have had an almost apocalyptic vision of society: "now we are living in the midst of what may turn out to be the fifth act, the climax of the play, the final catastrophe, the downfall of western civilization." He does not appear to be referring here to any specific event, but rather to general trends in science and psychology which are subverting some of his cherished standards, and the comment seems to be a part of the melancholy that infuses much of what he wrote throughout his life. For instance, what he writes in 1895 is very similar in tone to what he writes in 1933. In 1895 he asserts that "the secret is the human touch. We are lonely creatures, we men and women. Apart we are helpless, we move in a great darkness, and we like to know that our fellows are not far from us." In a private letter of 1932 he writes "we are comets hurtling through space, we greet, and then we pass. How true! Chilly but true.... May the New Year bring us such happiness as is possible." He looked back on the Victorian Age as a time of enlightenment, saying that "coming generations may look back upon the nineteenth century as the one brief rift in the clouds of desolation which have always overhung poor, blind, stumbling humanity."

It is from his position, then, as a critic sympathetic to the aim and tenor of Arnold's critical ideas that MacMechan begins his career as literary reviewer for several Canadian periodicals. Through this medium, rather than from his teaching, he seems to have formulated his criticism of what most concerns us in this chapter, Canadian fiction. His career in this sphere follows an interesting pattern, one we have observed earlier in his work as a scholar. It appears that MacMechan's

interests in the criticism of prose fiction move from an international scope into the narrower field of Canadian, or "nationalist", criticism -- which is not to imply that it was therefore provincial in attitude. For a brief background to this observation, his evolution from international literary concerns to more narrowly Canadian ones is interesting to observe. As the Dean, MacMechan repeatedly remarks on his duty to review what is put before him, but that his interest is increasingly shifting toward Canadian matter. At one point he goes so far as to say that if he had his way, he would review nothing but Canadian writing -- an assertion that would be rather extravagant even now, and certainly was remarkable then, in 1923. It is a particularly emphatic remark for a reviewer whose influence was widely felt. Rudyard Kipling, for example, reportedly read and commented favourable on the column.

MacMechan was no novice to newspaper book-reviewing when, in 1905, he began to write for the Montreal Standard. His most notable work had been done for Goldwin Smith's Toronto-based paper, The Week. MacMechan had written articles in The Week during its thirteen years of existence: as he himself put it, "I sat by its cradle and I followed its hearse." After the collapse of the paper in 1896, MacMechan wrote for several Halifax newspapers, notably, for The Acadian Recorder and the Evening Mail, in which he wrote a column under the caption of "The Irresponsible, Indolent Reviewer". His first signed article in The Montreal Standard appeared on September 30, 1905, and was entitled "Canadian Literature: A Private View". On March 7, 1906, MacMechan begins his writing as "The Dean" under the heading "Book and Beaver". From the title alone one can detect the nationalistic bias of the reviewer. His introductory column is worthy of extensive quotation, for in it he outlines what was to be a twenty-seven year involvement with contemporary literature, and, particularly, with Canadian literature:

The slightest reflection, the slightest knowledge of facts, shows that in every nation there is a remnant, a saving few who devote themselves to the things of the intellect and the imagination. These the nation is proud to count as its representative men. Go to Finland, Boston, or Argentina, and you will find this true. Ah, but our Canadians do not take first rank, they are not known to the world, and that hurts our pride.

The nativist literary movement in Canada in the last twenty years presents distinct features and outlines to the observer who has noted the facts. Verse came first, and then prose fiction, Lampman and Parker leading the two divisions. The output, in bulk and variety, is worthy of attention, and greater things are yet to come. The books in question could have been written only by Canadians. Generally, outside recognition gave our writers their place, and extra-Canadian markets gave them a living. . . . Their royalties would not have bought them shoe-strings. Our own people were apathetic, until London and New York began to praise and to buy.

One reason for our apathy, which now is passing away, was the quality of our criticism. In the past Canadian books have been either over-praised or else unduly disparaged. Both methods have made the public suspicious, and doubtful if any good thing could come out of -- Canada. At the present time, criticism has a useful function to perform. It can over-look, commend, praise, and interpret the literary movement. In rare instances, it may call attention to faults. Because there is only one standard by which Canadian literature should be measured -- the highest. But its chief aim should be to interpret. The school of Jeffrey, Lockhart, and Macaulay were zealous for order, for putting people in their places, for awarding judicial praise and blame; they loved the literary tomahawk and scalping-knife. But Sainte-Beuve showed us a more excellent way. He taught us that the chief aim of the critic should be to understand his author and help others to understand him.

To criticize our rising school of Canadian literature in this spirit is the aim of this department. I desire to keep the readers of The Standard informed on the subject in its progress and continuity. The formal reviewers give an account of single books but I wish to note rather the significance of the single book in its relation to the larger whole of the national life and the national literature. My method I would make less formal than that followed in regular reviews, -- to discourse, necessarily in monologue, but as 'you would talk to a friend,' -- the method of the causerie, in fact. I wish to be free to comment on whatever shapes our literary activity takes, briefly, or at length, as the case may seem to require. And while my chief aim is to interpret our nativist literature in the making, I may deal with non-Canadian works, as time shall serve. My cognizance explains itself. The beaver is our totem; he is a proverb for industry; and he is devouring a book. I look to him for incentive. My

motto is the motto of Quebec; for I wish to look before and after, and act as a literary memory for my readers, should I be so fortunate as to have any. 'Je me souviens.' I propose, further, to do what no reviewer or causeur has hitherto attempted, -- to recognize the fact that Canada is a country with a dual language and a dual literature. I propose to give, for the benefit of English readers, some account of the works produced by our compatriots in French. Having been for many years a student of French, and deeply interested in the journalism and more permanent and serious writings of Quebec, I desire to do what I can to promote a good understanding between the two great sections of our people. It can do us only good to know each other better. 'Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner.' Literature offers a common meeting-ground above the storms of party. English readers should be informed especially on the development of historical research in Quebec at the present time. Much excellent work is being done in the way of biographical memoirs, and histories of parishes, orders, and institutions which ought to be better known. Both in French and English, I wish to devote attention to minor publications, that do not come within the ken of the ordinary reviewer, the brochures, pamphlets, papers, essays, transactions of learned societies, which have all their place and importance in the development of our intellectual life. The writers of such things generally publish at their own expense, and look for no reward beyond the consciousness of duty done. It is only just to give them the recognition they deserve. The Canadian public ought to know something of its scholars, as well as those who weave their web from their imagination. Gentle Reader, if you have followed me so far, you will feel like saying, 'This is a programme, not for a column in a newspaper, but for a comprehensive review, of the magnitude and solidity of the Quarterly.' And you are perfectly correct. But observe. I have only mentioned the classes of writings I wish to take cognizance of. It will be impossible to notice a tenth of the works that are produced in Canada, but I can still comment on those that are typical, and, perhaps, it will not be labor thrown away. I claim the privilege of the 'chorus' of 'indolent reviewers,' -- freedom from responsibility. When introducing himself to his public, Mr. Spectator affirmed that readers like to know if a writer 'be a black or a fair man . . . married or a bachelor.' You, Gentle Reader, may then figure, if you please, the writer of these lines as a snuffy old professor in a little college no one ever heard of, who spends his time pottering about a couple of quiet, dusty provincial libraries. But he is not so deeply buried in his books that he does not, now and then, push up his spectacles and glance through the loopholes of retreat upon the wonderful progress of Canada. The other dons, my few colleagues, are still in the vaward of their youth, some fifty, or by'r lady inclining to three-score; but I have the melancholy honor of seniority, being in fact

THE DEAN

In 1907, the column is renamed "The Dean's Window", and MacMechan writes

For reasons which are not necessary to recount, my first device has been given up, and the present heading adopted. It implies a certain point of view, namely, that of the cloistered, academic person, who looks out upon the world from the seclusion of a collegiate life; It implies limitations, of course; but let these be remembered with charity. My window is not so old that it cannot be lifted to admit the airs and sunlight of June, nor so narrow that it does not give glimpses of the busy town, of roofs amid trees and gardens, and of blue sky above it all.²⁰

While MacMechan's nationalism is somewhat muted, it is nevertheless a powerful force in his criticism, and for the remaining twenty-six years as "The Dean", he quietly but steadfastly champions the cause of Canadian literature.

His mentors, both in critical and creative writing, are figures such as Carlyle, Tennyson, Melville, and Arnold. He brings their influence to bear on Canadian literature as he observes its emergence, and he attempts to uphold international standards of excellence in judging the worth of "nativist" products. It is interesting to speculate on how much Canadian writing MacMechan would have come in contact with had he remained a strict academic and how much was literally thrust upon him in the course of his work as a book reviewer. This reviewing, in turn, was done as much to supplement his income as for the sheer love of the task, it would seem. While his Journals record his considerable satisfaction at the completion of his weekly reviews for The Standard, they also record his real feeling of needing to supplement his salary as George Munro Professor of English Language and Literature at Dalhousie. In 1916, for instance, after having been at Dalhousie for twenty-seven years, MacMechan enters in his Journal amounts of royalties on books and payments for his various newspaper articles with comments on how he must work with increased intensity in order to pay off the remaining \$500 owing on

his house, and get a bit saved. Clearly, his income from reviewing was a necessary supplement to his salary, but from this necessity, it seems, emerged his real interest in Canadian writing.

From the outset, his interest in Canadian literature in general, and Canadian fiction in particular, was that of an experienced observer who wished to foster a developing culture. Initially, he attempted to appraise what had been written and what was currently being written in Canada in the light of what had been produced in other colonial cultures. In 1892, for instance, he speaks of Australian literature and cites a novel by Marcus Clarke, His Natural Life: "we have nothing of the kind to show here and the achievements of the colonial English at the other side of the world might prove to be a useful stimulus to our more slowly developing literature." (The reasons for the slower development of Canadian literature he spells out in his 1910 article, "Have We a Literature?", in which he stresses the influence and proximity of the United States on Canadian culture in general.) Olive Schreiner's Story of an African Farm (1883) is another of the "colonial" novels he considers significant as a "touchstone" for what Canadian fiction might achieve. It is important to consider both of these novels -- their qualities and what they have in common -- as a first step to establishing the type of fiction MacMechan wished to see develop in Canada.

His Natural Life, originally published in serial form and then in book form in 1874, has been described as dealing "literally with the underworld; the world beneath Europe, the other side of the globe, the bottom of the map; and the world of criminals and prisoners (not necessarily synonymous); the underworld of society that England preferred not to know about and to dispose of." This critic goes on to describe the society depicted by Clarke:

In his depiction of the penal colony Clarke offers a complete counter picture of English society in its systems of authority, oppression and brutalization. The officers, the guards, the clergy, the innocent and the guilty prisoners, and the free settlers, comprise a full social range. But it is a society that is the reverse image of the official picture of early Victorian England: here the convicts are not conveniently shipped away, here the underworld is the dominant concern of the society. Here the systems of authority of England reveal themselves in explicit brutality.... Clarke was at pains to suggest the authenticity of the appalling, unbelievable brutalities that are the material of his novel. A sensationalist manner might well have invalidated the serious indictment of the convict system 25

Another critic, in an attempt to place Clarke's book in its historical context, writes

His Natural Life, and Robbery Under Arms diminish in stature as time passes, they are milestones, but they are not the classics of Australian fiction which they were once thought to be. They hold a considerable interest for us still, because they represent stages in the history of the progress towards an Australian prose tradition. An account of prose fiction in Australia from the beginnings to 1920 inevitably becomes an account of fumbling attempts to discover the artistic possibilities of Australian subject-matter. 26

He continues, offering his evaluation of the book's qualities:

In his Preface of His Natural Life, Marcus Clarke claims to be a reformer, but this would seem to be merely a gesture. What moved him was the spectacle of suffering which the convict records offered. A.G. Stephens was surely right when he suggested that "much of the force of His Natural Life must have lain perdu in the records on which Clarke based his story." Clarke's skill lay in scene-painting rather than in the delineation of characters in their relationships, and the convict records gave him the human facts which he could dramatize. The improbability and involution of the romance which Clarke invented has been commented on often enough. He was not involved, creatively, with this fabrication, which has a makeshift air about it, as if he improvised as he went along, with one eye on the serial readers. His Natural Life is greater than the melodrama it contains, and much greater than the triviality of its concluding scenes. The unifying theme is injustice, and injustice is shown as inherent in civilization. The novel is not merely a chamber of horrors: along with the melodrama is a moral sense, imperfectly and intermittently expressed, which implies a deeper level of seriousness. 27

From this evaluation, one can isolate qualities that would have been significant for MacMechan in his search for parallels in colonial fiction. MacMechan's natural interest in actual events rendered in imaginative form would obviously be stimulated by Clarke's account of actual conditions of convict life. Secondly, the recounting of these actual events accurately depicts an area of Australian life hitherto neglected by Australian writers and therefore sets a precedent for the sort of "realism" MacMechan wished to see appear in Canada. The novel's originality is noted to-day, when it is appraised as "the only major work of the period not animated by the desire to present an interpretation of Australia and Australian manners." ²⁸ Finally, the moral sense, "intermittently and imperfectly expressed" as it may be, would surely commend the novel to MacMechan, who sought, perhaps above all else, that quality in fiction. From such a consideration of Clarke's novel, one can perceive some of the qualities MacMechan wished to see develop in Canadian fiction, and which, at that time, did not exist.

By extension, many of the qualities he perceived and endorsed in Clarke's novel were qualities he appreciated in Schreiner's. The truth-of-detail, the starkness of subject, the unpoetic rendering of the scene were qualities in The Story of an African Farm that gave it significance as a possible precedent for similar fiction to come in Canada. Olive Schreiner's biographer, in describing the source of the novel's power, sheds some light on the appeal of the novel for MacMechan, who was in search of "nativist" literature in untapped places:

As with many, if not all, great works of art it is impossible to define the fascination of this novel. It is clumsy, painful, disjointed, often incoherent and juvenile, but no one could ever deny the power of the work, nor its strange magic which lingers

in the reader's mind. As Edward Carpenter puts it "...its intensity was such that it seized almost at once on the public mind. The African sun was in its veins -- fire and sweetness, intense love of beauty, fierce rebellion against things that be, passion and pity and the pride of Lucifer combined..." Frank Harris, who met the author at her publishers, declares: "The faults of the book stared at me, but the magic of it was in my blood. Here was all the witchery of the Highveld and the strange barbaric land with its mountains and kloofs, the great valleys and strange wild animals, and above all the entrancing climate of the high African plateau, where one has the blazing tropic sunshine and the champagne-like, dry, intoxicating air. Here too were fiery sunsets and magic sunrises, and here were real people, modern in this most romantic of all settings. The book came into me in long draughts."²⁹

From this description of Schreiner's novel, it would seem that, like Clarke's, the setting -- its unfamiliarity and its faithfully recorded detail -- enhanced the power of the story, and that this rendering of locale made it important to MacMechan chiefly as an analogy for Canadian writers to note well. Both Marcus Clarke and Olive Schreiner chose settings which they knew exactly, and this aspect of their work appears to be the common denominator which MacMechan discovers and emphasises as necessary for Canadian writers, none of whom had, in his view, produced a novel with as firmly delineated a sense of place as had these two novelists.

MacMechan's chief target for criticism of the Canadian tendency to falsify setting is Gilbert Parker. Parker's historical novels frequently contain errors of fact, and MacMechan cites an article by Arthur Stringer in which many of Parker's mistakes are noted. Having pointed to errors in various authors who have written about Canada, Stringer turns to the work of Parker.

Equally strange are the errors of Sir Gilbert Parker, who is Canadian-born and was for many years a school teacher in his native country. Thus, in his book, The Chief Factor, he has two of his characters about to fight a duel with swords. It is natural, of course, that

two such combatants would search for passably level ground. Sir Gilbert takes them from the Hudson's Bay Company's post and brings them to a moose-yard. Now it is my fixed conviction that the author in question has in some way confounded the word "moose-yard" with "barn-yard". It is equally my conviction that Sir Gilbert has never looked upon a moose-yard, much less tried to travel through one in the winter-time. For a moose-yard is nothing more than an intricate network, a wandering maze, of deep tracks, or, rather, of deep gutters, an irregular series of trap-holes two feet and more to the bottom. And a delightfully odd and uncertain place indeed in which to indulge in combat by sword! Still again, Sir Gilbert's tendency to sentimentalize the situation leads him to depict his characters as marching across the snow in the dead of winter while one member of the band blithely defies sub-zero weather and trippingly plays a flute. Now just how this placid-souled gentleman fingered the stops is a very nice problem, when an unmittened hand will show signs of frost-bite before even the aria of "Annie Laurie" could be rendered. We see the same tendency to render up a goulash of dilettante details spiced with sentiment when Sir Gilbert turns historical and has General Wolfe "eye" his men in the boats on the St. Lawrence, at the turn of the tide, during the eventful night which had already been described as pitch-dark, even while these men were so many, many hundred feet away. Wonderful indeed are the midnights of Canada, for on the same occasion Wolfe observes the bivouacs of Bougainville at Cap Rouge, many miles higher up the river. . . . but neither nature, history nor fact need be tarried over in the sentimentalization of "literature".³¹

MacMechan's belief in a country's existence hinging on the writing that has been done about that country is part of the distinction he draws between the writing of Lucy Maud Montgomery and "Ralph Connor", the Reverend Charles Gordon. MacMechan frequently considers the two in conjunction and sometimes uses one as a foil for the other. For Connor, the setting for a novel was peripheral to the its "message". Moreover, his didacticism was unpalatable to MacMechan, although one might have thought that MacMechan would have shared at least two of Connor's traits -- a Calvinist Presbyterianism and an admiration for the life of physical action. It is evident, however, that MacMechan's

aesthetic tastes in general made him object to alloying qualities in prose and often kept his literary judgments abstemious. His comments on Connor's work are incisive:

Gordon is a thoroughly Canadian product. Having passed through the regular mill of Ontario government schools, he took his degree in Arts at the University of Toronto, and, in Divinity, at Knox College. After theological courses in Edinburgh and some travel on the Continent, he returned to Canada to work in the mission fields of the Northwest, before the coming of the land-sharks and the fabulous prices of townlots. He saw the raw, hard life of the frontier from the missionary's point of view. It was a wonderful chance to gather material and Gordon used it to the best of his ability, but the artist in him was always overshadowed by the earnest preacher of the gospel.³²

Here, MacMechan speaks with some authority of the "typical Canadian product", being himself similar to Connor in having passed through the "mill" of Ontario schools, having finished his academic training outside Canada, and having done the Wanderjahr on the Continent. The fairness of the final comment, however, is the salient feature of the paragraph, and in this MacMechan has put his finger on the outstanding quality of Connor's work. It is interesting to observe that a recent evaluation by Clara Thomas amounts to an expansion of MacMechan's judgment:

When he wrote his autobiography, Postscript to Adventure, just before his death in 1937, Connor speculated on the phenomenal popular and financial success of his fiction. He gave, he said, an authentic picture of the great, new, wonderful west; he knew from personal experience the settings of which he wrote, whether Glengarry or the prairies, France or the Malbaie area in Quebec. And most important to him, he had set forth religion in its true light as a synonym of all that is virile, straight, honourable and withal tender and gentle in true men and women. Charles Gordon's own ideals meshed perfectly with the books Ralph Connor wrote: every hero was another personification of the man of action, the 'muscular Christian', the acceptor of challenges and fighter of battles -- with might and right combined to win...
 It was Ralph Connor's fortune that his own imaginings answered perfectly the requirements of a very large number of men and women of his time. Even into the thirties, he had a loyal following that in Canada

far outnumbered the potential readership for newer and more seriously artistic novelists.³³

In Headwaters of Canadian Literature, MacMechan notes a similarity between the fiction of Connor and of L.M. Montgomery, who had taken a class from MacMechan in 1895. He draws attention to the "Scottish atmosphere" of both writers:

Both writers are of Scottish descent. Gordon is a minister, and Miss Montgomery married a minister. In all they write the influence of the minister is either actual or implied. This means that Scottish religious and social ideals have been brought to this country by the immigrants from Scotland, and they have had no small or trivial influence in the up-building of the new country.³⁴

This similarity is rather superficial, however, for in many places MacMechan notes the strengths of Montgomery's writing, features that he finds lacking in Connor's. In 1919, for instance, reviewing Rainbow Valley, he writes "you may call it pretty -- you cannot deny its reality".³⁵ Two years later, he writes somewhat less positively of Rilla of Ingleside (1921): "the elements of a good novel are there, but as you read you wish they could all be raised to a higher power."³⁶ Writing of Anne of Green Gables (1908) in 1924, he says

The Canadian book just misses the kind of success which convinces the critic while it captivates the unreflecting general reader. The story is pervaded with a sense of reality, the pitfalls of the sentimental are deftly avoided; Anne and her friends are healthy human beings, their pranks are engaging, but the 'little more' in truth of representation, or deftness of touch, is lacking, and that makes the difference between a clever book and a masterpiece.³⁷

The difference he discerns between Montgomery and Connor is clearly the difference between an artist, of however limited scope and success, and a preacher. He perceives the strengths of Montgomery's writing, and perhaps his desire that it be "raised to a higher power" expresses as well as anything could just how well she has succeeded, and yet

how far short of greatness she has come. Nevertheless, MacMechan discerns her worth, and in this, again, he anticipates modern criticism. Critics who are superficial in their reading of Montgomery's work may tend to dismiss her, like one who recently labelled her books "tourist fare", clearly not having read them. ³⁸ Another critic, however, has pointed to the increased interest in Montgomery, and concludes an interesting article with this observation:

This brings us to the final claim of L.M. Montgomery on our attention and respect. She is the novelist for the bookish child, the word-conscious child to whom she gives reassurance about a sense of the magic of 'naming.' She knows that words are her tools, and have been so ever since as a child, by naming, she made her own Island in time.³⁹

This desire -- to "name" -- and the sense of the magic inherent in words are qualities in Montgomery's writing that set it apart from the writing of Connor and distinguish the artist, Montgomery, from "the earnest preacher of the gospel", Connor.

It is important to note MacMechan's understanding of the importance of the depiction of place as informed by actual experience of a given area. This kind of discrimination allows him to distinguish with ease the fantasy of Gilbert Parker, for instance, from the perhaps far-fetched story yet credibly rendered locale of Frank Parker Day's Rockbound (1928). Upon reading Day's novel, MacMechan exclaims in his private journal "Canadian realism at last!" and goes on to review it enthusiastically in "The Dean's Window". ⁴⁰ To attempt a definition of what MacMechan would consider accuracy in depiction of setting, one might seek the aid of Ethel Wilson, one of Canada's outstanding modern novelists, who writes in this manner of the creative process:

There is a moment, I think, within a novelist of any originality, whatever his country or his scope, when some sort of synthesis takes place over which he has only partial control. There is an incandescence, and from it meaning emerges, words appear, they take shape in their order, a fusion occurs. A minor writer, whose gift is small and canvas limited, stands away at last if he can and regards what he has done, without indulgence. This is a counsel of perfection which I myself am not able to take with skill, but I must try to take it. I am sure that the very best writing in our country will result from such an incandescence which takes place in a prepared mind where forces meet.⁴¹

This definition of incandescence seems very closely allied to MacMechan's desire to see elements of fiction "raised to a higher power". Both writers are dealing with the much-discussed, ever-elusive identity of the great Canadian novel and are stipulating what they take to be necessities for such a work. Both deal with the work of minor writers, presumably as the forerunners of a greater to follow. This comment from a contemporary practising writer and critic indicates that even recent criticism  tied with what MacMechan worked at fifty years earlier -- the preparation of the ground for the emergence of a major novelist.

Related to the question of how native fiction in Canada was to be grounded in a particular place is the problem of the sheer size of the country, MacMechan asks

Is it possible, I wonder, to love a huge country as well as a little country? Our after-dinner orators are fond of telling how they can put half Europe and a dozen Englands in one corner of a Canadian province, and never miss them, but I wonder how long it will be before our half-continent inspires praise half as noble as that foggy little island to the northwest of Europe has drawn from poet after poet since Shakespeare penned the dying speech of John of Gaunt.⁴²

One might here read into the passage MacMechan's own love of Nova Scotia. Perhaps his feelings of belonging were enhanced by the province's comprehensible size: he refers affectionately to various areas in diminutive terms, Life of a Little College being perhaps the most conspicuous example

of the practice. Throughout his writings his affection for the province is often expressed in reference to its size, whereas the province of his birth and youth is generally referred to in more formal, and less affectionate, phrases such as "the Banner Province", with no trace of emotion. The whole matter is one of his personal quirks and is necessarily rather arbitrary, but it is an important aspect of MacMechan's attempt to define "Canadian". This attempt he makes in common with several other critics, notably with Pelham Edgar. Both suggest definitions for what might constitute distinctively Canadian sensibilities.

Imaginatively realistic depiction of the Canadian locale which brings the country into existence as it is written about requires skill in writing that, throughout his career, MacMechan looks for in vain in most Canadian novelists. Just as he insists that Canadian poets must adopt the "anvil theory" in the composition of poetry, so he urges Canadian novelists to develop their skills and abandon their amateurish ways. In 1910 he writes

We have had in Canada not a few writers who have made their mark in poetry, their names will occur readily to the instructed, but our achievement in prose is far less important, especially in the department of prose-fiction. Our novelists may be vastly popular, their works may sell by the hundred thousand copies, and yet be really without any but the most ephemeral interest. The reason is that, with few exceptions, our novelists are amateurs they seem never to have realized that a novel is a work of art or that the fabrication of acceptable tales is a trade which must be learned if they desire to succeed. Plot is the idea of pattern applied to human life. Characterization is another important element in fiction. By characterization I mean that method of making the personages in a story act and speak so as to reveal their natures. Good novelists must have no small share of dramatic skill. They employ little explanation or psychological analysis. They make the reader understand their characters by what those puppets say

and do. To say that the hero is brave is not as stirring as to exhibit him doing brave deeds: to state that the heroine is witty is not as effective as making her utter epigrams, emit sparks.... But of course it is easier to write that the hero is brave, or the heroine witty than to compose a thrilling incident, or make a joke that will raise a laugh, hence the feeble novelists adopt the former method.... If my amateurish novelist resenting my criticism shall retort, 'Very well, Herr Doctor Allwissend, if you think you know so much about novels, why don't you write one yourself and show us how?' I shall answer calmly 'Who can does, who cannot, teaches.'⁴³

This passage reveals several facets of MacMechan's attitude to novels and novel-writing. Perhaps the central point is the idea of the novelist as puppet-master or deus ex machina. One thinks of MacMechan as typically Victorian in this attitude, and recalls at least one outstanding instance of a Victorian novelist explicitly treating his characters as puppets. Thackeray, in concluding Vanity Fair, is perhaps the most conspicuous example of this trait: "Ah! Vanitas Vanitatum! Which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, 'having it, is satisfied?' -- Come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out."⁴⁴ Thackeray's attitude toward the writing of the book and his implied attitude toward the reader indicates the gulf separating modern readers from writing of this sort. By inference, one may say that MacMechan, firmly settled in a Victorian or nineteenth-century cultural context, finds the experimental writing of the early twentieth century distasteful and somewhat "puzzling".⁴⁵ This point will be taken up later: here it is sufficient to begin a discussion of what were MacMechan's standards for the mature Canadian novel.

As we have already seen, MacMechan repeatedly stressed what seemed to him "axiomatic", or "a mystical doctrine", depending on the mood in which he was writing. For example, referring to himself ironically as

"a certain Canadian professor", he writes in 1929 in "The Dean's Window" what he had been saying for years:

[that] a country comes into being only as it is written about is the mystical doctrine of a certain Canadian professor. In proof of his theory he adduces the concrete instance of Scotland before Scott wrote his poems and romances. Kirby and Gilbert Parker have made Quebec romantic, as Hemon has made Peribanka. Because Sara Jeannette Duncan made Brantford the scene of The Imperialist, because Mabel Dunham made Waterloo County the scene of The Trail of the Conestoga and Towards Sodom these places have an interest they never had before. The same is true of Rockbound.⁴⁶

Elsewhere, and though he is referring to a different medium, he writes of a painter of island landscapes: "the creative impulse works both ways -- the island has made the painter, and the painter has made the island."⁴⁷

His belief is clearly that the imaginative existence of a country, its mythology, if you will, is established only by the artistic, visionary work of artists (of differing media, but particularly the literary) who depict an area in a manner that reveals its qualities for others to see and share and, in so doing, create an awareness of place that is imaginative and shared.⁴⁸

This process is particularly important in the writing of fiction, where place can serve simply as "setting" or "atmosphere", or, alternatively, as so integral to the "story" as to be inseparable from it and, in fact, part of the telling. As an eminent Canadian novelist has recently expressed it, "in a sense...we haven't got an identity until someone tells our story. The fiction makes us real."⁴⁹

In MacMechan's view, accuracy in the depiction of place is a sine qua non for the artistically successful and satisfying novel. MacMechan insists that the writer of such a novel must be well-acquainted with the locale about which he writes and, therefore, must usually be native to the area, though he was quick to praise notable exceptions to his rule. He regarded,

for example, Louis Hemon's Maria Chapdelaine,⁵⁰ (in W.H. Blake's translation⁵¹) and Willa Cather's Shadows on the Rock as fine accomplishments in presenting with skill the scenes they depict. In fact, he goes so far as to say that they have done what native writers had failed to do, and that the novelty of the foreign environment had been their stimulus to creativity. Reviewing Shadows on the Rock, he writes:

This is a novel which should have been written by a Canadian, English-speaking or French. It is a tale of old Québec in the days of Bishop Laval and Frontenac.... The favorite period of our romances, The Seven Years' War, is not even suggested. There are no rumors of war. The picturesque incident of the siege of Phipps is dismissed in a reference. There are no gallant cavaliers, or wild coureurs de bois, or Indian braves, or fearless explorers. The usual melodrama, the usual love interest is absent. The book is a restrained study in character contrast. Two great figures in our early history are depicted, the great governor and the great churchman in their irreconcilable differences. All the material has long been known, and is quite accessible.... Why, then, have our ambitious young lions allowed this fine subject to be taken by an outsider? It is another case of Maria Chapdelaine.⁵²

MacMechan often stresses the stimulating, novelty new environments can provide for creative artists, and it seems probable that he was thinking of his own introduction to Nova Scotia, and the stimulus the "unique province gave to his Upper-Canadian experience. His journals are filled with references to the striking novelty Nova Scotia offered his imagination. For example, his early response to a foggy Halifax day was expressed as "beauty perpetual...if I have eyes to see"⁵³ and to the Avon river at Windsor as "in futuristic colours".⁵⁴ Obviously, examples could be multiplied, and many of his essays in The Book of Ultima Thule are evidence of this tendency.

Fidelity to truth in the depiction of setting in the novel is but one aspect of what MacMechan sought in accomplished and "mature" Canadian fiction. It is, however, the quality he emphasised above all others, possibly because of all facets of the craft of novel-writing, faithful

depiction of setting would give the work credibility by defining a particular area as "Canadian". In Headwaters of Canadian Literature he offers his other criteria -- "only those rare works which combine deep knowledge of life, dramatic power to represent it and style, have a chance to survive." 55 While he is often able to commend various aspects of a given novel, he is seldom able to endorse an entire book as having met the requirements set forth in Headwaters. In fact, The Imperialist (1904), by Sara Jeannette Duncan, is the only novel he mentions, by 1924, as having a chance to survive. Of The Imperialist, he says

[Sara Jeannette Duncan] has written only one story which deals with Canadian life, The Imperialist (1904), which first ran in The Globe as a serial, but that story stands out from the vast desert of well-intentioned mediocrity known as Canadian fiction. Its distinction lies in its choice of theme and its truth of observation. It does not deal with the romantic period of our history, nor of the Acadian French, nor of the adventurous west, but of plain, bourgeois, money-getting Ontario and the humdrum activities of a little town which grows slowly in wealth and population; and in which the greatest excitements are a tea-meeting or a Dominion election.... The characters are all carefully drawn.... In the English-speaking parts of Canada there is a real homogeneity, no matter how widely they are scattered, and the types of The Imperialist are to be found both east and west. True as this novel is, it was not a popular success.... Perhaps the book was too true. 56

Three points are notable in this comment: first, the choice of theme, secondly the truth of observation, thirdly the careful delineation of character in the novel. As MacMechan notes, the theme is of "humdrum activities" rather than the far-fetched or romantically remote. The author has dealt with a life she knew and at one time shared. As a recent critic has said,

In The Imperialist, then, Sara Jeannette Duncan was dealing with a society that she knew at first hand. Her great strength is that she did not permit herself to be overwhelmed by a host of impressions; she managed to get the society into clear focus, and the resulting picture is neither smudged by sentimentality nor attenuated by analysis. The problem of getting a society into focus is a difficult one at any time

for a novelist, particularly when he is dealing with a young society unsure of itself and seized with adolescent self-consciousness. The usual response of the nineteenth-century Canadian novelist was to avoid the problem by turning to another time and another place, or else to bathe the present in sentimental didacticism. Sara Jeannette Duncan was neither repelled nor confused by the society she found around her; she looked at it objectively, yet sympathetically, and she was not afraid of a touch of sentiment and pride.⁵⁷

The choice of theme leads directly to the second point -- the truth of observation MacMechan perceives in the novel. In the quality of her observation, the novelist is distinguished from such writers as Mazo de la Roche, who, MacMechan observed, might as well have set her novels in Texas as far as her fidelity to locale is concerned. His comment on the success of Jalna is worth lengthy quotation for its irony and humour:

Like many other Canadians I have followed the course of Jalna in the Atlantic, my curiosity not allowing me to await with patience the appearance of the novel in book form. Then as soon as the book appeared, I bought it for the sake of the climax, for suspense is well sustained....The Whiteoak family is almost as curious a menagerie as Sanger's Circus. The old pottering grand-uncles, the brothers of all ages, Meggie disappointed in love, and, above all, Grandmother with her parrot, her free tongue, her gluttony, her huge love of life....The novel does not conclude, or wind up; it simply stops. Naturally, I expected the tremendous grandmother to die in a rage, or pop like a burst balloon; but she doesn't, she attains her ambition, the celebration of her hundredth birthday....

Of course, Jalna is an interesting story, but there is nothing distinctively Canadian about it. The Whiteoak family are a world apart with their own manners and customs, and a law unto themselves. They are isolated and totally unaffected by the community in which they have pitched their tent. The scene might as well have been laid in Texas. If Miss de la Roche would take a similar "Old Country" family and plant them in a typical Canadian community where they would be alternately cooed to, and despised, envied and swindled until they were ruined, and return home, she would produce a truly Canadian novel, the reality of which would be recognized everywhere from the Atlantic to the Pacific.⁵⁸

Finally, MacMechan's point concerning the careful delineation of character in The Imperialist takes us into his ideas concerning realism. According to Claude Bissell, Sara Duncan was, in her journalism, the champion of "the analytical school of realism" of which William Dean Howells and Henry James were the leading practitioners." 59

These are the two literary names that occur most often in her column. She poured contempt upon the elaborately plotted novel with its inevitable culmination in a romantic marriage. The realistic novel, she said, 'may be written to show the culminative action of a passion, to work out an ethical problem of everyday occurrence, to give body and form to sensation of the finest or the coarsest kind, for almost any reason which can be shown to have a connection with the course of human life and the development of human character.' 60

Obviously this definition of "realism" allows the author the widest possible latitude in dealing with human life and character. What might be noted, however, is her emphasis on the "culminative action of a passion" and the working out of an "ethical problem of everyday occurrence". It is apparent that for her some "fundamental brainwork" 61 or, in MacMechan's terms, some labour at the anvil, is involved in giving her characterizations plausibility by "working out" the courses of their lives. This is undoubtedly part of the "careful delineation" MacMechan detects in her characterization and accounts in part for the resultant Canadian "type" he discerns in The Imperialist: far from being a stereotyped or inflated sort of characterization, Sara Duncan's is built up credibly from minute particulars. This sort of construction would be of a kind to appeal to MacMechan, whose standards of perfection permeate his judgments in many spheres. For instance, students of his recall his emphasis on the truth and accuracy necessary in student compositions 62 -- "verify your references" was one of his stock admonitions to them. Another of his well-remembered observations concerns the finish required in a well-produced piece of writing, and he spoke frequently of "the great art, -- the art to blot." 63 Elsewhere, he asks rhetorically, "Would you

dismiss a book for one misplaced word?" and goes on to say "I would", explaining that "a word, misused in its context, can damn the entire product." ⁶⁴ Also, one of his refrains, applicable in many spheres, obviously, but pertinent here in relation to fiction, is that "perfection is made up of trifles, but perfection is no trifle." ⁶⁵ All these instances emphasise the exacting nature of MacMechan's criticism. In addition, he could be devastatingly wry as when, for example, he comments on an adage such as "You can't tell a book by its cover" in his own lively style: "How externals attract! All masculine eyes of all ages are drawn to the pretty girl, though she is a moron, with no more ideas in her head than a cocoanut and no more manners than a cow." ⁶⁶

Clearly, MacMechan and Sara Duncan were in agreement concerning at least one aspect of The Imperialist. The two were presumably acquainted, both having contributed frequent articles to Goldwin Smith's The Week, and in May, 1905, Sara (Duncan) Cotes writes to MacMechan, thanking him for his review of The Imperialist: "I share with you the conviction of the individuality of the Canadian type. The spirit of place always seems to me strong in the land. I want to come back and work at it from closer range, and soon I think this will be possible." ⁶⁷

From the foregoing discussion of The Imperialist, it is possible to discern several biases in MacMechan's judgments of fiction, and particularly of what he would call "realism" in fiction. For an expansion of the idea, and a slightly different emphasis, one might turn to another book he championed as a work of realism.

Olive Schreiner's The Story of an African Farm, published in 1883, represented for MacMechan an Arnoldian "touchstone" for the type of fiction he wanted to see develop in Canada. Specifically, the novel's

"realism" struck him with its force. Like Duncan, Schreiner had felicitously combined choice of theme, truth of observation, and careful delineation of character. Since much of what MacMechan said of this novel and, by extension, of other novels in reference to it, is implied in the Preface to The Story of an African Farm, a long quotation, signed pseudonymously "Ralph Iron", is illuminating in several ways:

Human life may be painted according to two methods. There is the stage method. According to that each character is duly marshalled at first, and ticketed, we know with an immutable certainty that at the right crisis each one will reappear and act his part, and when the curtain falls, all will stand before it bowing. There is a sense of satisfaction in this, and of completeness. But there is another method -- the method of the life we all lead. Here nothing can be prophesied. There is a strange coming and going of feet. Men appear, act and re-act upon each other, and pass away. When the crisis comes the man who would fit it does not return. When the curtain falls no one is ready. When the footlights are brightest they are blown out, and what the name of the play is no one knows. If there sits a spectator who knows, he sits so high that the players in the gaslight cannot hear his breathing. Life may be painted to either method; but the methods are different. The canons of criticism that bear upon the one cut cruelly upon the other.

It has been suggested by a kind critic that he would better have liked the little book if it had been a history of wild adventure, of cattle driven into inaccessible 'kranzes' by Bushmen, 'of encounters with ravening lions, and hair-breadth escapes!' This could not be. Such works are best written in Piccadilly or in the Strand: there the gifts of the creative imagination, untrammelled by contact with any fact, may spread their wings.

But, should one sit down to paint the scenes among which he has grown, he will find that the facts creep in upon him. Those brilliant phases and shapes which the imagination sees in far-off lands are not for him to portray. Sadly he must squeeze the colour from his brush, and dip it into the grey pigments around him. He must paint what lies before him.⁶⁹

The whole slant of this manifesto -- particularly the final sentence, "He must paint what lies before him" -- seems central to MacMechan's stipulations about Canadian fiction and the direction it should, in his opinion, take. He asks, for instance, in 1919, "when will someone have the courage to write of farm life in Canada?" It

is interesting that, to him, it requires courage to set down what is before the observer; apparently the courage required is for the iconoclastic rendering of what the author perceives, unbiased by strictures of decorum. "Diffidence" is the quality MacMechan repeatedly isolates as most typically Canadian, and he says it has functioned as a damper on the presentation of what he would call "realism". "Canadians wear a fig-leaf over their mouths", he claims,⁷¹ and elsewhere he insists⁷² that "whore" be re-admitted to the language. From comments such as these, it is possible to piece together a tentative definition of what MacMechan meant by "realism", that word that is too broad to be used to any purpose without a strict limiting of definition.

One critic has provided a succinct and comprehensive analysis of "realism" and, for our purposes, it is helpful to indicate some of the points he makes which are germane to the discussion at hand. In his Introduction to Documents of Modern Literary Realism, George J. Becker indicates three main emphases in what he terms "realism", which, he points out, is no more a single thing than is "romanticism".⁷³ The first aspect of realism is a choice of subject matter that enables the writer to take the ordinary and the near-at-hand as suitable for literary treatment. The second he defines as the "element of reaction against romantic prettifying" in the work of a realist, and he asserts that the first element in this reaction is that the realist's material, unlike that of the romantic, is the product of first-hand observation. Becker's third point, and the one which requires longest quotation because it is the most tortuous, is what he cites as the philosophical basis of realism, which "seems to rest on a contradiction":

It has just been reiterated that the basic ideal of the /realist/ movement was and is rigorous objectivity, in spite of this it was almost impossible not to take a position, at least implicitly, about man and his fate, particularly since the whole climate of thought in which realism flourished was one of scientism. It is sceptical of that whole cluster of things which are associated with traditional theistic belief, such as the soul, telic motion, the power of divine grace, and the whole world of miracle, of causality. That is, the events which escape the otherwise ineluctable laws of causality. It is this last term which is the key to the realist position: the universe is observably subject to its laws, and any theory which asserts otherwise is wishful thinking. Thus as the whole of human behavior and experience, in individuals and societies, was examined and portrayed with increasing exactness, realistic writers could not escape making statements about man and the condition of mankind which were in violent opposition to those traditionally accepted. It usually happened that these writers declared that life had no meaning, no telic motion, that man was a creature barely risen from the level of animal behavior and driven by forces over which he had little or no control and in which he could discern no goodness or purpose.⁷⁴

From what Becker writes, it is clear that "realism" is a comparative, relative term -- that there are many degrees of realism. As our aim in this chapter is to place MacMechan in the spectrum as accurately as possible, it is useful to test some of his opinions and judgments against Becker's points. The first two -- the realist's choice of first-hand subject matter and his opposition to "romantic prettifying" -- would receive MacMechan's immediate affirmation. Certainly MacMechan was anxious to get to the actualities of life as it was lived in Canada and, therefore, to pare away any prettifying that falsified this truth. The final and philosophical point is much harder to determine, for it takes into account the deepest beliefs of the man and his philosophical position, which are rather difficult to state with any precision. That he was a believer in "telic motion", in Becker's phrase, seems clear from various sources, though it is also clear that meaning in life often seemed obscure to him and that he frequently questioned the possibility of meaning. He presumably believed in an on-going

soul in some form, for in his journal he is clearly incredulous about the attitude of a friend who has lost a favorite daughter and who has no faith in a hereafter. "And he believes that she is dead as other creatures and the flowers of last year. The human machine that loved him has stopped. That is all. How can he!"⁷⁵ MacMechan appears to have retained the influence of his minister-father, for his journals are punctuated with meditations on anniversaries of deaths in which he ponders the likelihood of his own survival for another year and of working within the plan of an Almighty. Each new year in his journals begins "I.H.S." with a date, and the years usually close with "laus Deo". External evidence of his spiritual stature is plentiful, both from various references to his "spiritual" nature and from his familiar presence at Fort Massey Presbyterian church, where it was his custom to go twice each Sunday.⁷⁶ From even a cursory account of some of MacMechan's attitudes, then, it is evident that the paradox of realism to which Becker points -- its alleged objectivity, which rests, ultimately, on some view of human nature, and that view, in its extreme, a degrading or nihilistic one -- must be taken into account when considering what MacMechan understood by the type of realism he would consider salutary for Canadian fiction. Surely, his was a moderate version of this particular meaning of the term. The more radical realism, or naturalism of, for example, Zola was anathema to him on the grounds of its portrayal of a soulless externality of life.⁷⁷ For MacMechan, acceptable "realism" would have to be defined as a verbal construction which, while rendering large areas of human life with accuracy and the fidelity of first-hand observation, nevertheless stops short of denigrating human life by emphasising its futility, and, instead, contains elements of moral uplift and affirms,

the ultimate dignity and worth of the human condition and struggle. What he wrote of Dostoyevsky's Brothers Karamazov reveals his standards to some extent:

The Brothers Karamazov ought to appeal with unusual urgency to our Canadian public, which loves its fiction to be plentifully seasoned with ethics. And I, as a Canadian critic, applaud the national taste. The greatest fiction is that which deals with moral issues, for these are the chief concern of mankind. In the last analysis great fiction resolves itself into a conflict between right and wrong, good and evil.⁷⁸

MacMechan's ideas of desirable "realism", then, are not based on an attitude of philosophical naturalism; indeed, they are founded on a belief in a moral system inherent in human society. This attitude accounts for some of MacMechan's aversions, which, at first glance, might appear inexplicable. He spoke, for example, of Arnold Bennett's work in the following terms: "Realism not of the grimmest, but untouched by anything spiritual seems to me the distinguishing mark of his best novels. Art builds on Truth, and the truth of life in the Five Towns attracts as a spectacle even if it does not move or inspire."⁷⁹ One thinks here also of his comment on George Bernard Shaw:

He is still the bitter Puck of satire, ever developing anew his one theme, 'What fools these mortals be!' But Shaw is not human, he has no bowels of compassion. He does not greatly care if humanity goes to the dogs ...so long as he can discharge his blazing, yelping fireworks along its route. The spectacle of the present unutterable calamity [World War I] only moves him to mocking laughter, the crackling of thorns under a pot. In all the cleverness of his latest skit on the war, O'Flaherty, V.C., there is not one suggestion of sympathy with human suffering, only useless (and mistaken) jibing at human folly.⁸⁰

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MacMechan found Thomas Hardy "too pessimistic". Determinism of any sort -- either Hardy's pessimism which allows for no happy characters, or, conversely, the mindless optimism of books with a too-pat happy ending -- is not to MacMechan's taste. He insists that the events of a novel unfold in a pleasing pattern, and he sees plot as the application of pattern to human life. As with much in life, in his demands for fiction

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his approach is middle-of-the-road, conservative, commonsensical -- "nothing too much" is one of his stock phrases. This phrase applied also to his appreciation of style in fiction, and to this element it is now time to turn.

MacMechan designated various writers as "stylists", and for them he has little enthusiasm -- or understanding. Chief among these writers were Virginia Woolf and the Sitwells -- Osbert, Sacheverel, and, chiefly, Edith.⁸³ Since these stylists were prominent mainly in the closing years of MacMechan's life and since the impact of their writing did not really reach Canada until after MacMechan's death, discussion of this topic might appear at first glance to be tangential to the main concern of this chapter, which is MacMechan's relationship to Canadian fiction. However, since no description of his work as a critic of prose fiction would be complete without attention being given to this interesting phase of his work, the topic will be given due attention. From what has already been said about MacMechan's tastes in literature in the preceding pages,⁸⁴ it seems almost redundant to remark that experimentation in fiction was not to his liking. He would be the first to admit that experimentation was simply not to his taste, as his review of To the Lighthouse implies when he says

My first impressions are, frankly, puzzling. Over a hundred and ninety pages are taken up with the utterly unimportant events of one day in the family of a professor summering in the Isle of Skye 'If you read Clarissa for the story, you would hang yourself,' was Johnson's comment on Richardson's masterpiece. It is also true of To the Lighthouse. The underlying thesis, or philosophical idea, is 'How do I know what is greatest? How do I know what is least?' Through and around the commonplace incidents of an ordinary day play streams of thought and emotion The reader wonders what is going to happen, he has a sense of oncoming tragedy.

Possibly the children may fall over the edge of the cliff, or be cut off by the tide, but nothing of that kind happens. There is a reversal of values. These petty things suffused with thought and emotion are the very stuff of life. Death is a trivial accident, to be hurried by in a parenthesis. The style is no great aid to the understanding. Here again there is a reversal of values. Clarity is not the writer's main concern.

"Not that they may understand if they will, but that they cannot misunderstand even if they would" is no longer the ideal. One certain aid to the understanding is the short sentence. The longer the sentence, the harder it is to understand. Here is a passage from this story, consisting of two short sentences and one long one. The reader can easily judge for himself which is easiest to understand. He goes on to quote the two sentences, thus concluding his review.⁷⁸⁵

This appraisal of the novel indicates that while MacMechan in part understood the aims of the novelist, he was out of sympathy with them.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, MacMechan was capable of incisive evaluation of much writing that came to him for review, as well as of dismissal of it as not being to his taste. His comment on "new wine" is an instance of this tendency, as is the following

remark, made in 1915: "our modern verses have not the same end or aim as the ancients. The ancients aimed at perfection: the moderns are content to find expression."⁸⁶ From what he writes of To the Lighthouse,

it is evident that he was unwilling rather than unable to follow the writer's technique, or "style", and that he refused to relinquish standards that are "no longer the ideal". That MacMechan respects the writer's integrity is clear, both from his concession) that "Clarity is not the writer's main concern" (and the implication that it need not necessarily be) and from his exchange with Virginia Woolf at the end of the same year, in December, 1930. "The Dean's Window" for December 27, 1930 consists of a long open "Letter to Virginia Woolf" (reprinted here in Appendix C). In this letter MacMechan praises her treatise, A Room of One's Own, in a highly original -- and entertainingly ironic -- manner.

Clearly it impressed Virginia Woolf herself, for on January 26, 1931, she wrote

Dear Mr. MacMechan --

I must thank you -- a thing I seldom do -- for your article on my book A Room of One's Own. It is written with a sympathy and understanding for which I feel very grateful.

Yours sincerely,
Virginia Woolf.

Here, another of the paradoxes of MacMechan's thinking emerges, for while it is often tempting to think of him as a conservative, the issue of feminism, for example, was always of interest to him, and he had written in 1921

that it is better for any woman to be employed than to be idle, to earn her own living than to be dependent upon some male relative, to study, to practise a profession, to learn a business or handicraft than to exist as a parasite upon society is surely past any need of argument. Such a sudden change in the composition of society is sure to bring difficulties, danger, re-adjustments. But the gains far outweigh the losses.⁸⁸

Virginia Woolf's is perhaps a special case among MacMechan's consideration of "stylists", and it is her work that seems to receive his most attentive reading. Various other writers whom he construed as "stylists" he dismisses forthrightly. Experimentation in prose is clearly not to his taste, and he thinks, for instance, that Henry James was trying to make words achieve more than they are capable of doing, and he deplored the influence of James's work on the later writing of Sara Dunçan.⁸⁹ Often, literary experimentation strikes MacMechan as having the effect of producing nature morte -- vitiated, lifeless reproduction of surroundings. Of one such stylized book he writes that it was written in "a literary incubator, some monstrous glass bell or exhausted receiver. There is no circulation of free air in this volume."⁹⁰ At another point, he expresses his view of another literary "type"

represented by Remy de Goncourt: "They never were capable of athletic exertion. Their blood is thin ink, their faces and hands are papery. They secrete heart-breaking philosophies and venomous epigrams. They are withered, sinister, inhuman like their writings."⁹¹

This sort of over-cultivated "literariness" is the converse of what MacMechan admires, namely, the robust, positive, affirmative, life-affirming philosophies of physically energetic people. Such an observation obviously leads one into the question of the relation between art and life, again a nearly imponderable matter. However, to attempt such an analysis, one would immediately observe in MacMechan a strong belief in the essentially life-affirming nature of literature. The function of literature, he frequently asserts, is, in Dr. Johnson's phrase, "To teach us to enjoy life -- or endure it."⁹² MacMechan seems to delight in enumerating medical doctors who "beat the literary fellows at their own game",⁹³ that is, who, in addition to lives of humanitarian service, found time to write works of merit. Some of the names he frequently mentions are those of Sir Thomas Browne,⁹⁴ William Osler,⁹⁵ John Brown (author of Rab and his Friends),⁹⁶ John MacCrae,⁹⁷ William Henry Drummond⁹⁸ and Sir Andrew MacPhail.⁹⁹ In keeping with their Hippocratic oath, MacMechan would observe, these men wrote material that he would consider heartening and strengthening and life-affirming. His view of literature generally is that it goes hand in hand with human goodness, and these writers would rank high in such an argument for him. Writing of a novel with a conventional happy ending, for example, MacMechan says "the natural universal human heart rejoices in such an ending, rather than in some fantastic canker of malevolence or deceit."¹⁰⁰ Though it would be possible, perhaps, to construe these ideas so as to make MacMechan appear to be mindlessly optimistic and simplistic, he would offer, half-facetiously, in his own defence the remark that he is an old

Victorian sentimentalist: "I am an old fossil, a Victorian sentimental-
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ist." This comment might be expanded by means of a comment by MacMechan's friend and colleague, William Lyon Phelps. In his Preface to the Favorite Poems of James Whitcomb Riley (1931), Phelps writes

Riley was a man of faith, of sentiment, of optimism, of good cheer, to-day our citified intelligensia have only one motto-- What's the use? They find no pleasure even in sin.

To such persons no music is more discordant than cheerfulness. As the Bible says, "As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart...."

Even more than humor, sentiment follows the fashions. The only pages of Dickens which fail to convince us to-day are those whose pathos made originally the deepest impression. Many of Washington Irving's once popular "sketches" would be intolerable if they were not also unreadable.

Yet sentiment is the ground quality of art. Speaking of English sentimentality, Mr. Paul Cohen-Portheim, ... says:

Fear of 'cheap' sentiment is simply fear of giving way to the feelings in people who are not inwardly sure of themselves, while sentimentality is a symptom of health and unsophisticated simplicity.... Sentimentality is much nearer to great art than critical intelligence is, because both are matters of feeling originating in the unconscious.... Sob-stuff for the most part only comes from want of tact in handling emotional material, a want of which the masses are not conscious.

There is not the slightest doubt, after making due allowances for the taste in sentiment that prevailed in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, that many of Riley's verses are too sweet not only for these sour times, but for any time.¹⁰²

This is a comment with which MacMechan would undoubtedly have agreed.

He gives ample evidence, in his writing, of his understanding of "sentimentality" as being "a symptom of health and unsophisticated simplicity". Moreover, he would undoubtedly have quoted, as a basis for some of his ideas, Matthew Arnold's rationale for the exclusion of "Empedocles on Etna" from the 1853 edition of his Poems:

Any accurate representation may therefore be expected to be interesting, but, if the representation be a poetical one, more than this is demanded. It is demanded not only that it shall interest, but also that it shall inspire and rejoice the reader: that it shall convey a charm, and infuse delight. For the Muses, as Hesiod says, were born that they might be "a forgetfulness of evils, and a truce from cares": and it is not enough that the Poet should add to the knowledge of men, it is required of him also that he should add to their happiness. 'All Art,' says Schiller, 'is dedicated to Joy, and there is no higher and no more serious problem, than how to make man happy. The right Art is that alone, which creates the highest enjoyment.'

A poetical work, therefore, is not yet justified when it has been shown to be an accurate, and therefore interesting representation; it has to be shown also that it is a representation from which men can derive enjoyment. In presence of the most tragic circumstances, represented in a work of Art, the feeling of enjoyment, as is well known, may still subsist: the representation of the most utter calamity, of the liveliest anguish, is not sufficient to destroy it: the more tragic the situation, the deeper becomes the enjoyment; and the situation is more tragic in proportion as it becomes more terrible.

What then are the situations, from the representation of which, though accurate, no poetical enjoyment can be derived? They are those in which the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done. In such situations there is inevitably something morbid, in the description of them something monotonous. When they occur in actual life, they are painful, not tragic: the representation of them in poetry is painful also.¹⁰³

Again, although Arnold restricts his discussion to poetry, the emphasis placed on "Joy" and the artist's duty to contribute to human happiness are obviously requisites of both poetry and prose fiction for MacMechan. He frequently stresses the "Joy" essential to literature -- from Wordsworth's "Joy in widest commonalty spread", to Coleridge's "Joy...by which we live", to Robert Louis Stevenson's rhetorical "the novelist is a films du joie, and if he fails to amuse, what atonement can he offer?"¹⁰⁴ MacMechan describes one writer in the following manner:

"All times he has enjoyed greatly, and he has the ability to translate his experience of joy into words which in their turn rouse up in the

reader's mind some shadow or image of that joy. Therein lies the achievement of literature." ¹⁰⁵ This concept of the "joy" present in literature forms the basis for several of MacMechan's reflections: of Somerset Maugham he says, "no man should deal wholesale in discouragement" ¹⁰⁶. He wrote, also, that "healthy, ordinary Human Nature cannot stand [Thomas] Hardy's pessimism. It is no unfair test of a work of art to consider if the results of the ideas released by it should prevail universally." ¹⁰⁷ Morley Callaghan's "realism" in Strange Fugitive ¹⁰⁸ he found joyless -- "a dull, moralizing sermon".

MacMechan's emphasis on human goodness and on the salutary influence of literature on life as it is lived, which sometimes amounts to his advocacy of a kind of tamped-down strenuous life, seems perhaps dated to-day when morality in literature has come under such heavy attack from the New Criticism in its attempt to sheer away such thinking from the work per se. Some of MacMechan's ideas are endorsed, and one is prompted to think that they are but temporarily out of vogue, when one reads that the renowned Shakespearean critic, Alfred B. Harbage, has said as recently as 1973 that kindness is what unites Shakespeare and Dickens as artists, and that by promoting kindness, their art serves a moral purpose. Possibly MacMechan's commonsensical criticism and opinions are old-fashioned but resilient, for it is certain that he would applaud when Harbage writes

No one who has ever spent more than a few hours with either of them [Shakespeare and Dickens] ... has to be told that creation is better than destruction, nurture better than neglect, generosity than greed, love than hate, kindness than cruelty, and so on. Advocacy of the obvious begets apathy or even hostility. What people want is not to hear about good feeling but to feel it. Orwell spells out

the message of Dickens as "decency". It is a good word, and one that our age, which fears sentiment, can use with a sense of security, but the more descriptive word is kindness. Of all the plays and novels in English, those of Shakespeare and Dickens are the kindest. They are the thing they promote. The Elizabethans passed on to succeeding generations their "gentle" Shakespeare. During the Restoration period Dryden said that he admired Jonson but "loved" Shakespeare, and that Fletcher had the softer but Shakespeare the "kinder" soul, the implication being not that he teaches good feeling, but that he engenders it.¹⁰⁹

Here, Harbage's discussion of "decency", "sentiment", and "kindness" is of the kind MacMechan would have found congenial.

From such assembled comments and attitudes it might seem that MacMechan in his daily life was a rather shallow optimist. Such a judgment, however, would be false. If anything, he was temperamentally melancholy, and he perhaps required of literature an affirmation of a benevolent universe that his intuition contradicted or at least doubted. One often has the feeling that his pronouncements on the qualities desirable in literature go against the grain of his deeper feelings. His comments on the First World War, as previously mentioned, are illustrations of this tendency. In his journals, for instance, in the dark days of late 1916, he repeatedly confides his fear that the Germans will win, but, he adds, this is something that he must keep to himself for fear of demoralizing his acquaintances. In line with this tendency, he records at one point (August 24, 1916) "Foggy day: Depressing, Arsenical, and Throat-cutting", yet it seems from the remainder of the entry that he kept these thoughts to himself: Similarly, in his literary criticism he appears to have denied or ignored some of his misgivings. It is really only with his review of Robert Graves' Good-Bye to All That (1929),

that MacMechan offers his own views of the futility of the First World War to a public audience. This phenomenon is particularly remarkable since he repeatedly notes with satisfaction the popularity of John McCrae's rondeau, "In Flanders Fields". This reticence on MacMechan's part, his refusal to recognize certain powerful themes in literature, narrows his scope at times, and, at other times, makes his estimates seem rather prim and dated. Two outstanding examples of this tendency are demonstrated in his estimates of Samuel Butler's Way of All Flesh and E.M. Forster's Passage to India. The former MacMechan found distasteful on the grounds that no man ought to think, let alone writè, that way of a father -- "a literary man who spends twelve years of his life blackening the character of his dead father and mother /Mac-113
Mechan writes/ -- well! every plain man has the name for him." Here we see the dutiful, decorous, convention-bound MacMechan in a guise we immediately think of as Victorian, with all the associated concepts of repression and hypocrisy that the term to-day conveys. A Passage to India is a slightly different case, although MacMechan's ideas of decorum and propriety surface in this instance, too. He dismisses the novel as "a terrible book" 114 in his private journal, and in his review of it in the Montreal Standard he points to the depressingly pessimistic outlook for English-Indian relations the book purveys. 115 MacMechan's treatment of A Passage of India is remarkable for what it reveals about his tendency to overlook phenomena: he had been enthusiastic about Sara Duncan's The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib (1893), a rather superficial and witty account of English-Indian relations. Forster, it would appear, offered a darker version of some topics MacMechan apparently did not want to recognize.

From the foregoing account of his position as a critic of prose fiction, it seems evident that MacMechan was out of sympathy with much of the writing done by novelists in the early years of the twentieth century. One has only to turn to his reviews of many of the outstanding serious writers of the period to see that, in most cases, MacMechan's reviews of their work register incomprehension or apathy or distaste. In referring to the novels of D.H. Lawrence, for instance, he remarks on the rejection of Lawrence in some quarters and says "There are cheering signs that the world is not wholly given over to the worship of that black trinity -- the Sword, the Dollar, and the Phallus", the latter being for him a symbol of Lawrence's work. ¹¹⁶ Of H.G. Wells, MacMechan writes "his work shows there is no centre to which he can relate himself. His high-minded, sentimental blackguards are beginning to pall. They are simply Joseph Surface brought down to date" ¹¹⁷ -- this is in spite of the fact that "no one writing English today [1915] possesses his gifts as a novelist." ¹¹⁸ Of Katherine Mansfield he writes that in her choice of subject matter and in her treatment of it "her effect on me is uncanny", and MacMechan goes on to describe himself as "out of sympathy with twentieth-century madness and the abyss" ¹¹⁹ which for him Mansfield's writing depicts. He adds a bit later "'complications' are what you die of, when the doctors are fairly puzzled, but they are the life of the modern novel." ¹²⁰ Elsewhere he speaks of modern fiction in rather plain terms: "the peck of dirt everyone is supposed to eat has come my way chiefly in the form of modern novels to read." ¹²¹ And, he speaks of the "Cloacine School of Filth". ¹²² Yet, in 1928, he deploras the general reticence concerning the discussion of sexual and religious topics, saying that people do not talk about such matters -- "it is not

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done". Here he apparently recognizes the desirability of doing so as well as the impossibility of it. Here, too, one is tempted to attribute MacMechan's attitudes to his Victorian upbringing. In a recent issue of The Canadian Forum, Barker Fairley has referred to an aspect of "Victorian" life that is pertinent here. He says, referring to his youth in the late 1880's,

Remember that I am speaking of the Victorian age, not of England of today. And to the Victorian age I belonged, because the Victorian age outlived the Queen by quite a number of years, and didn't really stop at 1901. History books are misleading. It amuses me to remember the morning when I got into the train to go to school in Leeds and a man sitting beside me dropped his newspaper and said to his neighbour, 'Well, the old lady's gone at last' and so she had. But nothing changed. The settled life and outlook went on as before, the same steadiness, the same silences. No one asked questions. 124

The "silences" Fairley mentions appear to have been of a nature similar to those MacMechan means when he says "it is not done". If one were to place MacMechan in his proper context, particularly in his attitudes ~~in~~ fiction, one would undoubtedly call him "Victorian" -- he himself did so, as did his closest colleague. Here it might be well to keep in mind something Virginia Woolf wrote. In a lecture delivered May 18, 1924, at Cambridge, she said "I will hazard a second assertion, which is more disputable perhaps, to the effect that on or about December, 1910, human character changed." She was referring specifically to the exhibition of Post-Impressionist paintings to be seen in London at that date, and she is indicating her perception of the break with past conceptions of human nature that these paintings revealed:

I am not saying that one went out, as one might into a garden, and there saw that a rose had flowered, or that a hen had laid an egg. The change was not sudden and

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definite like that. But a change there was, nevertheless, and, since one must be arbitrary, let us date it about the year 1910. The first signs of it are recorded in the books of Samuel Butler, in The Way of All Flesh in particular; the plays of Bernard Shaw continue to record it. In life one can see the change. . . . All human relations have shifted -- those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature. Let us agree to place one of these changes about the year 1910.¹²⁶

Perhaps the date she offers can be taken as a watershed in MacMechan's life too, as marking a point after which his perceptions and attitudes altered very little. New approaches to human character and morality as represented by the work of Freud and reflected in the fiction of the time became increasingly alien to MacMechan. A recent critic, writing of three novelists whose collective work spans the period between 1875 and 1930, roughly the years with which we are concerned, has expanded what might appear to be a truism into a fascinating study in changing attitudes. Calvin Bedient, in Architects of Self, introduces his thesis with the assertion that "what makes each age coherent and fascinating is the strength and brilliance of its opposition to a preceding age, with which it is unified in repulsion. In each period the self thaws from the cold of rational and social strictures and runs south into climates at once metaphysical and instinctual":

To take the full measure of the issues grouped and at stake in these post-Christian disputes over the best blueprint of human character, we can do no better, it should now be apparent, than to concentrate on three writers in particular: George Eliot, the chief moralist of the Victorian ethos; Lawrence, her zealous opposite; and Forster, who, though nearer to Lawrence in belief, represents, all the same, something of a median position. The major ideals of human characters -- Christian and ascetic, pagan and mystical, Greek and individualistic -- are all clustered and tempered in these three writers and all in the burning centres, the crucial fevers, of their books.

These are the three supreme creative consciences, the three major architects of the self in English fiction, in their adjoining and complementary eras. In them stands most of the story of what British writers since 1830 have held it humanly desirable to be.¹²⁷

By connecting these three novelists, Bedient has indicated the overlapping of moral concern that forms a continuity between the Victorian era and the modern. Such a description of the continuity is useful when one tries to place MacMechan in his context, for his appreciation of the problem with which Bedient is concerned does not extend to Lawrence and Forster, and one can only observe his indifference to various trends in modern fiction after say, 1910.

To observe MacMechan's lack of sympathy with developments in the international field of fiction, however, is not to diminish his significance as a critic of Canadian fiction at the time in which he was writing. As we have seen, many of his judgments and predictions were based on late Victorian novels of various kinds -- on Schreiner's, Clarke's, and Sara Duncan's. He sought to do what was then yet undone: to prepare the way for the appearance in Canada of a novel of major importance and artistic maturity. The period in which he worked was largely that of the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth. By its nature, literature in Canada in the late nineteenth century looked backward, or across the Atlantic, to a "Motherland", as is the nature of colonial writing. One study of Australian poetry makes this point by its very title -- Tradition in Exile -- which implies the sort of holding operation often discernible in colonial writing. The imagination, still adhering to ideas formed by the older culture, is unable to produce creative work grounded in the new country until the "tradition" is firmly established and worked through in the new environment. Canadian fiction, at the time MacMechan

was writing, was largely dependent on models beyond Canada for its influences. In 1919, MacMechan writes of this phenomenon, calling Canadian fiction "amateur", and giving as a reason the fact that Canadians have no national life of their own: "we invent nothing; we borrow, borrow, borrow." Canadians, he says, are intellectual parasites on the United States, a Canadian Olive Schreiner is wanted, he insists. ¹²⁹ Two years later, he directs his column in the Montreal Standard at young Canadian novelists, who must realize, he says, that their craft is not easy and that their apprenticeship is long. In one of his last general comments on the Canadian literary scene (April 15, 1933), he advises the young writers of Canada to look about them for material:

One word to our "young lions": have the courage to make your stories Canadian -- "common Canadian" -- not English or American or any blend or mixture of these elements. Don't write with one eye on the American market, and with the other on the English reviews. Dare to tell the truth of the life we live and know. Drop the convention of "hardly Canadians", and represent him as he is -- in school, -- on the farm, -- in politics, -- in the small town, -- in his religion, -- making war, -- making love. This is what the outside world is waiting for. Novelists of Canada, here lies the road to distinction. ¹³⁰

In the year before his death, he reiterates his belief that Canadians have a unique culture from which to create fiction: "Here in Canada we have the most abundant material all ready for the novelist -- racial contrasts and contacts, -- all varieties of urban, rural, and industrial ¹³¹ life...." Exhortations and observations like these marked his critical work from the time he began his reviews, in The Week in 1885, until their conclusion, with his death, in 1933. His work in the area of prose fiction was largely concerned with setting standards, albeit often Victorian standards, and with encouraging little-known works of promising authorship in an attempt to prepare the way for a flowering

of novels: Throughout the 1920's, when signs of a "boom" begin to appear in Canadian fiction, MacMechan repeats his insistence on the necessity for the upholding of standards. In one of his last columns, reviewing Frederick Philip Grove's Fruits of the Earth, MacMechan records what, as it turned out, were his final words on Canadian fiction, particularly on Canadian "realism" as he had defined it. Opening his review with the somewhat curious assertion that he "does not know" Grove's novels, he goes on to compare Fruits of the Earth with The Story of an African Farm for powerful presentation of setting:

I understand one squeamish community ... had Settlers of the Marsh put on the Index Prohibitus. Perhaps that was an unsolicited testimonial to its value. Still, I did not expect much from Fruits of the Earth. I have read too many "Canadian" novels to cherish high expectations of any new one, no matter how loudly the advertising trumpets are blown.

But Fruits of the Earth is the sort of story I have long been looking for. /He goes on to class it with The Imperialist, Wild Geese, and Rockbound. / /Like Moby Dick /, they all give true pictures of the worlds the authors know.¹³³

Here one can see the thread of unity in his work -- his early work on Melville led finally, if indirectly, to pronouncements on Canadian literature that seem, even to-day, avant garde and fresh. As a critic of fiction, he brought to bear on his appraisal of fiction in Canada the methods in the study of comparative literature he had learned at Johns Hopkins University. By placing representative works of Canadian fiction alongside "touchstones" from other, usually colonial, cultures, he attempted to produce foils for Canadian works, to appraise their worth, and to diagnose reasons for their failings. He brought to his reading of Canadian fiction his deep belief in the power of place and the necessity of interaction between environment and individual talent in bringing disparate areas, and so, ultimately, a whole country, into imaginative life. The difficulties peculiar to this process in Canada,

were observed by him, and his life-long theme was of a country's coming into existence only as it is written about. Such an existence is desirable and essential in order for a national culture to flourish. In reiterating this credo, MacMechan anticipated a kind of nationalism in literary criticism that came after the years of his most active work. Lionel Stevenson, W.E. Collin, E.K. Brown, and, most prominently, Northrop Frye, have offered expansions of this basic idea. The key paragraph of one of Frye's speeches might fittingly be offered here as evidence of a continuing theme in cultural criticism that had an early expression in the prose criticism of Archibald MacMechan, "an old penny-a-liner, off in his provincial corner."¹³⁴

Children in Canadian schools study Canadian geography, not because it is better than the geography of other nations, but because it is theirs; and similarly with Canadian history and politics. Canadian writing, too, has a value for Canadians independent of its international value. It tells us how Canadian imaginations have reacted to their environment, and therefore it tells us something about Canada that nothing else can tell us. Even if it were not very good in itself, still a Canadian who did not know something of his own literature would be as handicapped as if he had heard of Paris and Rome but never of Ottawa. The study of Canadian literature is not a painful patriotic duty like voting, but a simple necessity of getting one's bearings.¹³⁵

The Literary History of Canada, summing up the change that occurred in Canadian fiction between 1880 and the time of the First World War, indicates some of the changes in Canadians' own attitudes toward their country. From the foregoing account of MacMechan's attitudes -- his involvement, first in The Week, then as a regular columnist for the Montreal Standard, his strict standards as a scholar, his concern with observing the growth in quality and quantity in Canadian literature -- it is possible to see his influence in the changing attitudes which are described in these concluding paragraphs:

What most distinguished the fiction written by Canadian writers from that written by their British and American contemporaries was their writers' experience of place, and, to a lesser degree, their experience of time. The fiction written by Canadians before 1880 presents scenes of Canadian life in only a few isolated spots in an unknown country. One cleared patch lies along the St. Lawrence, centring on a Quebec City and a Montreal of the Old Regime. Another smaller patch includes the Minas Basin of the Evangeline country, and a vaguely adjacent Louisbourg and Halifax. Another small patch is around Saint John, other, unrelated patches are the bush clearings of the Ontario Front. A few English writers, R.M. Ballantyne, Kingston, and Henry, put Hudson's Bay and the wilds of the Northwest on the fictional map. Canadian critics in the 1880's had good reason to feel strongly that Canadians had not awakened to the possibilities of using their own localities in fiction. An editorial in The Week for September 29, 1887, reprinted a note from the Boston Literary World, entitled "A Field for Romance," which suggested that American writers ought to exploit the Canadian scene, since little use had been made by Canadians of "the abundant and rich material for fiction afforded by the scenery and history of these neighbouring lands."

In the following thirty years, Canadian writers did use the abundant and rich materials of their own land to a remarkable degree. The panorama of their fiction which follows below is representative, not exhaustive. In these years, the fictional map of Canada expanded as quickly as the physical map had in 1867. By the time of the First World War, the whole known area of Canada had been sketched in, and the scarcely knit, pluralistic localness of Canadian life in those years had been mirrored directly or obliquely in hundreds of short stories, romances, and novels.¹³⁶

Notes to Chapter III

¹Robert E. Houghton and G. Robert Stange, eds., Victorian Poetry and Poetics (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), p. xxii.

²MacMechan admired the Queen's Quarterly, having observed its development from the outset, in 1893. By 1916 he calls it "a journal of real power".

³Scribner's Magazine, August, 1929. Reprinted in the Halifax Chronicle, August 19, 1929. MacMechan had observed, in 1925, "It is sometimes the privilege of a man to see what he foresaw. 'The wheel has come full circle'" (DW, Feb. 21, 1925).

⁴Unpublished letter to the editor of the Dalhousie Review, April 28, 1962.

⁵Northrop Frye, The Bush Garden (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1971), p. 11.

⁶Hershel Parker, ed., The Recognition of Herman Melville (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1967), pp. vi-vii. MacMechan himself notes the beginning of Melville's recognition, DW, Feb. 18, 1922: "The literati are just discovering Herman Melville and his masterpiece, Moby Dick".

⁷Henry S. Salt, letter to Archibald MacMechan, February 7, 1900. It is interesting that Salt and MacMechan should have been in agreement about the value of Moby Dick, for Salt's Tennyson as a Thinker (1893) was a denigration of one of MacMechan's most cherished figures. When Salt speaks of "J.W. Stedman", surely he means E.C. Stedman, Edmund Clarence Stedman (1833-1908), critic, poet, editor, and anthologist.

⁸DW, Sept. 17, 1921: "Many years ago I discovered this supreme romance of the sea in the dusty Mechanics' Institute library of a little Ontario hamlet, and revelled in it".

⁹Parker, p. 137.

¹⁰Herman Melville, letter to Archibald MacMechan, December 5, 1887.

¹¹In Chapter IV. MacMechan included it in Life of a Little College, apparently considering it rather familiar in tone.

¹²See the previous discussion of this matter in Chapter II, pp. 94-95.

¹³DW, July 8, 1933.

¹⁴The Week, Jan. 4, 1895.

¹⁵Letter to Watson Kirkconnell, quoted in Kirkconnell, A Slice of Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), p. 293.

¹⁶DW, September 2, 1916.

¹⁷DW, December 29, 1923.

18 Sir Andrew MacPhail, in a letter to MacMechan, January 9, 1911, writes "I spent a week at Orwell /Prince Edward Island/ and on my return found a message from Mr. Kipling to you which I hasten to send on: 'Twixt you and me, I was not a little fond of that same book /his Rewards and Fairies, reviewed by MacMechan on November 12, 1910/ and what a splendid review 'The Dean' gave of it! Please convey to him my best thanks', which now I do." MacPhail and MacMechan were at this time joint editors of The University Magazine (1901-1920).

19 DW, February 9, 1907.

20 DW, June 8, 1907.

21 D.C. Harvey, An Introduction to the History of Dalhousie University (Halifax: McCurdy Printing Company, 1938), p. 101, indicates that the George Munro Chair of English Literature and Rhetoric was established in 1881 and endowed with \$2,000 a year. C.L. Bennet remembers that, in 1930, President MacKenzie indicated that university professors were essentially being paid for seven months' work and were expected to supplement their incomes during the remaining five months of the year. See MacMechan's poem, Appendix H, for attitudes to journalism and scholarship.

22 The Reviewer, The Week, October 1, 1892.

23 In order to clear up confusion concerning the two possible titles of the book, the following note may be helpful: "The novel first appeared as a serial, His Natural Life, in The Australian Journal from March 1870 to June 1872. Clarke then revised it considerably ... /publishing it in book form in 1874./ The longer title of the novel was not used until 1885, in the first posthumous editions of the novel issued in Australia and England; the reason and authority for this change to For the Term of His Natural Life are not known" (W.S. Ramson, ed., The Australian Experience /Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974/, p. 19).

24 Ramson, p. 20.

25 Ramson, p. 21.

26 John Barnes, "Australian Fiction to 1920", in Geoffrey Dutton, ed., The Literature of Australia (Penguin Books Australia Ltd., 1972), p. 134.

27 Barnes, p. 148.

28 Barnes, p. 149.

29 Johannes Meintjes, Olive Schreiner: Portrait of a South African Woman (Johannesberg: Hugh Keartland, 1965), p. 58.

30 There may have been hidden reasons for his evident quarrel with Parker the man as well as the writer, for one rumour has it that Parker and MacMechan were at one time rivals for the affections of Edith (Cowan) MacMechan.

³¹DW, December 19, 1908. MacMechan quotes Stranger's article on Parker at length.

³²MacMechan, Headwaters, pp. 204-205. See also MacMechan's account of growing up in Ontario, DW, February 22, 1919.

³³Clara Thomas, Our Nature -- Our Voices, Vol. I (Toronto: New Press, 1972), p. 52.

³⁴MacMechan, Headwaters, pp. 212-213.

³⁵DW, November 15, 1919.

³⁶DW, October 22, 1921.

³⁷MacMechan, Headwaters, p. 211.

³⁸Kent Thompson, ed., Stories from Atlantic Canada (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), p. xv. Introducing this collection, Thompson observes gratuitously "I regret also that I have found no writer to represent Prince Edward Island. Obviously I do not take Lucy Maud Montgomery as seriously as the tourist bureau does."

³⁹Elizabeth Waterston, "Lucy Maud Montgomery: 1874-1942", Canadian Children's Literature, I (1975), p. 25. This article is, on the whole, very informative: one small point of fact might be mentioned, however, and that is that MacMechan is mentioned as having been Montgomery's teacher and as a "short story writer". This is to suggest an influence that was not present, for MacMechan was an essayist but not a short-story writer. From various published work, it is clear that MacMechan sensed a spiritual affinity with Montgomery that made him sympathetic to her writing. Possibly this affinity could be defined, most broadly, as a sense of melancholy, of the lacrimae rerum they both possessed. This aspect of Montgomery has been indicated quite strongly recently, beginning with Wilfred Eggleston's Green Gables Letters (Toronto: Ryerson, 1960). In these letters a very unorthodox Montgomery emerges, and since the time of their publication, the Canadian Broadcasting Company's television programme (Winter, 1976) on her life, as well as Mollie Gillen's The Wheel of Things (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1975), a biography of Montgomery, have both represented her as being a more profound thinker than earlier writers had indicated.

On the other hand, MacMechan apparently had little in common with Charles Gordon. He was not interested enough in hearing Gordon speak to the congregation of St. Matthew's church in Halifax during the autumn of 1917 to leave his own church, Fort Massey, for the occasion. In his journal for September 30, 1917, MacMechan records: "I went to Fort Massey in the evening which was almost empty; the crowd had gone to hear 'Ralph Connor' at St. Matthew's." On the following day, October 1, he writes: "In the evening, went to Ralph Connor's address before the Canadian Club... MacMechan had been asked to give the Club's speech of thanks/ the house was crowded: not even standing room: hundreds turned away. The speech was characteristic."

⁴⁰MacMechan, private journals, October 26, 1928. See also DW, November 24, 1928.

⁴¹Ethel Wilson, "A Cat Among the Falcons", Canadian Literature, II(Autumn, 1959), p. 17.

⁴²DW, February 21, 1908. The reference is to Richard II, II, 1, 40-68.

⁴³DW, July 30, 1910.

⁴⁴W.M. Thackeray, Vanity Fair (London: Dent, 1912), p. 699.

⁴⁵MacMechan uses the word "puzzling" frequently. See his review of To the Lighthouse, below p. 136.

⁴⁶DW, September 21, 1929.

⁴⁷DW, February 2, 1929.

⁴⁸Obviously, Northrop Frye's articulation of this concept is well-known to-day. See below, p. 151, for discussion of the connection between Frye and MacMechan.

⁴⁹Interview with Margaret Laurence, quoted in D.G. Jones, "Myth, Frye and Canadian Writers", Canadian Literature, Winter, 1973, p. 15.

⁵⁰MacMechan often observed that translation is the most difficult of literary arts: "next to tragedy the most difficult thing to write is a good translation" (DW, October 3, 1925). He goes on in this review to mention Blake. MacMechan and Blake had much in common temperamentally, as Blake's book of essays, Brown Waters (1915), would indicate. The two men shared a reflectiveness and a melancholy that is often evident in their essays.

⁵¹Hemon's Maria Chapdelaine (1916) and Cather's Shadow on the Rock (1930) are both set in a Quebec of an earlier time, the nineteenth and seventeenth centuries respectively.

⁵²DW, February 29, 1932.

⁵³Private journal, December 18, 1894.

⁵⁴Private journal, July 25, 1918.

⁵⁵MacMechan, Headwaters, 141.

⁵⁶Headwaters, 138-139.

⁵⁷Claude Bissell, "Introduction", Sara Jeannette Duncan, The Imperialist (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), p. vi.

⁵⁸DW, November 12, 1927.

⁵⁹ In Headwaters, MacMechan notes the influence of Henry James as detrimental to the art of Sara Duncan. In general, MacMechan was intolerant of the aims and methods of James. One comment, from DW, March 8, 1919, is characteristic: "Henry James belongs to the class of English eccentrics -- Carlyle, Meredith, Browning -- who force language to do what it cannot do naturally and easily. The resulting verbal acrobatics are wonderful, but, in the end, they become tiresome to watch, and the fashion of them perisheth."

⁶⁰ Bissell, op. cit., pp. vii-viii.

⁶¹ D.G. Rossetti's phrase concerning the prerequisite for artistic creation.

⁶² A former student of MacMechan's, Miss Edith Creighton, and a colleague, Professor C.L. Bennet, have both quoted him as frequently repeating "Verify your references" or variants of the same phrase.

⁶³ Again, this was a stock phrase, and one former student of MacMechan's, Dr. J.P.C. Fraser (Class of 1921), particularly recalls hearing MacMechan use it.

⁶⁴ DW, December 10, 1927.

⁶⁵ DW, April 12, 1919.

⁶⁶ DW, November 15, 1924.

⁶⁷ Sara Jeannette (Duncan) Cotes, letter to Archibald MacMechan, May 4, 1905.

⁶⁸ DW, November 15, 1919.

⁶⁹ Olive Schreiner, The Story of an African Farm (London: Collins, 1953), pp. 15-16.

⁷⁰ DW, April 19, 1919.

⁷¹ DW, March 7, 1908.

⁷² DW, March 21, 1914.

⁷³ George J. Becker, ed., Documents of Modern Literary Realism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 23-34.

⁷⁴ Becker, 34.

⁷⁵ MacMechan, private journals, October 3, 1894.

⁷⁶ Max MacOdrum, who taught with MacMechan in 1928-29, said in a letter to MacMechan [undated, c. 1926], that his father, a Presbyterian minister, had called MacMechan "the most spiritual man [he had] ever known." MacMechan's journals record his regular church attendance, as does a memorial plaque to MacMechan at Fort Massey beside the pew in which he customarily sat.

77 DW, June 19, 1926.

78 DW, July 27, 1912.

79 DW, May 8, 1931. In this review he speaks of having met Bennett in London in the summer of 1911.

80 DW, September 15, 1917.

81 DW, March 5, 1932.

82 See especially, in Chapter II, his attitudes to modernist poetry.

83 DW, April 5, 1930.

84 DW, May 26, 1917.

85 DW, December 18, 1915.

86 DW, October 4, 1915.

87 DW, October 4, 1915.

88 DW, July 30, 1921.

89 See, for example, Headwaters, p. 138.

90 DW, February 13, 1926. This image of a bell jar is an interesting one: it anticipates a mood of exhaustion and a feeling of claustrophobia common to twentieth-century writers. Perhaps the most striking instance of its use has been in Sylvia Plath's thinly-veiled autobiographical novel entitled The Bell Jar. With Plath, surely, the tendency to an extreme form of the literary sensibility has come to a culmination. See A. Alvarez, The Savage God (London: Methuen, 1972), for an extended consideration of this topic.

91 DW, May 1, 1926.

92 DW, August 15, 1925.

93 DW, May 29, 1926.

94 Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682), English medical doctor, author of Religio Medici.

95 Sir William Osler (1849-1919), physician and author. As Osler was on the Faculty of Medicine at Johns Hopkins University from 1889 to 1905, possibly Osler and MacMechan met there.

96 Dr. John Brown (1810-82), Scottish physician and author of Horae Subsecivae (Vol. I [1858]; Vol. II [1861]; Vol. III [1882]). "Rab and his Friends" appears in Vol. II.

⁹⁷ John McCrae (1872-1918), pathologist at McGill University and author of "In Flanders Fields", originally published in Punch in 1915. A posthumous collection of his verse, In Flanders Fields and Other Poems (1919), was printed with an appreciation by Sir Andrew MacPhail.

⁹⁸ William Henry Drummond (1854-1907). Born in Ireland, educated at McGill and Bishop's University, he practised medicine in rural Quebec. From his familiarity with the French-Canadian idiom he wrote his most popular poems, for example, The Habitant and other French Canadian Poems (1897).

⁹⁹ Sir Andrew MacPhail (1864-1938) practised medicine in Montreal, served as a medical officer in the First World War, and was Professor of the History of Medicine at McGill from 1907 to 1937. He became editor of The University Magazine in 1907 and was a personal friend of MacMechan's as well as a co-editor of the Magazine until it ceased publication in 1920.

¹⁰⁰ DW, July 17, 1926.

¹⁰¹ DW, June 6, 1925.

¹⁰² William Lyon Phelps, ed., Collected Poems of James Whitcomb Riley (New York: Triangle, 1931), p. vii.

¹⁰³ Matthew Arnold, The Portable Matthew Arnold, edited by Lionel Trilling (New York: The Viking Press, 1960), pp. 186-187.

¹⁰⁴ MacMechan speaks of Stevenson often enough to call him either Tusitala or to abbreviate his name to "R.L.S.". This tendency to abbreviation, which sometimes led to esoteric and obscure references, has been remarked upon by C.L. Bennet, private letter, April 20, 1976.

¹⁰⁵ DW, June 19, 1926.

¹⁰⁶ DW, December 4, 1926.

¹⁰⁷ DW, March 5, 1932.

¹⁰⁸ DW, June 22, 1929.

¹⁰⁹ Alfred B. Harbage, A Kind of Power: The Shakespeare-Dickens Analogy (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1975), p. 71.

¹¹⁰ In fact, mindless optimism is one of his chief accusations against J.D. Logan (DW, February 9, 1907).

¹¹¹ See Chapter II, pp. 88-89

¹¹² Reprinted in Appendix G.

¹¹³ See DW, January 30, 1932 and March 4, 1933.

¹¹⁴ Private Journal, June 30, 1933; DW, August 5, 1933.

¹¹⁵ DW, August 5, 1933.

- 116 DW, December 10, 1927.
- 117 DW, April 12, 1913. Joseph Surface is a malicious hypocrite in R.B. Sheridan's School for Scandal, the elder brother of Charles.
- 118 DW, November 13, 1915.
- 119 DW, January 10, 1925.
- 120 DW, February 14, 1925.
- 121 DW, June 18, 1928.
- 122 DW, November 10, 1923.
- 123 DW, y 5, 1928.
- 124 Barker Fairley, "Student Days", The Canadian Forum (September, 1976), p. 28.
- 125 See above, Chapter I. C.L. Bennet has said flatly "Remember, MacMechan was a Victorian" (Letter, July, 1976).
- 126 Virginia Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", in The Captain's Deathbed and Other Essays (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1950), p. 6.
- 127 Calvin Bedient, Architects of the Self (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 4.
- 128 John P. Matthews, Tradition in Exile (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962).
- 129 DW, November 15, 1919.
- 130 DW, March 12, 1921.
- 131 DW, November 19, 1932.
- 132 This is MacMechan's word. See DW, October 22, 1921.
- 133 DW, April 13, 1932.
- ✓ 134 His description of himself. DW, January 3, 1920.
- 135 Northrop Frye, "Culture and the National Will" (Convocation Address at Carleton University, 1957), in Elizabeth Waterston and Munro Beattie, Composition for Canadian Universities (Toronto: Macmillan, 1964), p. 296.
- 136 Gordon Roper, Rupert Schieder and S. Ross Beharriell, "The Kinds of Fiction: 1880-1920", in Carl Klinck, gen. ed., Literary History of Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 285.

Chapter IV

MacMechan as Essayist

The term "essay" carries an apology with it. The author tacitly declares: "I offer nothing complete; the treatment of my theme is not exhaustive, I put forward only fragments, hardly more worth acceptance than hasty memoranda, hints and material to be treated more fully at some future time.... All true essayists stud their works with "I's". Instead of employing the royal, magnificent editorial we, which seems to include the universe, but puts the reader at such a distance, or the careful omission of all personal reference... "the reader is admitted behind the curtain and sits down with the writer in his gown and slippers."¹

In his own day, MacMechan's place in Canadian letters rested largely on his various forms of essay-writing. This area of his work, combined with his writings as a critic, constitutes his main legacy to Canadian literary history.² Among MacMechan's contemporaries Lorne Pierce, for example, cites him as notable among Canadian essayists:

[W.H.] Blake, Sir Andrew MacPhail and MacMechan ... come nearest to the real essay...the easy inconsequence, grace, charm, sophistication and personal intimacy of the letter are all found in the essay, which may be defined as an epistle to the world of kindred spirits at large.... The successful essay is a touchstone of urbanity, and only comes after long standing in the oak. Good talk sparkles and has a rich bouquet, the essay is that.³

Sir Charles G.D. Roberts, who was familiar with MacMechan's writing from the association of the two men on The Week, wrote in 1929 "I consider you our best...essayist, -- perhaps the best Canadian master of English prose."⁴ Even MacMechan's opponent and harshest critic, J.D. Logan, conceded that MacMechan was, in the context of Canadian literature, "an unsurpassed writer of the light essay"⁵.

MacMechan's life-long interest in essay-writing and in the essay as a form can be traced throughout his writings. He often writes of the essay, demonstrating his critical appreciation of the genre.⁶ It is obvious from even a cursory glance at his bibliography that the essay form was most congenial to him as an original writer; throughout his life

he wrote essays of various types, and some of his finest work, as well as some of his earliest, consists of essays. Some of these early pieces appeared in The Week.⁷ Brandon Conron points to MacMechan's unique position as a contributor to this periodical when he writes that "of all the contributors to The Week, only Archibald MacMechan...deserves the title of 'essayist'" and goes on to describe MacMechan's qualities:

Like the Victorian writers in whom MacMechan took more than the scholarly interest demanded by his position at Dalhousie University, he was the heir of the Romantics. The Dreamer, the agent of MacMechan's fancy, transforms purely descriptive pieces into whimsical reveries celebrating the fresh innocent beauty of nature, art, and woman. MacMechan's romanticism, however, is never escapism. Words order and control his experience, and create a formal if fanciful pattern to fix "golden days in memory" for the enrichment "of less happier times to come"...The simplicity and restraint of the style, on the one hand, and the luxuriousness of the subject-matter, on the other, combine best in pieces like "Ghosts," "The Fence-Corner," and "My Own Country," where a fresh and distinctive lyricism reveals an imaginative but not unreal world of infinite delights for the thoughtful observer.

The period in which MacMechan did most of his essay writing -- the years between 1890 and 1920 -- has been characterized by J.B. Priestley, himself an outstanding essayist, as a time of renaissance in the writing of essays:

It was a great time...for the essay and the literature of travel. The essayists -- Chesterton, Belloc, E.V. Lucas, Alice Maynell, Augustine Birrell, G.S. Street, to name the first that come to mind -- might turn up anywhere, sometimes regularly in a popular newspaper, for there was plenty of space for essays, and somehow plenty of time for them to be carefully written and then slowly enjoyed. (I often wonder what we do with all the time we have saved by using time-saving devices -- just sit around giggling over gins-and-tonics?)

Elsewhere, Priestley points out that "the history of the English essay is inextricably entwined with the history of the periodical. Since there have been papers and magazines to write for, all our chief essayists have been 'periodical writers'." These comments surely apply to

MacMechan. Written chiefly before the outbreak of the First World War, his essays reflect a life that was changed radically after 1914. The world of which he writes, with its leisurely pace and its opportunities for reveries, is a world one thinks of as Edwardian.¹¹ To a great extent, it was the external world that changed after the war, but as well MacMechan himself naturally matured, abandoning in the process many of the characteristic qualities of his early essays: the dreaminess, the effusive sentimentality, the idealism, are either absent or considerably modified in MacMechan's later writings.

Before one turns to the essays themselves, it is important to establish the type of writing MacMechan's essays represent. To quote J.B. Priestley once more, the term "essay" is quite nebulous. He cites Sir Edmund Gosse's definition (from the Encyclopedia Britannica) of the essay: "a form of literature, the essay is a composition of moderate length, usually in prose, which deals in an easy, cursory way with the external conditions of a subject, and, in strictness, with that subject only as it affects the writer".¹² Priestley goes on to point to de Quincy's distinction between the Literature of Knowledge and the Literature of Power, indicating that

"the true essay belongs to the latter class.... We might as well banish the term "essayist" entirely unless we realize that neither [Jeffrey nor Macaulay] was an essayist. One was a literary critic, the other a literary critic and historian. Their work belongs to the Literature of Knowledge.... the essay is the kind of composition produced by an essayist.... Actually we do know what is meant by an essayist, whereas the term "essay" is so elastic that it means nothing".¹³

A Canadian scholar, in compiling an anthology of essays by Canadian authors, concludes his brief historical account of the personal essay as it has grown from Montaigne through Abraham Cowley, Charles Lamb, and Robert Louis Stevenson with the observation that "a good case might be made for the claim that the past thirty or forty years [from 1890 to 1920] constitute a "Golden Age" for the English essay" and goes on to

offer a tentative definition of the personal essay:

To sum up...the characteristics of the personal essay include: a distinctly personal note -- something of the reverie; emphasis on mood, rather than title, as a cementing force; urbanity -- a suggestion of retirement from the forum; literary quality and style, and usually some measure, at least, of wit and humour.¹⁵

These five criteria of the personal essay might well be borne in mind when one considers MacMechan's essay-writing.

MacMechan's main collections of essays are to be found in three volumes: The Porter of Bagdad and Other Fantasies (1901), The Life of a Little College (1914), and The Book of Ultima Thule (1927). Throughout the three volumes, it is evident that for MacMechan the essay functioned as a suitable vehicle for combining fact and imagination. The essay allowed him the free-play of the imagination (or more accurately, perhaps, that of the secondary, fantasizing power of Coleridge's definition¹⁶) over a given topic. His ideal essay was of the kind written by Montaigne or Lamb, rather than by Bacon or Matthew Arnold.¹⁷ He wrote of Arnold's essays, for example, that "their length, their bellicosity, and their didacticism are against them. They are separate campaigns, battles, skirmishes, single combats, episodes in his life-long warfare against Philistines."¹⁸ Partisan zeal is not among the qualities MacMechan apparently saw as suitable for the personal essay, and this quality is certainly absent from his own description of the life he has chosen. What he says (previously quoted in Chapter III) in 1911 on the subject bears on his own essay-writing:

How few are the wants of the bookman! A table, a chair, a book, paper, and ink -- give him these and he can be happy. To think, to range one's thoughts in order, winning a little, well-made world out of the chaos of thick-coming fancies, to fix them for yourself and for others by the magic of black marks on white paper, is a joy that never palls.¹⁹

From this description of a writer's life it is possible to discern some of the qualities that are to be found in MacMechan's own writings, particularly in his essays. These qualities might include a certain philosophic calm and detachment, an attempt to glean something lasting from an active mind, the delight in the exercise of that mind, and the ultimate sharing of the mind's creations in a manner which suggests an epistolary connection with other minds. In his sense of nostalgia and in his perception of homely matters, MacMechan is often akin to the "gentle" Elia. Indeed, in various essays he adopts several persona of gentle -- often humble -- natures: "The dreamer", "The Summer Boarder", "Grizzlebeard" are a few such examples. Overall, the outstanding qualities of his essays are his breadth of topic (like Bacon, in this respect, MacMechan often appears to "take all knowledge as his province"): he asserts that "like Terence's slave, I count nothing human alien to me" and this claim is reflected in a number of his essays. The classical background he brings to his subject matter is also a remarkable feature of the essays, as is his weltanschauung, which ranges in time from past to present and back again. Finally, perhaps, one might isolate MacMechan's seeming leisure for expatiating on topics for the sheer love of doing so, as well as the philosophical, tentative approach that allows him to toy with ideas.

The essay form seems especially congenial to MacMechan's temperament, for in it he is able to combine scholarly accuracy and a personal, even dreamy style. It is worth observing here that it is in the essay form that MacMechan seems most at ease as an original artist. His poetry and his sketches are other examples of an original, artistic impulse that never really seems to find adequate expression. The essay form seems to be the most useful device he could find for celebrating his love of his adopted province, Nova Scotia. In his essays dealing with Nova Scotia,

MacMechan is able to combine historical fact with evocative detail of his own so as to produce his mythical land, Ultima Thule. The essays on this topic are possibly his most original and lasting contribution to the extensive writing about Nova Scotia he undertook in the course of his forty-four years in the province.

The Porter of Bagdad and Other Fantasies (1901) is a collection of his earliest essays. It demonstrates, nevertheless, some of the characteristics that also appear in his later essays. Among these is his idealism, particularly as related to women. Women form the topic of at least half the essays in the collection in their roles of mother, mentor, friend, lover, wife. While one might attribute such an emphasis in the collection to the tendency of late-Victorian literature to idealise women, in MacMechan's case the tendency is undoubtedly augmented by his feelings for his own mother, who died in 1870 in childbirth, when MacMechan was eight years old. In his journals he regularly recorded the anniversary of her death, April 13, with various comments on the terrible disruption that her death had caused in his own life, and he is unable to refer to her without emotion. In The Porter, both subject and author are often idealized figures: the author (often named "The Dreamer") is characterized as a poetic, which is to say unworldly, youthful, impressionable, sensitive, and rather gauche man who is chivalric in his treatment of women. "Mrs. Lily Sweetwick's Coffee" exemplifies this sort of essay. The women, in turn, are Rossetti-like Fair Ladies to whom the writer accords a kind of courtly love. This stylization and archaic effect are extended to the diction of some of the pieces, particularly "The Lake" and "In the Cherry Orchard", where "thee", "like unto", "demesne", and other archaisms create a Pre-Raphaelite atmosphere.

Another ideal common to these essays is Friendship, which MacMechan exalts to its classic form as epitomized by David and Jonathan. "Fantasia: Riding", "The Ghost of a Garden", and "Bess" all celebrate various forms of friendship, and speak of friends in highly charged, heightened language. A good example of this tendency is the following passage from "Fantasia: Riding":

Why it is, I cannot know, but here in the stillness of my study the face of a friend rises, wearing the well-remembered quiet smile, the measured tones of his even voice seem sounding in my ears. It does not matter that at the present moment we are seated at the extremities of a continent, as at the ends of a Cyclopean see-saw. The thought of his face has brought back even the familiar aspect of every place his presence used to fill, our old haunts that we shall never see again. The thought of him unites us instantly. Rivers of a thousand miles, high mountain ridges, wide inland seas and prairies ocean-like, shrink in a lightning flash to a compass narrower than the slightest of these pen strokes.²⁵

Here the nostalgia and the depth of the friendship are intensified by the extravagance of the diction. This passage is also a conspicuous example of MacMechan's passionate idealism, notable in many of these youthful essays but prominent in much of his writing throughout his life. Also evident in this passage is a mood of melancholy. From previous chapters, we have noted such a mood as typical of MacMechan. An entry in his journal for July 30, 1920, reveals the characteristic mood:

It was a magnificent moonlight night, with some sea running. I watched the curious liquid-metal effects and thought how four minutes beneath its surface would teach me the great secret. Byron's line about the graves of empires heave like passing waves came to mind.

This mood is frequently perceptible in the essays in The Porter of Bagdad.
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 As we have seen above, the essays in the book go back to his early writing in The Week chiefly in the years between 1892 and 1895 and so,

as one might expect, they occasionally reflect a youthful, "romantic" morbidity. "On the Selection of Epitaphs", which originally appeared in The Week of January 22, 1892, is a case in point. The following paragraph establishes the tone of the essay:

The strongest reasons for choosing our epitaphs early in life is [sic] that only by so doing can we hope in any measure to deserve them. Only after long years of strenuous endeavour could we dare to have placed above our crumbling dust the legend of what we hoped and agonized to be and do. Only after long and severe trial could we deserve to have the painful story of failure and disappointment blotted out, and our small measure of actual attainment made enduring in stone or metal.

Here we see an oblique exhortation to the Carlylean fulfillment of Duty and Work, couched in a mood similar to that of some of Donne's sermons. The pervasive sense of human mortality is common to much that he writes. For instance, in a scrapbook beside a pressed flower, a lily, he writes

"The hand that gave me the lily is dust, and so that lily is sacred." 28

MacMechan's journals record, often in considerable detail, the deaths of friends: rarely does he neglect a reference to himself in noting them; and a typical entry reads "Thus does Death come nearer and nearer to me, in narrowing swoops". Phrases like "How beautiful the world would seem if one were viewing it for the first time -- or the last!" are characteristic of him, and meditations on death are typical of his writing, both private and public, throughout his life. His notice of Andrew Lang's death in "The Dean's Window", August 3, 1912, is typical:

It is very hard indeed to realize that Andrew Lang is dead. Only the other day he was just beginning to be heard of in the little world of classical scholars as a translator of Homer in partnership with Leaf and Dutcher. To Canadian college men of thirty years ago, his was a name of freshness and power. At sixty-eight, he did not seem old. There was no symptom of age in his thinking or his style. He was in the full tide of production, and had plans for adding to the immense mass of excellent work which bears his

name. And now he is gone. Death came suddenly and unexpectedly after an illness of a few hours. Johnson's great lines on Levett apply almost exactly to his case.

Then with no throbs of fiery pain,
 No cold gradations of decay,
 Death broke at once the vital chain,
 And freed his soul the nearest way.
 It is a good way to pass out of life.

It is also prophetic, for this was how he, too, died.

An essay in The Porter of Bagdad that is interesting from a number of viewpoints is "Bess", a meditation on a friendship between a child and a somewhat pedantic older man. MacMechan was consistently interested in children, particularly in children's literature, as a glance through the columns of "The Dean's Window" will reveal. Among the books he considered at some length are those of A.A. Milne, L.M. Montgomery, and, of course, Lewis Carroll: Alice in Wonderland is the topic of extended treatment in one of the essays in The Life of a Little

College. One of his comments on the children depicted by E. Nesbit in The Railway Children gives us a glimpse of what MacMechan considered wholesome in children -- namely, an innocent spontaneity: "They are thoroughly natural human children, not little prigs or monsters of goodness." Part of MacMechan's appreciation of the "naturalness"

of children stemmed from his attraction to spontaneity and honesty. He apparently perceived these qualities as strikingly absent in many "pedants", as he called various professors and teachers. The contrast between the two types, as exemplified by child and old man in "Bess", is central to the essay. In another essay in this volume, "On Names", he draws the same contrast between simplicity and a form of pedantry in a gently ironic way: "The Visitor was one of those misguided persons who spoil their eyesight poring over books. As a consequence he was very ignorant; he did not know the names of the flowers:" Granted

that he is being ironic here, nevertheless he makes the same sort of comment often enough for one to assume that he disliked and somewhat distrusted the overly intellectual who had cut themselves off from the natural world.

Another of MacMechan's chief topics in The Porter of Bagdad is love and lovers, whom he idealizes for their faithfulness and loyalty to each other. One of MacMechan's final essays, and one which was widely printed, entitled "Old Lovers" (1930), deals with the theme of love between man and wife as it continues throughout a life-time, mellowing in the process. The Brownings and the Tennysons were for him two examples of such love, but the essay is also thinly disguised autobiography: "Archie and Edie", as the MacMechans were familiarly known (though not to their faces), were famous for their devotion to each other.

In a letter to D.C. Harvey, MacMechan indicates some of his feelings on marriage: "A man should marry. From what you have told me, I infer that yours was what a marriage should be -- young, not too prudent (from a worldly point of view) and the consummation of faithful waiting.

Like my own, in fact." Love and lovers form a subject which permits MacMechan ample scope to indulge his unabashed penchant for sentimentality.

When he writes about young love, his evocation of nostalgia tends to shade into the maudlin. (He is capable of a phrase such as "one of the saddest tragedies that ever happened".) "A Green Ribbon" in The Porter of Bagdad

is typical of this sort of writing. In this essay, MacMechan displays his taste for melodrama, his rather moralistic tendencies in referring to "the black sheep of the family", and his love of pathos -- the unrequited love of a faithful young man is given elaborate treatment by the author. "Northern River" is also a celebration of love and lovers, but

this essay ends on a positive note in that it is hopeful of their love's continuance. "Three Pictures" is a word-painting of three famous pairs of lovers, each pair caught at a dramatic moment in their history. Here, MacMechan reveals a painter's eye. "Three Pictures" seems to be modelled on the technique Pre-Raphaelite painters such as Holman Hunt, for example, used in pictures like "The Awakening Conscience". Such didactic message-paintings were staples of Victorian households and, one assumes, influenced MacMechan's perceptions considerably. His description of one of the "subjects" is characteristically Victorian in its love of pathos, its vicarious sentiment, and its moral content:

The bright sunshine strikes along her neck and breast making their whiteness like snow, and tingeing her brown hair with gold. He stands like a tower with his sun-browned face close to the fairness of hers. Over them and around them there is the strength of the arch, the strongest thing man's brain devises, or his hand fashions. At their back is the cloudless blue of heaven, and beyond, a glimpse of the sea with its restless power, and the living rock in its abiding majesty. They are bathed in sunshine, and there is no hint of change in themselves or their surroundings; the brightness is without a shadow. There is sadness enough in life, we all know, but still, thank God, it is sweetened from time to time by sights such as the artist has immortalized in this noble picture.⁴⁰

In this essay it is unclear whether MacMechan is describing an actual or imaginary picture of the typical late-Victorian kind: the emblematic features of the picture -- blue sky, living rock, arch -- are typical of such Victorian pictures with a message, and MacMechan is typically Victorian in his didactic explication. Discernable also in this essay is another quality that many of the essays in The Porter of Bagdad have in common and that it is possible to isolate as their common denominator -- their romantic sense of longing for things remote in time and place.

One of MacMechan's frequently quoted phrases is "infinite passion and the pain of finite hearts that yearn";⁴¹ his expression of this sense can often lead to sentimentality, but in these essays it is frequently expressed as a carefully controlled sense of lacrimae rerum. "The Ghost of a Garden" is such an example. So, too, is the final essay in the book, "The Paradise of Voices", in which MacMechan employs a wise passiveness, a nostalgic sense of past time, and some vivid descriptive passages to create one of the most powerful essays of the collection. In "Comrade Wind" he treats the theme of the wind in an effective manner, the image of the wind becoming increasingly definite and sinister until the climactic ending of the essay. "Comrade Wind" possesses qualities perceptible in many of MacMechan's familiar essays, the opening mood of dreamy longing modulating to a certain sense of the tears in the nature of things combined with a sort of exhilaration in the face of Fate that is analogous to the mood of Browning's poem "Prospice".⁴² "The Ghost of a Garden" and "The Paradise of Voices" merit special attention, for they exemplify MacMechan's controlled mood of longing sustained and given definite form.

The most successful of the essays in The Porter of Bagdad, at least in terms of current taste, would probably be his meditations on themes -- for example, "On the Selection of Epitaphs" or "The Dip in the Road". The latter begins with an authoritative Baconian sentence:

"Our nature is so full of affection that if we cannot find a fellow-being to love, we will make close companions of the faithful, dumb brutes."⁴³

MacMechan goes from this observation to an expansion of the theme and a carefully detailed record of a walk he took each day. This rather homely topic is embellished by the care and enthusiasm with which he has undertaken the walk; his familiarity with the subject and his attention to detail

make this one of his most compelling essays, simply in terms of its unpretentious, unsentimental meditation on a simple topic made interesting by a nearly scientific detachment of observation, coupled with a freely ranging mind which brings to this humble topic a wealth of learning and reflection.

Day after day, at the same hour you pass along and almost unconsciously, learn every foot of the way, till you miss a pebble out of its place and know when a weed has its stem broken. And however commonplace it may seem by daylight, nothing can be more eerie than this fading track of ghostly dust in the noiseless, moonless summer night. The landscape on both sides of the way has sunk out of sight in impenetrable darkness, and you seem to be walking on the very rim of the world and rolling the round ball of it under your feet. Its aspect is changing continually, -- the rain, under the burning sun, when the snow comes and the earliest flowering weeds. You understand the procession of Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter, better for observing their march across something fixed, limited and having the mathematical quality of a straight line.⁴⁴

This passage is reminiscent of Thoreau's Walden in its extrapolation of the eternal and the infinite from a well-known and seemingly insignificant subject. That there should be echoes of Thoreau in MacMechan's work is more than a remote possibility, for MacMechan speaks of Thoreau quite often, most formally in his "Thoreau" entry in the Cambridge History of American Literature.

Possibly the most significant aspect of the essays in The Porter of  both in terms of biographical interest and of MacMechan's development as a writer, is what might be termed his free-floating impressionism in describing landscape. Much of the landscape in these essays is generalized, idealized, and unspecific, one does not receive an impression of a particular area accurately described. ("The Dip in the Road" is obviously one of the few exceptions to this observation.)

In this respect, these essays differ radically from those in The Book of Ultima Thule, and the difference might be attributed to a combination of factors. Primarily, one might note his youthful idealism and love of fantasy which create an effect of blurring, in that he seems to be creating an ideal world, often by means of archaic diction that tends to remove his subject matter from the realm of the familiar and mundane. In these essays, however, some of his later affinities are suggested.

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His love of country, for example, anticipates his later, vehement patriotism while at the same time the vagueness of outline suggests that he has an ideal country in mind. Seemingly, this ideal country took on form for him as Nova Scotia. The province was of the kind to stimulate his imagination: its combination of historical background and a physical beauty with configurations which were particularly appealing to him made Nova Scotia a landscape that became for him a type of literary landscape, endowed with mythical significance. It is of this perception that W.J. Alexander appears to speak when, in a letter to MacMechan, he mentions "the charm of the Maritime Provinces which you especially feel and of which you have so successfully written." MacMechan's apprehension of this charm is conspicuous in his review of a book entitled Highways and Byways of the Mississippi Valley (1906):-

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As you look at the pictures, you think of Miss Ophelia's characterization of the South, "How shiftless!" and you contrast this sprawling, slovenly, sloppy, squalid country with the great wheat lands and ranches of our west, the thrifty farms and cities of populous Ontario, the south bank of the St. Lawrence, like one great village with the shining church-spires and grey convent walls everywhere, the lovely valley of the St. John, little Prince Edward Island, the "Garden of the Gulf", the orchards of the Annapolis Valley, and the white fisher-huts along the Nova Scotia shores, and you thank God for your heritage.⁴⁷

MacMechan's early essays seem to lack focus in that quite often their settings seem to be unspecific and unlocalized. This, as much as

anything, contributes to their dreamy, sentimental effect. An interesting example of this early style is to be found in "The Idyll of a Northern River". The "northernness" is not specified -- it is unclear whether the far north is meant or simply a river north of something "south". From its very title one can perceive some of its incongruities: the diction, including an "idyll" reminiscent of Tennyson, seems somehow out of place in a river to the north. The idyll involves a lovers' tryst in a canoe on the river, or, in MacMechan's phrase, "our gondola is a cedar canoe".⁴⁸ The two lovers might be characters in any medievalized romance. The lover pays homage to a rather aloof Lady: "no argosy every held more precious lading: for the freight is Castara, the Lady of All Delights."⁴⁹ At one point in the essay, the Lady exclaims over a particularly placid piece of landscape that apparently reminds her of an English landscape as painted by John Constable, for she exclaims "Look at the Constable!"⁵⁰

"Look at the Constable!" cries Castara, suddenly breaking the delicious silence, and her eyes brighten, as she points to the opposite bank. I stop the canoe in the cool shadow of the bluff which we are passing and we look across the brown water at Castara's picture -- a vast expanse of blue sky, wind-driven white clouds, field after field of fertile land stretching to the distant horizon, in the foreground a little hillock sloping with a gradual curve to the water; rushes, golden-rod, in the centre, a sleek-hided cow, white and brown, up to her knees in the stream, and other cattle seen more remote. The name of the picture is "Peace"; so, at least, Castara and I read the title.

Here MacMechan appears to be writing in the colonial vein so often exemplified in early Canadian literature, in which the landscape is seen through the eyes of a native of the Old World.⁵¹ The point is worth making here, for it is interesting to see how MacMechan's perceptions alter in the course of a lifetime as a Canadian. Two of his most conspicuous utterances bear on the phenomenon of colonial writing: one occurs in the introduction to his selection of Tennyson's poems,

where he comments on the "exotic" nature of Tennyson's poetry for non-English readers, and the other is his extrapolation of this one, that "a country comes into existence only as it is written about".⁵²

It is interesting, and curious, to observe how, in his own work, MacMechan's final position as an emphatically nationalistic writer evolves over the course of his lifetime.⁵³ The Porter of Bagdad, then, is an interesting collection of essays in terms of the fitful attempts made in it to write what he later calls "nativist" literature. In this respect, it serves almost as a foil for The Book of Ultima Thule.

To summarize, one might characterize the essays in The Porter of Bagdad as imitative of late nineteenth-century neo-romanticism in England, particularly of the style designated as "Pre-Raphaelite".⁵⁴ MacMechan's essays reflect this influence in their subject matter, chiefly in their treatment of women and idealized qualities, and in their style, the use of archaic diction and highly stylized settings. However, it is possible to discern in these essays qualities apparent in much of MacMechan's later writing. For one thing, the tone is common to much of his writing -- a mood of melancholy peculiarly his own identifies these early essays as his. For another, these essays express a type of idealism that MacMechan's later writing retains. His belief in ideals and qualities that lift people out of their pettiness is a consistent aspect of his writing, and is possibly part of what contributed to his force as a teacher, making at least one student regard him as his "spiritual father".⁵⁵ Finally, these essays demonstrate his love of landscape and the out-of-doors; his frequent references to walking and the meditative activity walking can engender are features of much of his work.⁵⁶ The undefined, unspecific references to a favorite bit of landscape are the germ of what later becomes his very specific and articulate love of a particular province.

The essays collected as The Life of a Little College (1914) are concerned, as the title suggests, with matters of particular interest to academics. Many of them, however, also have appeal for the general reader. Generally, the essays in this volume are more scholarly, more sophisticated, and more recondite than those in The Porter of Bagdad. Many have to do with academic subjects, particularly with literature — "Tennyson as Artist", "Virgil", "Everybody's Alice" on Alice in Wonderland, and MacMechan's best-known scholarly and critical essay, "The Best Sea-Story Ever Written", on Moby Dick. Another kind of essay in the collection bears on literature and its connexion with history as pursued by an amateur historian. An example is "Evangeline and the Real Acadians", in which MacMechan writes of the impressive empirical results obtained from "telling a story to a literary man". He refers to Longfellow's Evangeline here, which, he notes, is remarkable in that Longfellow had only heard the story of the expulsion of the Acadians and had never visited the land in which the action occurred. Elsewhere in the book, MacMechan expands on his interest in history, an interest which becomes more pronounced in his later writings. "History is largely a matter of right perception into the real nature and true proportions of things", he writes, and this "perception", particularly into the "true proportions of things", offers MacMechan a basis, evident in much of his writing, of philosophic detachment in a pursuit of truth in which his interests in history, philosophy, and literature often dovetail. Two essays in this collection — "The Life of a Little College" and "The Vanity of Travel" (surely influenced by Dr. Johnson's Vanity of Human Wishes), are two examples of the less formal, more personal essay of the kind appearing in The Porter of Bagdad.

In The Life of a Little College a number of MacMechan's overlapping interests emerge. His essay on Tennyson, for example, brings together his scholarly work on the poet and some observations on the English-ness of Tennyson's poetry, a point which, as we have seen, becomes important to MacMechan's critical theory when he comes to write on Canadian literature. From the essay on Tennyson one is able to trace the beginnings of MacMechan's ideas on cultural nationalism. In his ideas on the necessity of a writer's rootedness in a particular place, MacMechan here anticipates a more recent critic who has observed that

universally appealing literature does not seek to deny its own cultural roots. On the contrary, it appeals most widely when the writer reaches most deeply into the life of his own place and time, and finds the universal where his spiritual roots plunge into their native soil.⁵⁹

This example is but one instance of the merging of MacMechan's interests and ideas to be seen in this volume. Throughout the collection MacMechan is capable of offering a casual remark that is very suggestive of his position more broadly. For instance, in the same essay he remarks "university systems...are calculated for the average, not for the exceptional, academic person".⁶⁰ One tends to wonder if this is the mature reflection on his experience of the "American" system as he knew it at Johns Hopkins and of a certain "grind" quality to the learning process.⁶¹ Possibly, too, it is a reference to the narrowness of specialization that MacMechan sees developing in the American-influenced university system of Canada.⁶²

From the topic suggested by his comment one might also infer something of his views of elaborate literary criticism. He deals with this phenomenon to some extent in 'Everybody's Alice', where he suggests facetiously that with "three more decades of such swift and sweeping

changes...the book will need footnotes and explanations", speaking here of the "ordeal of Higher Criticism", and going on to say "who knows but some day a Doctor of Philosophy may edit it with various Prologomena and complete apparatus criticus; or some Oxford man get his research degree by a thesis on it." Critics, even those of the Oxford stamp, apparently fail to impress him. Also, his prescience is remarkable here, as The Annotated Alice attests. Possibly this passage would indicate that he expected Germanic-American methods of scholarship to infiltrate even the British system, for elsewhere in his writing, and in the Little College essays, he makes clear his criticism of a specifically American mode of scholarship. In his essay "Virgil" which is in some respects a reworking of his Vergil: a Lecture (1897), he offers further criticism of the American system of education. In the essay he is concerned to show the relation of Virgil to English literature, but not "English" in a narrow sense -- his nationalistic bias is evident when he says that he "speak/s/ as a Canadian to Canadians":

...the English tradition of élegant classical scholarship has never really taken root in this country, and the study of Greek and Latin literature has had to make head against the crude democratic demand for immediate utility, which means for an educational article which can be, as soon as possible, turned into dollars and cents. The cause of education in our country could hardly be better served than by leavening our Canadian schools with some scores of Oxford men. This is, of course, easier said than done. The healthy Canadian youth objects to being patronized; the Oxonian is a delicate exotic /note that word, applied earlier to Tennyson's poetry, again used here/, hard to acclimatize; and above all, first class men are few. The happiest solution would be obtaining Canadian teachers with English training. ⁶⁴

His view here is obviously biased in favor of the English system with its tutors over the "crude, democratic process" that leads to assembly-line "American" education.

Perhaps the most important essay in the book, certainly the one for which MacMechan is most widely recognized as a critic to-day, is his essay on Moby Dick. This essay has two main points of significance for us. They are, first, the indication offered by the essay of MacMechan's independence of judgment, and second, the foreshadowing in the essay of MacMechan's affinity for aspects of the book that were later to become obvious to other critics -- namely, its rhetorical sweep, its accuracy of description of life at sea, and its creation of the microcosmic world of the Pequod. The essay is primarily an appreciative effusion over the qualities MacMechan literally "discovered" in Moby Dick, for as we have

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seen from previous chapters, MacMechan's appreciation of the novel antedates general critical recognition by over two decades. Moby Dick is primarily, of course, a sea story, and such stories never failed to delight MacMechan. His knowledge of such literature is demonstrated in this essay as he compares the sea-stories of Marryat, Smollett, and

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Dana. Then too, Melville's recording of detail was an aspect of the book's interest for him -- he calls Moby Dick the "encyclopaedia of whaling". The other characteristics of the book, its poetic sweep, appealed almost equally to him: "this book is at once the epic and the encyclopaedia of whaling". He reiterates the zest and swing he finds in it: "Melville is a Walt Whitman of prose, Moby Dick is large in idea, expansive; it has an Elizabethan force and freshness and swing, and is, perhaps, more rich in figures than any style but Emerson's". All these features add up to "convince us that the whaler's business is 'poetic'". What he fails to identify as "Carlylean rhetoric" but which other critics have called that was surely also appealing to him, considering his life-long love of Carlyle, especially as exemplified by what became the definitive critical edition of Sartor Resartus.

In this essay MacMechan also mentioned the metaphysical element in the novel, claiming that this feature "shows the natural bent of the Scot towards metaphysics... this thoughtfulness is one pervading quality of Melville's books". This, however, is not an aspect of the novel with which he is particularly at ease. As he himself says in another essay in Life of a Little College, "I am not and never could be a metaphysician".

In this essay he praises Professor George Paxton Young, whose idealist philosophy had been of vital importance to MacMechan ever since he came under Young's influence as an undergraduate at the University of Toronto:

Even now MacMechan writes an article... on "Reality", or a conversation on philosophy makes my head swim. But I would not exchange Young's course in metaphysics for all the others I took at Toronto. Metaphysics was but a small part of that course. Young was a born teacher. That he taught us philosophical truths of the last importance was still a slighter thing than teaching us to think and teaching us to live.⁶⁸

His appreciation of the metaphysical content of Moby Dick, then, was apparently of the order he describes in the quotation above. While he appears to have had an emotional appreciation of the subject, his intellectual grasp of it was never very secure.

Two final points remain to be made in connexion with the essay on Moby Dick and the subjects on which it touches, points that are interesting in the context of MacMechan's later development. One is his indication in his essay of the humour he perceives in Melville's novel.

He writes of Melville's "free-flowing humour which is ... the distinct cachet of American Literature".

That the humour is appealing to MacMechan is no coincidence, for he himself possessed an acute, and sometimes zany, sense of humour. One instance of this quality in him is his attraction to Lewis Carroll's brand of humour: on April 22, 1929, the last day of classes for that term, he writes "Last day of lectures: Oh frabjous day!"

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Another example, this one more fugitive but more

basic, is MacMechan's early recognition of G.K. Chesterton. He prides himself on being the first in Canada to appreciate Chesterton, a "discovery" that is surely in the same league as that of Moby Dick. 71

Certainly the emotional tone of much of Chesterton's writing, coupled with its reaffirmation of Christian orthodoxy in a materialistic century, appealed to MacMechan. Tangential to this orthodoxy is the quality of Chesterton's sense of humour, something the two men shared. This humour includes a perception of the incongruities and lightness of life, despite its tragedy: indeed, in one of his oddest essays, Chesterton asserts that the secret of Jesus' life was his sense of humour which enabled him to be at times detached from the life around him. This perception seems odd at first glance, but it is the sort of notion that would appeal to MacMechan in its power of undermining conventional wisdom. One of MacMechan's more endearing qualities is his occasional ability to turn his sense of humour on himself. 72

The final point to be made concerning the essay is that, in his appreciation of Moby Dick, MacMechan isolates what he calls the book's "Americanization". MacMechan's search for this elusive quality is a life-long preoccupation. He is often most easily able to identify it (usually to its detriment) with something Canadian. To him the most striking aspect of "Canadianism" is a quality he identifies as "diffidence". 74

To summarize MacMechan's notions of Americanism, one might most briefly state that he considered the American outlook forward-looking to the point of being brash and that he deplored American "democratic" beliefs in commercialism and materialism with their attendant vulgarity. In the Moby Dick essay, however, the Americanization he detects is connected to the ebullience characteristic of the new world. Some of MacMechan's most florid language is employed in writing about life at sea, in this essay and

elsewhere; indeed, the two subjects that evoke from him the most un-
 passionate prose are sea-faring and the praise of ideal virtues. The
 two are united in a comparison in the essay on Moby Dick: "Melville's
 chief excellence is bringing to the landsman the very salt of the sea-
 breeze while to one who has long known the ocean, he is as one praising
 to the lover the chiefest beauties of the Beloved".
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Even the sense of high adventure he finds in Moby Dick takes
 second place to Melville's close rendering of the life aboard ship:
 life on the Pequod is for MacMechan "the world itself in little," a
 microcosm, presented with unprecedented detachment from the land.
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 factual basis of the book -- its accuracy in describing actualities of
 life at sea, its "encyclopaedic" quality -- is appealing to MacMechan
 and is one of the qualities that, throughout his life, he finds necessary
 for books which would express the kind of "realism" he values. One
 might say that the common denominator of the novels he most esteemed is
 this basis in fact. For example, Frederick Philip Grove's Fruits of the
Earth (1933), one of the last books MacMechan reviewed, is "the sort of
 story he had long been looking for"; Grove's novel and The Imperialist,
Wild Geese, and Rockbound "all give true pictures of the worlds the authors
 77 know". This basis in reality is one of his standard criteria for fiction,
 and in this essay one sees an early indication of the tendency.

The importance of The Life of a Little College might best be
 suggested by indicating some of its central themes and ideas. The over-
 riding interest of the book is in what might broadly be termed its
 emphasis on a liberal education, if this term can encompass topics as
 disparate as Virgil and Alice in Wonderland. In The Life of a Little College
 one has a sense of a highly cultivated mind choosing various topics as
 focal points for discursive reflection, the topics having mainly to do

with matters that have "educated" that mind, whether in the discipline inherent in a study of Virgil or in the more topical and practical matter of co-education. In both stances -- as disinterested scholar, and as academic administrator -- the essays convey a sense of authority. It is noticeable that the essays in this volume have taken on a direction since the earlier collection, The Porter of Bagdad. The looseness and the vagueness of the earlier collection have largely disappeared, and it is apparent that these essays are written by a man of the world rather than by a dreaming youth. The effect of more mature, more authoritative writing is achieved, primarily by the evident vantage point from which MacMechan writes -- several essays have to do with his own college days, whereas several of the previous collection were written during his own college days. Also, these essays are more pragmatic and empirical in their treatment of topics: several give the impression that their convictions have been tested in practice. This is, in fact, the case, for at least two are reworked lecture notes. ⁷⁹ As for the essay on co-education, it is evident that the writer has been involved with the problem at close range, probably as a teacher. Furthermore, the more mature essays in this volume offer less evidence of the writer's idealism than did the previous collection. These are more business-like and have less to do with rarified emotions; "The Vanity of Travel", for instance, is urbane in the eighteenth-century manner and reflects the experience of a rather assured, informed, and cosmopolitan figure at ease in society; the gauche youth of the first collection is now a grown man and, one might infer, a responsible member of an elite. This inference would be borne out by MacMechan's place within academic circles, as well as by his acceptance in high government circles, at least within the province: his

frequent visits to Government House as a dinner guest are well documented in his journals. In general, these essays deal with various facets of college life as experienced by a former student who has now become a highly successful professor. An overall concern with the life of the mind dominates the essays in The Life of a Little College. This is a departure from The Porter of Bagdad, which was much more involved in word-pictures and impressionistic reflections of emotional states. The two books, however, do have several features in common. The later volume reveals a kind of social responsibility which was sketched very generally in The Porter essays. The themes of patria and of private virtues (fidelity, friendship) which were evident in the earlier collection take on more substance in The Little College essays, where the awareness of a wider world undercuts some of the more narcissistic effects of The Porter. The Life of a Little College is paradoxically cosmopolitan as well as provincial; that is to say, the author of the essays has brought his trained mind to bear on a particular area, on Dalhousie University, and more generally on the province in which it is located. In short, this collection bears the imprint of a writer who is established in a set place, with certain established ideas and habits. What he wrote in the earlier essay "The Dip in the Road", applies later to his life in general: "You understand the procession of Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter better for observing their march across something fixed, limited and having the mathematical quality of a straight line." In these essays it is apparent that MacMechan is embedded in both the life of a small college and the life of a small province, and that both are on a scale congenial to him. As his gift for essay-writing might suggest, he seems most at ease on a scale that admits the exercise of personality -- he typically goes from the particular to the general in his thinking, and his mind, often called "conservative", has a bias that apparently reveals

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in evidence of ideas which bear fruit. MacMechan's experience of Nova Scotia is central to the book, though the experience is more oblique than in his next collection of essays, The Book of Ultima Thule, which is an exuberant celebration of the province.

In The Book of Ultima Thule (1927) MacMechan brings together essays which, as he notes in the Preface, have been written and published over the previous twenty-seven years. The collection is centred thematically, as the title suggests: all the essays in the book have as their concern some aspect of the province of Nova Scotia, or, rather, the literary landscape created by MacMechan and called "Ultima Thule". In this volume MacMechan appears to have taken upon himself the task of bard, though his medium is prose, and chronicler of Nova Scotia, his "adopted"

84 province. A number of factors contribute to his particular affinity with the province and are evident from a reading of these essays. For one thing, the province presented him with many possibilities for out-door activities: essays in the collection indicate his love of swimming, clamming, walking, or simply picnicing. 85 His penchant for vigorous, open-air activities is recorded by many of his contemporaries; his long walks and his dips in the sea at unseasonable times were conspicuous among these achievements. 86

Such habits apparently contributed to his youthful demeanor, which is often mentioned in references to him up until his death at the age of seventy-one. D.C. Harvey, for instance, speaks of his death as having left an impression "as of a youth cut off

87 in the midst of his labours". Another aspect of Nova Scotia which he found congenial was its variety of scenery and the exercise this provided for his visual perception: "seeing", particularly "sight-seeing", was for MacMechan a highly developed skill, and his observations are often the observations of a painter. His comments are frequently made

with reference to the visual arts, and he had the ability to express his observations in visual terms -- for example, the colours of the Fundy mud and grassy banks near Windsor, Nova Scotia, appear to him "Futuristic".⁸⁸ Possibly any district might have provided him with scope for such activity, but Nova Scotia seems especially suited to him in that its wide variety of scenery within a relatively small compass enabled him to combine walking, his favorite mode of travel, with a rapidly changing scenery which served as imaginative inspiration for him. "Afoot in Ultima Thule" illustrates this combination. In this essay he writes with enthusiasm of the challenge of the variety he experiences while walking through the Annapolis Valley:

Voyages of discovery! That was a good day when the march began at Ferry Hill....That day the air was warm, holding the promise of rain, the orchards were in full flower; the road really ran through Avalon, the Cymric paradise

"Deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns,
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea."

Every turn in the road, every hill mounted brought a new picture to viewOnce or twice the railroad crossed the road. Then it was seen in its true perspective as a mere irrelevance in the landscape, a troubler of its peace.⁸⁹

Another aspect of his fascination with the province is the age of Nova Scotia, that is, the length of time it has been settled. MacMechan demonstrates an interest in history early in his life in Nova Scotia, and this interest continues throughout his life.⁹⁰ While his effectiveness as an amateur historian has been questioned,⁹¹ his enthusiasm for the subject is scarcely open to dispute. His influence upon D.C. Harvey, to cite just one instance, is indicative of the passion if not the specialization he brought to the subject.⁹² His rather eclectic treatment of history is typically expressed in a passage of "Afoot in Ultima Thule":

Another outcome of the long human usage of this land is a plentiful growth of place-names, which are unchanged by time. Such names both fix and make history. That King's Meadow should lie beside Lebreau's Dike is almost an epitome of provincial history. Names like Retreat Farm, Martock House, the Ardise Hills give character to the country-side. They pass readily into song, nor have they lacked the inspired singer to hitch them into rhyme. In the winter night when the moon is shining on the snow, the lover is longing for the impossible, the presence of the beloved. The outer world is freezing, but the rendezvous is waiting and warm. He would use an incantation.

Come for the night is cold,
The ghostly moonlight fills
Hollow and rift and fold
Of the eerie Ardise hills!

The icy breath of winter is in those lines, and the strange beauty of moonlight on snow, yet withal a suggestion of comfort in the sheltered nook beside the open fire.⁹³

In this passage it is possible to detect his essentially literary sensibility and the use to which he often put history in providing a background and context for some manifestation of the creative impulse. It is not quite accurate to call him an historian, "chronicler" might be a better phrase and, indeed, he was sometimes called "the Hakluyt of Nova Scotia".⁹⁴ The phrase would imply the loosely-arranged, episodic, unsorted, but above all, ebullient quality generally associated with the work of the Elizabethan chronicler. MacMechan's historical writings have more in common with such "chronicles" than with the modern specialized writings of historians.

In The Book of Ultima Thule MacMechan has created his own somewhat idealized version of a Nova Scotia that was rapidly passing away even in his day. The essays on the Annapolis Valley, for example, make poignant reading now, since MacMechan wrote "in the spring the whole Valley turns into one billowing, white noesgay"⁹⁵ the apple industry has declined radically, removing the vast expanses of orchards which before the First World War had been the chief beauty of the region.⁹⁶ In these essays he combines the factual history of the province in descriptive essays such

as "The Memorial Tower", "Old St. Paul's", and "Province House" with its lore, with descriptions of its scenery, and with his own nostalgic yearnings for a sort of Utopian, unfallen world. This aspect of the book identified it quite clearly as being by the author of The Porter of Bagdad, for in the later collection the strains of ideal beauty and a "romantic" yearning for a vanished past are observable and tend to relate the two volumes. MacMechan's coining of the names "Ultima Thule" (for the province, Nova Scotia) and "Dolcefar" (for the city, Halifax) tend to place the descriptions in a world remote from the everyday world in a manner reminiscent of Charles Lamb's created atmosphere in essays such as "Dream Children". One might speculate on the origin of MacMechan's terminology. "Ultima Thule" combines the sense of ultima, in Latin meaning "beyond", or "the other side of", and of Thule, a mythical island somewhere to the north of Europe. MacMechan's land, then, is clearly in an imaginative beyond. Possibly he is indebted to Joseph Howe for the idea of this remote land, for Howe referred ^{to} Nova Scotia as "Little Paradise". "Dolcefar", MacMechan's coined name for Halifax, implies both sweetness and distance. For MacMechan, Halifax takes on the character of a mythical, mystical city whose features are alternately delineated with great care and conveyed impressionistically in various writings. The city seems to have offered MacMechan almost unending inspiration. What he wrote in his journal June 28, 1895, is interesting in this connection:

Something tells me I shall live and die in Halifax and I have never been deceived in these premonitions, it would not be a sorry fate. I love the place: it made Edith and home and the dear children possible. I should be ungrateful not to love it. Dirty disreputable old wooden town: it shall give my living and pay my debts and make me independent if I do not become idle and smug and contented with easy chair and slippers and dressing gown.

MacMechan was always eager to discover references to Halifax in literature, and even wrote an article on the subject. ⁹⁸ One of the books most

enthusiastically reviewed in his column in The Montreal Standard is Michael Williams' Book of the High Romance (1930). The important aspect of this confessional book was, for MacMechan, its vivid portrayal of Halifax as the environment in which the writer matured. In The Book of Ultima Thule, MacMechan achieves a version of what he esteems in other writers - the imaginative creation of a specific area, with this creation, in turn, becoming the basis for the development of a national literary existence. ¹⁰⁰ Certainly this book of essays presents the particularities of Halifax and of Nova Scotia in an unprecedented and original manner.

Some of the features which make the collection unique are worth examining. First, one notes the unpretentious manner in which MacMechan presents his material. He makes it seem quite natural to compare the Annapolis Valley to the vales of Arcady. The comparison, which even favours the local valley, is startling to a Canadian reader, but it undoubtedly makes him more aware of his own country than he had previously been. Secondly, MacMechan brings to these essays the classical education noted earlier in reference to The Life of a Little College. Merely by indicating his familiarity with a wider world, his writing loses its possible stigma as merely "regional" and the material is given considerable credibility. His obviously scholarly background as well as his careful first-hand observations of place create a distinctively personal, familiar touch that has previously been noted as a hallmark of his essays. In this collection, it has the effect of making the author appear to be a wise, informed guide sharing with a privileged reader the fruits of his scholarship and the experience of observing a much-loved series of places. This deference to outside standards is a matter MacMechan advocated in other contexts, as we have seen before: "Outside opinion, an external

standard of taste should be called in to redress the balance of conflicting provincial views. If a Canadian work does not please New York, it may be assumed that some essential quality is lacking. There is an absolute standard, by which literature, Canadian or any other, can be judged.¹⁰¹ Given such a perspective, MacMechan's own essays on Nova Scotia possess an inherent awareness of a wider world and are thereby lifted out of any possible provincialism with which they might be charged. Developing from this point is a third feature of the essays, the unabashed chauvinism of many of the essays in The Book of Ultima Thule. MacMechan communicates a mood of healthy confidence in the quality of the subjects he chooses. For example, he says flatly of the Bedford Basin, "Round the Basin runs one of the most alluring roads in the world",¹⁰² and of the Annapolis Valley, "You might wonder the whole world over, and not find its equivalent."¹⁰³ This sort of exuberance for native scenes is rare in Canadian writing, then as now.¹⁰⁴ Such a comment inspires a feeling of pride of place in readers who are unaccustomed to seeing their own country represented in literature. Moreover, this kind of writing presented a scene without reference to a "Mother Country", the implication being that the place described is able to bear favourably any comparison the reader might care to make. In "The Orchards of Ultima Thule" MacMechan achieves what is possibly the most sustained and successful of such regional celebrations: speaking of the fecundity of the area, he asserts that these orchards are famous the world over. MacMechan sees¹⁰⁵ in the valley's institution of "Blossom Sunday" a recrudescence of the pagan festival of rebirth in a Puritan community.

Generally, in The Book of Ultima Thule, MacMechan's stance as an essayist of provincial themes is that of a cosmopolite, a philosopher, one who possesses a sense of history and a broad scope into which to fit

this gem of a province so as to show to best advantage its true worth. All these qualities of mind contribute to the charm of an essay such as "Clamming", obviously a work of delight for both author and reader which illustrates MacMechan's broad knowledge, his homely experience of clamming, his sense of humour and irony, and his philosophical insight. Using the humble clam as a starting point, MacMechan spins out one of his most typical and delightful essays. In a manner reminiscent of Melville's dissertation on the etymology of "whale" in Moby Dick, MacMechan expound on the origin of "clam" and its possible applications; his mock-seriousness is typical of his lighter moods:

The psychology of the clam has no doubt been exhaustively studied, but possibly the observations of an independent investigator (who has dug for clams twice or thrice ere now) may not be altogether without value. The world has a low opinion of the clam's mentality. In common parlance, clam is synonymous with fool; and indeed he is the Nabal of bivalves; folly remaineth with him. Why else should he reveal his presence to his human enemy by spouting thin jets of water through his proboscis? A truly wise beast like the oyster or the mussel remains passive and undemonstrative at the approach of danger. The clam would seem to be of a nervous, excitable temperament. The approach of the spade compressing his muddy home apparently angers or frightens him, and he spouts in a sort of hysterical fury. Can it be that he thinks he is defending himself by putting out the rash beholder's eye? Or insulting him by spitting in his face? The popular advice not to be a clam is justified by the observed facts.

The happiness of the clam, especially at high water, has also passed into a proverb. Perhaps it is because he is a fool that he is happy in his unreflecting way. Pessimism and Weltschmerz have passed him by. Of course, at high water the clam is safe from his human enemies, which may be the ground for his rejoicing.

Finis coronat opus. At last the bucket is filled... the reward of the persistent clammer looms near. Supper is no longer a far-off divine event. ¹⁰⁶

Here MacMechan's mock-scholarly tone (almost a spoof of his studies as a philologist) and his inflated, Latinate prose ("Nabal of bivalves")

achieve a humorous effect while demonstrating his eye for detail, his love of homely subjects, his delight in simple things, and his essentially comic vision of life. "Pessimism and Weltschmerz have passed him by", and "supper is no longer a far-off divine event" -- these allusions to sober topics (German philosophy and evangelical Christianity) create an effect of incongruity that is often the basis for MacMechan's humour.

"Clamming" is one of MacMechan's most characteristic essays of the whimsical sort; it demonstrates the typically light manner in which he wears his learning. He is anything but a pedant, and from an essay such as "Clamming" one is easily able to appreciate why he has such an aversion to pedantry.

To summarize the overall effect of the essays in The Book of Ultima Thule, one might note the two categories into which they are divided.

One type of essay is concerned with Halifax and its landmarks and combines descriptive writing with historical fact. The other, characteristic of The Porter of Bagdad, has a fanciful quality and a speaker who is ostensibly a dreamer. In The Book of Ultima Thule, this person is often characterized as "The Summer Boarder", a visitor to an area who has no apparent obligations but is simply a passive spectator, enjoying what is there and writing of it in a carefree way. Part of this leisured writing represents what were holidays garnered from a busy schedule.

For the general reader, The Book of Ultima Thule provides an introduction to Nova Scotia and its capital city as perceived by a highly articulate and sensitive writer during the first quarter of the present century. The chief value of the collection is possibly in the play of a mind of great intelligence and imagination as it responds to a scene that has changed radically in the intervening years. Of the places of interest which have remained virtually unchanged (St. Paul's Church, the Memorial Tower, Province House), the essays prove significant through

their descriptive power. Throughout the volume there is a sense of the freshness of perception with which MacMechan approached Nova Scotian subjects. Possessing an outsider's eye -- that he is a native of Ontario is a fact he reiterates -- he was apparently more responsive to the ways of life he saw vanishing in Nova Scotia and so was more able to evaluate these phenomena than were natives of the province. D.C. Harvey, for example, asserts that MacMechan did more than Nova Scotia's native sons to perpetuate her old ways. MacMechan apparently possessed the eye for local colour that Frank Parker Day and Louis Hemon brought to their fictional accounts of two Canadian regions. Having said all this, one might wonder if there is, however, any quality in The Book of Ultima Thule that lifts the essays out of what might disparagingly be called "local colour" writing, or mere regionalism. As we have seen above, MacMechan's breadth of vision in the essays does just this. Like much of his other writing, the essays here are dated, which is to say that his impressions and feelings are marked by a rather quaint conversationality which is quite out of fashion just now. What he wrote of Thoreau and Walden might serve as summary for what MacMechan has accomplished in these essays: "There may be a thousand nooks in New England more beautiful than Walden, but they remain unknown, while the pine-clad slope which this strange being discovered and haunted... is charted as a permanent addition to the world-wide map of Romance."

¹DW, June 27, 1908.

²See R.W. McBryne, "Archibald MacMechan, Canadian Essayist", Dalhousie Review, L(1970), pp. 23-33.

³Lorne Pierce, Unexplored Fields of Canadian Literature (Toronto: Ryerson, 1932), p. 12. See also his review of The Book of Ultima Thule in The New Outlook, December 3, 1927, for an expansion of this observation.

⁴Roberts, Letter to MacMechan, April 6, 1929.

⁵J.D. Logan, Highways of Canadian Literature (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1924), p. 523. Logan's most moderate public statements concerning MacMechan are to be found in his Dalhousie University and Canadian Literature (1922) and Marjorie Pickthall: Her Poetic Genius and Art (1922).

⁶See DW, June 27, 1908, for a long consideration of the history of the essay as well as his appraisal of its contemporary situation.

⁷At least two had appeared earlier, in the undergraduate publication of the University of Toronto, The Varsity, under MacMechan's pen-name, "Bohemien". These were "Ghosts" (December 13, 1884), and "The Porter of Bagdad" (January 30, 1885). Those first published in The Week include "The Ghost of a Garden" (January 30, 1891), "Bess" (March 6, 1891), "An Open Gate" (April 10, 1891), "The Dip in the Road" (July 30, 1891), "A Boyish Outing" (August 7, 1891), and "On the Selection of Epitaphs" (January 22, 1892).

⁸Brandon Conron, "Essays and Travel Books: I. Essays (1880-1920)", in Carl Klinck, gen. ed., Literary History of Canada, pp. 341-342.

⁹J.B. Priestley, The Edwardians (London: Heinemann, 1970), p. 131.

¹⁰J.B. Priestley, Essayists Past and Present (New York: Dial Press, 1925), p. 17.

¹¹Priestley emphasises the leisure and the simple pleasures of that world. See The Edwardians, p. 131.

¹²Priestley, Essayists, p. 40.

¹³Priestley, p. 11.

¹⁴Samuel Raymond Norris Hodgins, Some Canadian Essays (Toronto: Nelson, 1932), pp. 18-23.

¹⁵Hodgins, pp. 21-22.

¹⁶Coleridge's definition as it appears in the Biographia Literaria, Chapter XIII.

¹⁷See DW, June 27, 1908.

¹⁸See DW, June 27, 1908.

¹⁹DW, June 24, 1911.

²⁰The first two are self-explanatory. The third was his persona as a rather eager, but inept landsman who goes to sea with great enthusiasm, if not experience. See "The CBasts of Ultima Thule" in The Book of Ultima Thule, Chapter XXIII.

²¹DW, June 27, 1908.

²²For example, he proposes to write an essay which will certainly be facetious on "The Influence of Red Hair on History". See DW, May 16, 1915.

²³By "sketches" here his various "portraits in prose" are meant. His poetry is, on the whole, an example of this rather thwarted attempt to find expression. Late Harvest (1934), a posthumous collection of his occasional verse and of various sonnets and ballads, offers ample evidence of this phenomenon, for in this volume, very few poems rise above the level of Tennysonian pastiche or of rather contrived sonnets, the sonnet-form being that in which he most often wrote poetry.

²⁴See various journal entries on the anniversaries of her death. See also his journal entry, May 14, 1922, "Mother's Day", on which he refrains from attending church, "Fearing what I should hear".

²⁵MacMechan, The Porter of Bagdad, p. 49.

²⁶This was written while MacMechan was vacationing at Baddeck, Nova Scotia, with the Alexander Graham Bell family. MacMechan's second daughter, Edith ("Polly"), had just become engaged to be married to Commander Claude Congreve Dobson, V.C., D.S.O., R.N. Bell gave the bride away at her marriage in Bristol, England.

²⁷See note 7.

²⁸DW, December 12, 1908.

²⁹MacMechan, private journals, March 17, 1920. He occasionally indulges a rather grim humour on the subject of death. In his journal for December 22, 1895, for instance, he notes the death of a provincial judge who had left his chambers with the following note affixed to the door: "At the Supreme Court".

³⁰MacMechan, private journal, September 3, 1920.

³¹The older man is MacMechan himself: the first person is employed in this essay.

³²See "Everybody's Alice", in Life of a Little College, pp. 233-272.

³³DW, December 8, 1906.

³⁴MacMechan, The Porter of Bagdad, p. 92.

³⁵This devotion is referred to in the caricature of him in "Pen Pictures of Popular Profs", Appendix B. This devotion, moreover, extended beyond MacMechan's death, for out of consideration for his widow, who would have been unable to make the journey to MacMechan's favoured burial spot near Bedford, his body was interred at the Camp Hill cemetery on Robie Street, Halifax (Information communicated during a conversation with C. L. Bennet, August 23, 1976). There, according to various people, including Canon H. B. Wainwright, it was Mrs. MacMechan's custom to go regularly: "His widow never accepted his death, and, for years, sat on a seat in the cemetery, mourning him" (Private letter, August 10, 1976).

³⁶MacMechan to Harvey, January 14, 1916.

³⁷For an early and sustained example of his sentimental style see MacMechan, "A North End Tragedy", Halifax Evening Mail, August 10, 1891.

³⁸MacMechan, op. cit.

³⁹His interest in the visual arts is evident throughout his writings. See private journals, May 27, 1920, for his approving comments on the work of the Group of Seven.

⁴⁰MacMechan, The Porter of Bagdad, pp. 115-116.

⁴¹DW, June 11, 1919. From Browning, "The Campagna", ll. 58-60.

⁴²This similarity to Browning is unusual, for on the whole MacMechan considered Browning's buoyant optimism wearing. See his introduction to Tennyson's Select Poems for instances of his attitude.

⁴³MacMechan, The Porter of Bagdad, p. 100.

⁴⁴MacMechan, op. cit., p. 101.

⁴⁵"My Own Country" and "The Idyll of a Northern River" are salient examples of this.

⁴⁶Alexander, letter to MacMechan, August 22, 1926.

⁴⁷DW, December 15, 1906.

⁴⁸MacMechan, Porter, p. 33. The lady's name, "Castara", appears to have originated from the volume of poetry entitled Castara published in 1634 by William Habington (1605-1654).

⁴⁹MacMechan, op. cit., p. 33.

⁵⁰MacMechan, op. cit., p. 34.

⁵¹The tendency is noted regularly by critics as pertinent, for instance, to Charles Sangster's perception of the landscape of Upper Canada in "The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay".

⁵²See above, Chapter III.

⁵³See one of MacMechan's late articles, "Canada as a Vassal State" (1921), as evidence of his nationalism.

⁵⁴For a comprehensive yet succinct definition of this term as it applies to poetry, see James D. Merritt, The Pre-Raphaelite Poem (New York: Dutton, 1966), pp. 10-13.

⁵⁵F.M. Salter in a letter to MacMechan, October 22, 1925, gives him this title. See above, Chapter II, for other references. In addition, Robert Winkworth, Norwood (1874-1932), Anglican pastor, author of Issa (1931), a mystical spiritual autobiography in poetic form, speaks in a letter to MacMechan of the understanding of the mystical in spiritual life that exists between himself and MacMechan (Letter, November 28, 1922).

⁵⁶His walks are an important part of each day, recorded in his journals with accuracy and noted as necessary to his balance of mind.

⁵⁷MacMechan, Little College, pp. 202-203.

⁵⁸MacMechan, op. cit., p. 3.

⁵⁹George Woodcock, "A View of Canadian Criticism", Dalhousie Review, XXXV (1955), p. 216.

⁶⁰MacMechan, op. cit., p. 98.

⁶¹For an explication of the learning process at Johns Hopkins, see MacMechan's article. "How they Learn at Johns Hopkins", New York Sun, May 13, 1889.

⁶²See his "Americanization of Dalhousie", Pine Hill Messenger, February, 1933.

⁶³MacMechan, Little College, p. 237 and p. 249.

⁶⁴MacMechan, op. cit., pp. 278-279.

⁶⁵See above, Chapter III.

⁶⁶Captain Frederick Marryat (1792-1848) served as a naval officer in the Napoleonic Wars and was the author of Midshipman Easy (1836). Tobias Smollett (1721-1771), in his partially autobiographical Roderick Random (1748), produced vivid descriptions of life aboard a man-of-war. Richard Henry Dana, Jr. (1815-82), an American lawyer, was the anonymous author of Two Years Before the Mast (1840), a realistic account of his voyage as a common sailor on a merchant ship.

⁶⁷MacMechan, Little College, p. 151.

- ⁶⁸MacMechan, op. cit., p. 161.
- ⁶⁹MacMechan, op. cit., p. 190.
- ⁷⁰Private Journals, April 22, 1929.
- ⁷¹See DW, May 16, 1915 for his assertion.
- ⁷²G.K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy (New York Dodd, Mead & Co., 1950), p. 299.
- ⁷³The ability is always sporadic. See above, Chapter III, for discussion of this subject.
- ⁷⁴See, for example, DW, May 7, 1910.
- ⁷⁵MacMechan, Little College, p. 194.
- ⁷⁶MacMechan, op. cit., p. 186.
- ⁷⁷DW, June 8, 1933.
- ⁷⁸In "Little College Girls", in The Life of a Little College, pp. 37-53.
- ⁷⁹"Everybody's Alice" and "Virgil".
- ⁸⁰By the time this book was published, MacMechan was a well-established figure at Dalhousie, having been a professor for twenty-five years.
- ⁸¹MacMechan, The Porter of Bagdad, p. 102.
- ⁸²See his comments on the size of a country, above, Chapter II.
- ⁸³Various contemporaries have called him "conservative". MacMechan's own attitude to the use of the term is implied in an entry in his diary, June 1, 1920, which records a luncheon he attended with Robert Falconer, Malcolm Wallace, and Pelham Edgar, among others. After the lunch, Edgar "put his arm round my shoulder, called me a 'dear old conservative' and, addressing Maurice Hutton, 'a man after your own heart'". MacMechan was obviously pleased by this affectionate tribute.
- ⁸⁴The word is Harvey's. See Canadian Historical Review (September, 1933), p. 343.
- ⁸⁵C.L. Bennet offers an amusing anecdote related to MacMechan's love of the outdoors in "Archibald MacMechan", Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada, (pp. 21-22).
- ⁸⁶See below, Chapter V, note 45, for further discussion.
- ⁸⁷D.C. Harvey, op. cit., p. 344.
- ⁸⁸MacMechan, private journal, July 25, 1918. See also C.L. Bennet, op. cit., p. 21, for references to MacMechan's sense of colour.

89

MacMechan, The Book of Ultima Thule, pp. 207-208. His apprehension of the beauties of the valley are heightened by his enthusiasm for the holiday which serves as the basis for this essay. In his private journal, undated entry, summer, 1918, he writes "As soon as the college term ended, E. [Edith, his wife] and I (thanks to Mother Cowan's [Edith's mother] \$200) went to Wolfville, May 11 and put up at Kent Lodge. We had a fortnight of miraculous weather and discovered the valley." The lines quoted are from The Idylls of the King, "The Passing of Arthur", ll. 429-430, and are part of the description of Avalon, the Vale of the Blessed.

90

See below, Chapter V, for discussion of this topic.

91

See below, Chapter V, note 28.

92

The correspondence between Harvey and MacMechan for a period of more than twenty-five years bears witness to the influence the older man exerted over the younger. It was at MacMechan's urging that Harvey went to Harvard to study history, for example. See, especially, letters of March 10, 1912, and March 26, 1913, in which MacMechan signs himself "Yours paternally".

93

MacMechan; The Book of Ultima Thule, pp. 205-206. The quotation is from Bliss Carman, "A Northern Vigil", ll. 25-29.

94

By others, as well as by himself. His first use of the term appears in a letter to Harvey, March 23, 1925.

95

MacMechan, The Book of Ultima Thule, p. 282.

96

"As many as 2,800,000 barrels of apples have been grown [in the Annapolis Valley] in a single year" (Raymond A. Simpson, The Province of Nova Scotia: Geographical Aspects /Ottawa: The Canadian Geographical Society, 1954/, p. 25.) Simpson notes that by the date of publication (1954), the annual crop is only half this figure. See also MacMechan, "Halifax in Trade", Canadian Geographical Journal, September, 1931.

97

MacMechan notes Howe's phrase in "Halifax in Literature".

98

"Halifax in Literature".

99

Williams wrote to MacMechan, thanking him for his generous review (Letter, January 26, 1920).

100

See above, Chapter III.

101

See above, Chapter III.

102

MacMechan, The Book of Ultima Thule, p. 184.

103

MacMechan, op. cit., p. 204.

104 See Hugo McPherson, Introduction to Hugh MacLennan, Barometer Rising (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), pp. ix-xv, for a discussion of the unique qualities of MacLennan's novel, particularly in its treatment of a Canadian city, as late as 1941.

105 MacMechan, The Book of Ultima Thule, p. 283: "When their orchards are at their whitest, the city people pilgrim to the Valley to feast their eyes. Even though it is largely an affair of the railroad and the hotel-keepers, the rise of the festival testifies to the drawing power of natural beauty."

106 MacMechan, op. cit., pp. 267-268.

107 This is a reference to MacMechan's summer vacations, which he usually spent away from Halifax, often in the Annapolis Valley, particularly at Windsor where the library of King's College was close at hand.

108 Harvey, op. cit., p. 344.

109 MacMechan comments on these two writers as particular examples of authors who brought to life a scene that had gone unregarded by natives of the respective areas. See, for instance, his review of Rockbound, DW, November 24, 1928.

110 MacMechan, "Thoreau", in The Cambridge History of American Literature, p. 13.

Chapter V

MacMechan as Chronicler

"Man goeth to the grave and where is he?" Hence any written word that calls back the vanished shadow from the realm of shadows appeals to us all who know how short is our own time. Hence the popularity of biographies, memoirs, diaries, letters, as well as essays with those who have outlived the period of romance.¹

MacMechan wrote this in 1908, and apparently considered himself as one who had "outlived the period of romance", as well as the atmosphere of youth, when death is not thought of as a personal thing. As he wrote in 1910, "romance suggests some glittering veil of illusion across the face of realities, some glamour or image arising from the unfamiliar aspect of the world, 'so various, so beautiful, so new'".² From what he implies about romance as illusion, then, it seems reasonable that MacMechan's final years should have been deeply involved with various "biographies, memoirs, diaries, letters" in his attempt to record for posterity what he perceived as a vanishing era -- the age of Nova Scotia's sailing ships. To this task MacMechan brought many of the qualities that had distinguished his work in other fields: his scholarly bias, his desire to instruct, his familiar writing style, and his love of the active life, particularly of the sea-going life, which he perceived as "heroic".³ His aim in writing these stories of the sea, MacMechan states, "is plain truth; 'romance' I avoid and abjure."⁴ A recent critic, S.E.D. Shortt, has offered a comment on MacMechan's sea stories that might serve as a catalyst for a discussion of them:

In his three collections of sea stories and adventure, published between 1923 and 1928, MacMechan established certain common themes. The plots centred on a struggle between the forces of evil, whether human or an element of raw nature, and a particularly good individual who ultimately vanquished his foe. Often staged in the

eighteenth century, 'the heroic age of Canada,' the adventures traced the exploits of Nova Scotian privateers, merchants, shipbuilders, or simple sailors against a background of violent seas or raging war. The adversaries of these maritime heroes were men marred by a tragic flaw or character or members of a 'lower race', often Greeks or American Indians. Always religious, the heroes were dedicated to a higher cause such as loyalty, yet modestly disclaimed their valour as mere duty. In a time of crisis the natural leader emerged at the head of a tightly disciplined crew and, through quick wits and hard muscles, averted potential doom. Always in the background was Providence, using the elements to punish the evil and reward the just. Though embroidered with romantic settings and heroic characters, MacMechan's sea stories were, in fact, simple lessons in Christian morality designed to inspire, in 'Young Canada' at least, admiration and, it was to be hoped, emulation.⁵

While much of what Shortt writes is undeniably true -- the members of a 'lower race' present in several stories, the modest disclaimers of heroism as 'mere duty', the emergence of a natural leader at times of crisis, for example -- his emphasis on the "staging" of these dramas and their didactic nature as "simple lessons in Christian morality" is to give the stories an emphasis that is hardly as pronounced as he would have it. Shortt's authority for some of his assertions comes from a letter he quotes, written by MacMechan to Lorne Pierce, concerning the sea stories:

You have perceived the main intent [MacMechan writes], not consciously followed, perhaps, but always there -- the revelation of the heroic. These plain sailor men have in them the element of greatness. Their lives, their achievements, their records form one of our richest natural assets My real point is that young Canada does not need to look outside our own borders for inspiration and example.⁶

Shortt types MacMechan as a "romantic idealist" whose "historical romances... stressed the ultimate triumph of the moral individual against the inherent evil of the environment to which his fallen state consigned him. The heroic deeds of the past, woven with the themes of Anglo-Saxon superiority,

the glory of war, and Carlyle's theory of great men, were presented as a model for emulation by a modern but mundane age." This assessment is satisfactory to a point: it certainly accounts for several of the themes present in the sea stories, and it undoubtedly points to prominent aspects of MacMechan's thought. However, it overlooks at least three points that are important to any discussion of these books. First, Shortt does not seem to give due credit to the careful research that went into the writing: his reference to "raging war and violent seas" makes the backgrounds of the books, which were very well described and documented, seem mere sets. Secondly, Shortt reads the stories as expressing a didacticism and an authorial discernment of the hand of Providence that are actually quite alien to MacMechan. One has only to recall MacMechan's comments on Ralph Connor's "earnest preaching" to realize that MacMechan disliked writing that had a "palpable design" on him, in Keats' phrase. While it is certainly true that the books contain observations on some of MacMechan's favorite topics -- England, Duty, and the Navy -- it is reductive to see the stories as "simple lessons" in anything. MacMechan's mind was too subtle to read -- or write -- "simple lessons" into his material. Finally, Shortt implies that these stories are on a grand scale and that the heroes are backed by a Providence which uses the elements to "punish the evil and reward the just". This is to parody what actually happens in many of the stories. Some of them are, if anything, simple tales of human survival, and such determinism is quite irrelevant to them.

In his Checklist of Canadian Literature, R.E. Watters has grouped several of MacMechan's books under the category "Local History and Description". While it is difficult to make clear distinctions between history and description in the writings, the term is useful to a preliminary discussion of some of these writings. MacMechan's various pieces of local history are among his first published writing upon his coming

to Nova Scotia and to Dalhousie University in 1889. His early interest in history seems to have been an effort to orient himself in a province which was new to him. Probably that is one reason why he became a member of the Nova Scotia Historical Society soon after his arrival in Halifax.¹¹ He was a member of the Council of the Society from 1896 to 1906 and President from 1907 to 1910.¹²

His first paper presented to the society in 1890, "An Historical Note on John Crowne",¹³ is worth examining in some detail. For one thing, this paper was published very soon after MacMechan arrived in Nova Scotia and shows clearly the germ of what is to be his later interest in the province, especially its history and its "romantic" charm. The paper is concerned with establishing the identity of one John Crowne, a minor Restoration playwright whose dates are uncertain (1640? - 1705?) and to discover what Crowne had to do with Acadia. MacMechan has traced Crowne's ancestry through several sources (the New England Historical and Genealogical Register, for example) and has provided information in elaborate and scholarly detail in a manner befitting a recently-graduated Doctor of Philosophy. In summarizing his findings, MacMechan reveals his interest in the man, John Crowne:

This much, at least, is plain from the foregoing accounts: John Crowne, play-writer and court favorite of Charles II, puppet of Rochester and rival of Dryden, had something to do with this country. What that relation was, it is the object of this paper to make clear. In order to do so, I must open a chapter in the early history of Nova Scotia: the land that Longfellow has made classic, Acadia, the land of Evangeline.¹⁴

The particular point of interest in this paragraph is that, amid the most academic and what MacMechan himself would call "dry" research, there is discernible the kernel of what is for MacMechan his driving interest in

the subject -- Nova Scotia as a "romantic" place, scene of incidents such as those made vivid by Longfellow. It is as if, possessing the equipment to do research, in the form of credentials from an outstanding American university, MacMechan is about to bring this equipment to bear on local subjects. D.C. Harvey indicates that such was the case when he asserts that "the impact of American scholarship upon the complacency of Ontario had given Dr. MacMechan the comparative idea. His contact with Nova Scotian local patriotism gave him an opportunity to exercise it. This was the germ of his literary and historical essays." That Nova Scotia already, by 1890, appealed to MacMechan by its colourful history and its sense of "romance" is prophetic: the "land of Evangeline" was the setting for his last book, Red Snow on Grand Pré (1932). Apparently the "romantic" nature of the province was to haunt him throughout the remaining years of his life.

Other points of interest in MacMechan's "Note on John Crowne" are chiefly those that prefigure aspects of his later writings on Nova Scotian history. His methods of ferreting out information make him appear to be a kind of literary sleuth, his interest in a problem simply as a puzzle to be solved is evident in the "Note", as it will be elsewhere. Another point, albeit a minor one, is nevertheless worth noting here, and that is the repetition in this article of the phrase "And now, as the sagas say, he is out of the story" (p. 280). This phrase, which here concerns one of the persons in the account he is offering, is repeated in many of MacMechan's later books, particularly those concerning stories of sea-drama. The phrase harks back, surely, to his knowledge of Old Norse and his eye for "sagas" in the history of Nova Scotian sea-faring people. MacMechan's ability to infuse what he perceives around him with a sense of historical and heroic precedent is evident here. It is a conspicuous

quality in much that he writes. In summary, then, it would appear that this early "Note" is significant for the light it casts on MacMechan's methods and interests within a year of his arrival in Nova Scotia. It is interesting to see so much telescoped in what is essentially a rather dry and academic piece of prose.

D.C. Harvey's concise appraisal of MacMechan's other historical writings will perhaps indicate their overall importance:

Apart from ephemeral essays and reviews, his first historical efforts were two studies in source materials: Nova Scotia Archives, volumes II and III. These were letter books, commission books, and minutes of council at Annapolis Royal, 1713-41. Of these he made a full calendar and a careful index, and thus facilitated their use by many students, who otherwise would not have had access to them. These studies were followed by The winning of responsible /sic¹⁹/ government in the Chronicles of Canada; and by a sketch of Nova Scotian history from 1604 /sic²⁰/ to 1912, in Canada and Its Provinces. Both these studies were carefully made and written in chaste and lucid English.²¹

These, then, form the bulk of MacMechan's "formal" historical work. They are important to note as being the core of his more popular versions of the same material. Harvey says that "bye-products of these more formal histories, historical poems and essays were written and published in chapbooks or magazines. Some of these have been collected in book form as Old Province Tales, The Book of Ultima Thule, and Red Snow on Grand Pré;²² but many others still await the hand of the collector."

It is with these "bye-products" of more formal history that we are mainly concerned in this chapter. A first acquaintance with MacMechan's historical interests might give one pause to wonder why a professor of English language and literature should have devoted such a large part of his life to historical pursuits. MacMechan's own description of his interest in "English" might here be examined for what it indicates about his biases. Just after completing his Ph.D., MacMechan wrote, in

"Testimonials of Archibald MacMechan", which was essentially a job application sent to various universities, among them Dalhousie, a description of his interest in the study of English:

I call attention to the special scientific and philological side of my training because I regard it as the necessary step to a thorough understanding of the literature, such as must be looked for in one who is to represent the department of English in a university. I sympathize very strongly with the desire...to make the study of English masculine enough to furnish as thorough a mental discipline as any department of your curriculum. I believe that the time has come for an historical and comparative study of English literature which shall lift it out of the field of mere aestheticism into the dignity of a real science. The aesthetic study must be continued, the study of particular authors must be dwelt on with emphasis and with devotion for truly great names, but, from the first, the student must be taught to compare, to examine, to weigh, and to emancipate himself from the shackles of any one expression which is fashionable simply or ephemeral. The student must learn to look at every period and every poetic monument as far as possible from within, i.e. from the vantage-ground of the period producing it. He must then learn to compare periods. To instruct worthily from this point of view, accurate scientific training is indispensable, and for this reason I lay special stress on my Johns Hopkins course.

At the same time I regard philology not as an end in itself, but as a means towards the wider comprehension of literature. And I ~~believe~~, moreover, that scientific study pursued in this spirit, instead of weakening appreciation, only results in increased power. Everything seems to point towards this as the method of the future.²³

His emphasis on the "scientific" and his desire to create "mental discipline" in the study of English are important to note in this passage. The study of local history provided concrete material for the kind of period study he advocated. It would seem that his philological training gave him the tools for dealing with material that attracted him imaginatively: in his work concerning the history of Nova Scotia, he had a mine of information waiting to be sorted and studied. Something of his attitude to this work can be seen from a letter to D.G. Harvey in which MacMechan writes of the research he is doing (at this point he was ²⁴ working on Old Province Tales and There Go the Ships):

Is there any game humanity ever invented more absorbing, than research? Getting at the facts of these sagas I find simply fascinating. By the way, I am greatly encouraged by the example of S. Thomas de Carlyle whose Cromwell's Letters and Speeches I have been devouring this last week to my great refreshment. That was a piece of research if you like. Chittick's Haliburton is another.²⁵

To his study of Nova Scotian history, MacMechan brought his scholar's training, his scholar's love of truth and detail, and his vivid and rather "romantic" imagination.²⁶ This combination enabled him to write with enthusiasm and accuracy about the history of the province. In the process, MacMechan turned much of the history into "saga" and created his own mythology.

Before one turns to the works themselves, a brief consideration of some of MacMechan's attitudes to history is relevant here. In his introduction to Heroes and Hero Worship, for example, he writes of the animating spirit of an author that can lift mere fact into a kind of incandescence.²⁷ Such animation can give life to mere facts and can create what is most valuable to MacMechan -- vivid, imaginative accounts of the past.²⁸ His distaste for "strict", dry scholarship²⁹ is related to his feeling for history: while facts are always of importance for their accuracy to his scholarly, truth-loving mind, their presentation in lively, human form is almost equally important. His comment on two historians, Kingsford and Parkman, reveals this view: "Kingsford had a great conception, but he laboured with more zeal than knowledge. It was Parkman who made Canadian history interesting."³⁰ What MacMechan says about historical novels also bears on his attitude to history, for certain of his convictions are observable in his own historical writing:

Facts are less important than stimulation. The main object of attack should be the tiro's imagination. Once he realizes that the previous ages were peopled by men and women very like himself, he has gained a Pisgah summit, from which he will never descend. He has achieved a point of view. History should not be

regarded simply as so many learned, scientific tomes, made for a few scholars: it should exist as a sentiment, a feeling. Our young Canadians may not know a single date accurately, they may not be able to pass even a high school examination in the facts of our history. I should not care a rush, if only the name Quebec awakens in their minds the thought of Champlain and Wolfe, if they cannot see the words Queenston and Chateauguay without remembering that a country's a thing men should die for at need. Therefore there cannot be too much popularization of Canadian history.³¹

This is surely the humanist speaking, one to whom nothing human is alien. An interesting comment on the apparent manner in which MacMechan himself perceived "previous ages...peopled by men and women" comes from someone who saw MacMechan, a familiar figure, as he walked about Halifax:

My memory of him is confined to a few glimpses of an erect and dignified figure with a grey torpedo beard, walking the streets of Halifax in a curious aloof way as if he had them all to himself. As indeed he had. His knowledge of the old seaport and its long romantic story was so complete that for him when he chose, the present time did not exist, he could ignore the clerks and the shopgirls...who scurried past intent upon the petty worries of the twentieth century and see only the redcoats, the buckskin-clad rangers and tarry seamen of the eighteenth. An uncanny faculty, not to be acquired lightly nor dismissed with a shrug.³²

The books to be discussed in this chapter are, chiefly, three that form a group by the nature of their subject matter -- Sagas of the Sea (1923)³³, Old Province Tales (1924), and There Go the Ships (1928).

His final book, Red Snow on Grand Pré (1932), will be mentioned only in passing, for its subject matter is unrelated to that of the other

³⁴three. In these books, MacMechan's interest in history is evident: he has gone directly to various sources for information which he then writes up in his own style. His most important sources are Des Brisay's History of Lunenburg County (1870) and Beamish Murdoch's History of Nova Scotia (1865-67). For There Go the Ships and Red Snow on Grand Pré the diary of Saint-Luc De la Corne caught MacMechan's interest: "The primary authority is a small pamphlet published by Fleury Mesplet, in Montreal,

1778, with the title 'Journal Du Voyage De M. Saint-Luc De La Corne,
 35
 Ecuyer, Dans le Navire l'Auguste, en l'an 1761'.

The first three books have as their unifying theme the heroic
 36
 life of sea-faring people. MacMechan's interest in the history of Nova
 Scotia generally was well established by the time he turned his attention
 to matters relating to "maritime" life. 37 There are, however, many
 indications that his interest in things pertaining to the sea goes back
 to his early life. This interest is remarkable in one reared inland --
 as D.C. Harvey mentions, "Dr. MacMechan was a son of the manse, a child
 of Ontario, product of its schools and the University of Toronto, a
 graduate student in Johns Hopkins, and an adopted son of Nova Scotia.
 In each stage of evolution, he was responsive to his environment and
 38
 influenced by it...." Thomas Radcliff has also stressed the remarkable
 influence the lore of sea-faring exerted over MacMechan.

I suppose everybody knows how Archie MacMechan, Ontario-
 born, a graduate of the University of Toronto, for a few
 years a teacher in Ontario schools -- an out-and-out
 freshwater man, in the salty Bluenose term -- came in
 1889 to take a post at Dalhousie...and fell in love with
 Nova Scotia and the sea.... He remained faithful to that
 love till death, and breathed his devotion into almost
 every line he wrote, though there was nothing narrow
 or merely provincial in his loyalty. 39

It would seem that actual residence in a spot near the ocean
 crystallized for MacMechan an interest in and love for the sea that had
 long been latent in him. For one example of his early interest, one
 might observe some pages which survive from a diary he kept while crossing
 40
 from Montreal to London in a cattle boat in 1885. MacMechan begins
 by calling his record a "log" and clearly enters into the spirit of sea-
 faring by referring enthusiastically to various parts of the ship by
 their technical names and by generally seeming to enjoy the excitement
 and beauty of life at sea. Also, in the notes for his first classroom

lecture at Dalhousie, given on September 25, 1890, he speaks of the similarity between beginning a new college course and launching a new ship -- the pitfalls inherent in both, the tension of waiting for the successful launching -- in an extended simile. These two indications of MacMechan's penchant for things pertaining to ships support the notion that he was ripe for appreciating the material he discovered in Nova Scotia. Perhaps the most obvious example of his affinity for nautical matters would be his early (and at the time, unusual) interest in Melville's Moby Dick; though his article on the novel did not appear until 1899, he speaks of having read the book much earlier, as we have seen above.⁴¹ The point here is that MacMechan's interest in the lore of the sea was consistent in him from his youth onward.

The components of this interest would seem to include the overall "romance" of the unknown in sea-faring, the noble history of sailing, the exactness required of sailors, and the "duty" and discipline involved in keeping things "ship-shape". A brief collection of phrases from his three books will illustrate particularly the last of these components -- MacMechan's fascination with the exactness, duty, and discipline of life aboard ship. In Sagas of the Sea he observes that "the master mariners of the province were a race apart, intrepid, skilled, resourceful, strong in character, strict in discipline, kings of the quarter-deck. They met every chance of the treacherous sea with unshaken hearts."⁴² Again, in the same book, he writes "He [the captain] must have had a well-disciplined crew, no lubbers or wharf-rats stood by the sheets and braces that December day."⁴³ And in Old Province Tales, he writes "The Cooks were men of tried ability, for fools and weaklings do not rise to the command of ships."⁴⁴ Through comments like these, which occur on every second page of the three books being discussed, MacMechan's hero-worship and admiration is plain. The requirements of life at sea seem to represent for him an ideal

of discipline and endurance which, to choose only two examples, he imitated in his own life: he exacted from himself both physical and mental discipline. The former can be represented by the long walks he took, despite a slight limp, and the dips in the Northwest Arm which he continued, sometimes, until well on into October. The latter, his mental discipline, is evident in almost everything he touched. His private journals, which he kept faithfully for over nearly forty years, are a sort of "log" of his private life, and his work as a reviewer, continued for the same length of time, was, at the time of his death, characteristically done up five weeks in advance.

With a background of historical research and a love of the sea, then, MacMechan began, in about 1921, to work on what became his final, many-sided project. This was his attempt to preserve some of Nova Scotia's marine past through a collection of stories, songs, and artifacts. His chief work was the writing of the three books already mentioned, which he took very seriously, as Thomas Raddall has recorded. Bennet told me how, when the first volume of sea stories Sagas of the Sea was published, Archie stood turning the book in his hands and said, "I think this is the most important work I have done, and the one for which I shall be remembered longest." Possibly MacMechan was correct in supposing that he would be remembered longest for his sea stories. His editions of Carlyle are now noted generally as "pioneer" efforts and have been superseded by later scholarship, and his books of essays and his Headwaters, the only serious contenders, are now considered period pieces of various kinds. It is interesting, then, to see MacMechan's name prominently placed in a section entitled "Legacy of the Sea" in a recent Nova Scotian history textbook that is remarkable for innovative methods which MacMechan would certainly have endorsed.

The excitement and dedication involved in this last project of his life can be seen in many places in the text of the books, as well as in letters he wrote to D.C. Harvey during the writing of Sagas of the Sea in 1922.

I still keep pegging away at local history MacMechan writes, as you may see by the enclosed chap-book. At present I am furiously interested in the shipping and sailors of Nova Scotia. There is material for a modern Odyssey here.⁵¹

The following year he expands on this idea, while retaining his adverb "furiously":

I have become furiously interested in Nova Scotia's epic of the sea. The story of N.S. wooden shipbuilding, the traffics and discoveries of our sailor men, is replete with marvels of courage, skill and fortitude. I have made a beginning of a N.S. Hakluyt. It is the millstone Job aforesaid, and is to be published by Dents in the Spring with the title "Sagas of the Sea". I wish I had nothing else to do but gather up the information and talk to old salts.⁵²

This letter would supply Harvey with first-hand evidence for his comments in his obituary notice of MacMechan.

Though he died full of honours and in the evening of his days, to his colleagues, his students, and other friends, his death has left an impression as of a youth cut off in the midst of his labours: for his retirement in 1931, after forty-two years' teaching in Dalhousie, had been regarded as but release from an exacting routine in order that he might be free to devote his leisure to creative literature, and he left behind him several unfinished manuscripts, one of which was to have been the 'roof and crown of things', a 'Green's short history of the Nova Scotian people'.⁵³

MacMechan's reference to the fortitude of sailors in his letter to Harvey is later amplified in his Preface to Sagas of the Sea:

The stories are all true. The notes in the Table of Contents give the original sources. In every case my aim has been to get at the facts, state them as plainly as may be and let them speak for themselves. Perhaps their common term is the cardinal virtue of Fortitude.⁵⁴

The grouping of these stories around the "cardinal virtue of Fortitude" is certainly unconscious, for MacMechan had long been collecting information pertaining to the stories that comprise this volume, simply as material appeared before him. Seven of the nine stories in Sagas are based on material that MacMechan presumably came across in his reading of Nova Scotian history, only the final story, "The Luck of the Grilse", is based on a contemporary happening.

Sagas of the Sea is a suitable volume to study for the light it casts on MacMechan's methods in writing these sea stories, for he employs similar methods when writing the other two volumes. In Sagas of the Sea, the organization of material into chronological order is noticeable at once. The first stories in the book, for instance "How Prenties Carried His Dispatches" and "The Teazer Light", are based on material from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively. In stories like these, MacMechan has gone to his source material and embellished it with his own prose. As MacMechan himself indicates in his Preface to this first collection, the stories have various emphases:

Four of these "Sagas" illustrate the perilous life of Nova Scotia seamen. Three have their origin in old wars, revealing the chances of military service and some aspects of privateering. One shows how the sailors of the old navy faced disaster, and another how sailors of the new navy saved their ship.⁵⁷

In these nine tales, MacMechan has relied for the most part on historical records and contemporary newspaper accounts for information. These sources, noted by MacMechan in the table of contents, are fleshed out by a prose style that one immediately recognizes as MacMechan's, particularly the style evident in many of his essays with its arresting phrase, its authoritative tone, and its balanced cadence. The opening paragraph of "Jordan the Pirate" is typical of this style:

On the morning of the 13th of September, 1809, a strange little craft called the Three Sisters was off Cape Canso heading for Halifax. She was a new fishing schooner of about sixty-four tons burden, tub-like in build, her beam being considerably more than the traditional one-third of her length, which was forty-five feet six inches from stem to stern. Besides her tubbiness, she had other noticeable peculiarities -- a remarkably high stern and a very swift sheer, which means that, seen in profile, the line of her rail ran steeply down from the lofty poop to the bow. Not much money had been spent on the usual decorations of a vessel. She had no carved and painted figurehead, no gallery to her square stern, and no cabin windows, she had not even the usual wooden mouldings there.... Her dumpy build, her colour scheme, her measurements, her lack of the usual marine adornments would make her easy to identify as far as a spy glass would reach.⁵⁸

In this paragraph, MacMechan sets the scene for what is to follow -- a grisly account of mutiny and murder -- by drawing attention to the irregularities of appearance of the ship he describes. His swift delineation of the vessel ("She was a new fishing schooner...from stem to stern") at once informs the reader of her distinctive shape ("tubbiness" is a homely, vivid word) and incidentally reveals the author's knowledge of proportions normal in such a craft ("her beam being considerably more than the traditional one-third of her length"). The final sentence in which the vessel is described as being conspicuous "as far as a spy-glass could reach" sets the mood of the story, both by the accuracy of the distance implied in the phrase and by the faintly ominous connotations of "spy-glass" which are borne out as the story progresses. This description of the vessel becomes central to the story later on, and by the vividness of this opening paragraph, MacMechan has caught the attention of the reader in an informative and striking manner without, however, being didactic. This style is typical of the narration of the stories in all three volumes: it is evident throughout that while the author is himself extremely well-informed and anxious to impart to his readers the important details of each story, he is nevertheless able to avoid a tiresome cataloguing of detail by means of an accomplished and varied prose style. The prose

style of these stories is, in fact, MacMechan's hallmark.

MacMechan chose as material for these stories accounts of heroism at sea, gleaned both from former centuries and from his own. At times, two eras overlap as, for example, when he records in his journal, early in his residence in Halifax, a visit to an elderly woman who had seen the victorious Shannon when it docked in Halifax in 1813. His remarks in his journal indicate that she had supplied him with yet "more detail" concerning an event that evidently interested him as early as 1892. His use of this detail, more than thirty years later, adds significantly to his account of the story of the Shannon by lending the telling the authority of first-hand observation. Having retold the events surrounding the encounter between the two frigates, the American Chesapeake and the British Shannon off Boston lighthouse in 1813, MacMechan adds a dimension to his story by including an eye-witness account of the return to Halifax of the Shannon with the Chesapeake in tow:

Sunday, June 6, 1813, was a very beautiful day in Halifax, a day long remembered. During the morning service, some one came into St. Paul's whispered to a friend in the garrison pew and hastily left the church. An observer thought of fire and followed him. Soon the church was empty. All the city was on the wharves and house-tops cheering like mad a procession of two frigates coming slowly up the harbour past George's Island. The first was a "little dirty Black ship," said Aunt Susan Etter, who saw them with her own eyes as a girl of thirteen, "and the other was a big fine ship." The first was the Shannon, her paint sadly weathered by three months cruising, and the second was her prize the Chesapeake, still fresh and glittering from the Boston shipyard. As they passed, the spectators observed that the decks were being swabbed and that the scuppers were running red.⁶⁰

MacMechan continues with two more eye-witness accounts of the spectacle, one of them by Thomas Chandler Haliburton, who supplied gory "detail" in abundance:

The deck was not cleaned (for reasons of necessity which were obvious enough) and the coils and folds of rope were steeped in gore, as if in a slaughter-house.... Pieces of skin and

pendant hair were adhering to the sides of the ship; and in one place I noticed fingers protruding, as if thrust through the outer wall of the frigate, while several of the sailoars to whom liquor had evidently been handed through the port-holes by visitors in boats, were lying asleep on the bloody floor, as if they had fallen in action and had expired where they lay.⁶¹

MacMechan continues his account by mentioning Captain Broke of the

Shannon:

Great honour was done to the victors. The Halifax merchants presented Broke with an address and a piece of plate. The home government promoted him, gave him a pension, and made him a baronet. He never entirely recovered from his wounds. Aunt Susan Etter remembered the white handkerchief he wore about his head in the streets of Halifax. He quitted the service and spent the afternoon of life as a country gentleman, devoted to his family, tending his estate, reading Horace, and going to church.⁶²

The skillful juxtapositioning of eye-witnesses such as Haliburton and Miss Etter achieves an immediacy that is very compelling for a reader, who feels that the narrator has a unique connection with an event remote in time by means of his rapport with someone who actually participated in the events described. This feeling of immediacy is characteristic of many of MacMechan's stories and serves as a gloss for Thomas Raddall's remarks concerning MacMechan's relationship to Halifax's history.⁶³

Certainly, the history of the city was alive for MacMechan, particularly because of the stories he had elicited from such observers as Miss Etter.

Such interpolation of first-hand information is characteristic of MacMechan's sea stories and becomes their most pronounced feature in the two later volumes, Old Province Tales and There Go the Ships. Throughout the three, the method of organization is the same. A story, either encountered in its historical context or heard recently, often through newspaper accounts, will prompt MacMechan to investigate more closely. For example, the germ of his story "The Luck of the Grilse"

may be seen in his journals for December 21, 1916, in which he notes the arrival of the "torpedo-boat destroyer" in Halifax, after she had been through a series of dramatic adventures, with the comment "A marvellous tale!" From such an observation, he proceeds to an examination of the vessel itself and an interview with the men involved so that he can compile an accurate account of events which he then renders in his own prose. The method used in relating this story in the final chapter of Sagas of the Sea becomes typical of the later volumes. In these, MacMechan's personal involvement becomes conspicuous, in the Grilse story, his participation is rather veiled. Certain phrases suggest that he has verified some matters for himself, but their wording is quite impersonal: "inspection showed /the Grilse's/ planking still dirty with oil; a huge dinge in the forward funnel, one mast gone" and "professional comment was more restrained" are both neutral and objective statements, in comparison with the involvement MacMechan displays in later stories. In the Grilse story his presence is to be inferred and serves to support the accuracy of his assertions, whereas in the later books his personal involvement becomes more pronounced and his writing, therefore, takes on a more familiar, immediate character.

The change in tone in the two later books is perhaps significant in that it represents a change in MacMechan's conception of his role as chronicler of nautical matters, historical and contemporary. He states as his aim, in the introduction to There Go the Ships, the presentation of what he calls "plain truth".

For the third time, I offer the public a handful of true stories, chiefly adventures of Nova Scotia seamen. My aim is plain truth; "romance" I avoid and abjure. The sources of each tale are noted in the table of contents, under each title. My task has been to order my material, correlate and harmonize the statements, and thus reconstruct

the incident. Inference and deduction came into play; but it was surprising to find how readily the collected facts fitted together as whole coherent narratives. Perhaps they may serve some native Carlyle of the future as data in a study of heroes and the heroic in history.⁶⁴

It would seem that initially his imagination was fired by the drama he perceived in sea-faring and that he wished to record, rather impersonally, the events of which he had knowledge. By the time his final volume appears, however, over half of the twelve stories in it are supported by or completely supplied by what MacMechan calls "personal narrative" of participants in the action, or their relatives. The alteration in the tone of the stories, therefore, is quite definite. In reconstructing the incidents of each story, MacMechan appears to be offering his record of a vanishing age in the hope that some "native Carlyle" of the future might utilize the work in a manner similar to Carlyle's use of history in On Heroes and Hero-Worship. As we have seen in Chapter I, Carlyle's use of material was characterized by his personal, imaginative, and idiosyncratic treatment of central figures in order to illuminate wider areas of historical thought and significance. It is characteristic of MacMechan to unite his earlier with his final writing in such a manner as this paragraph would suggest, for Carlyle's thought and writing provide an organizing theme in MacMechan's work throughout his lifetime. Moreover, as we also saw in Chapter I, MacMechan was very much alive to the significance of first-hand accounts of individuals he perceived as part of a vanished age. His involvement in history by means of a living link in the chain connecting the present with the past is a potent force in all his work, and it finds particularly fresh expression in his work with the nautical history of Nova Scotia. In his two final books in this trilogy, MacMechan has achieved a mingling of the nostalgia of the past with vivid evocations of the past by means of the testimony of survivors of by-gone days and events. This is one of his most felicitous

achievements in the books, for by such a juxtaposition of past and present MacMechan renders his stories in a manner that is both highly original and impossible to recapture, for, as he so rightly perceived, he was living at a time in history that was auspicious and indeed crucial for salvaging these stories.

In Old Province Tales one finds an outstanding instance of his tendency to see the past through the present, thereby adding a dimension to the historical account. This technique, familiar from the oral tradition of folklore, consists of consulting an "oldest inhabitant" or a survivor for advice or corroboration. In "The Lennie Mutiny", Chapter XII of the book, MacMechan retells the story of the mutiny of the crew of the Lennie and the subsequent murder of their captain, Stanley Hatfield of Yarmouth County. The account of these events, gathered mainly from newspaper versions appearing in The Times between March and July of 1876, is based on fact but is given a highly coloured interpretation and bias by MacMechan. In this tale one encounters an instance of his explicit racial prejudice. It is difficult to determine how much of this prejudice was MacMechan's and how much was that of the Nova Scotian seamen whom he interviewed. Certainly the Mediterranean sailor was regarded by local mariners (and also by the British) as untrustworthy, lazy, and treacherous. His use of knives instead of fists was seen as proof of his unmanly nature. Various examples of these prejudices stand out in the text of MacMechan's account of the Lennie mutiny, among them the following:

Nor was life on board one's own ship always safe. Crews were an uncertain quantity. No one could tell what foreigners were thinking of, or what they would do. They had a curious way of looking down at you, when they went aloft....One foreigner in a crew can be managed, two or three together almost certainly meant trouble; but a fo'c'sle full of Levantines

was a serious problem....Certain is it that Big Harry /a Greek/ drew his knife with deadly swiftness, stabbed Hatfield in the face, and instantly followed up with the ghastly, disabling belly-slash. His sureness of aim in the dark implies practice. Next year, another Greek almost disembowelled poor Captain Best of the barque Caswell with the same blow. Another Greek tried it with Worthington of the Nice, but the second mate was quicker with a belaying pin; and there was one Greek less in the world. This peculiar stab seems especially Greek.⁶⁸

Such obvious racial bias here colours the telling and introduces a personal note into the story which had been absent in the previous volume. The personal tone, sustained throughout the story, alters to a tone familiar from the essays in The Porter of Bagdad when, at the conclusion of the story, MacMechan introduces a note of melancholy. The pathos of the captain's murder is emphasised by MacMechan's conversation with Hatfield's surviving brother, who is unable to comprehend why the murder had to happen:

Nearly fifty years afterwards, in the golden haze of a rare September day, when every branch was scarlet with autumn and the yellow dahlias were a-flame about the old Hatfield homestead, Ned Hatfield told a sympathetic visitor the story of his brother Stanley's end. Below, the winding Chebogue glittered like silver. Over all was the peace of the mellowing year, a perfect contrast to the deed of blood that dark October morning on board the Lennie. Tears were in Ned Hatfield's eyes, and his fine old face was troubled, as he bade this visitor good-bye.

"Stanley was all right," he said. "He never bore a grudge. We never knew just why they did it."⁶⁹

This conclusion to the story, and to the book, gives the account an immediacy and an elegaic quality typical of MacMechan's writing, with its frequent suggestion of the lacrimae rerum.

By the time MacMechan comes to write There Go the Ships, his use of first-hand narrative is well-established. One of the most memorable stories in this book, both from the standpoint of its intrinsic interest and for the opportunity it provides for inspection of MacMechan's research

methods, is "A Master Mariner", Chapter V. In this story, MacMechan gives an account of the brigantine Cleo and her captain, J.B. Marsh, who kept her afloat when she was swept off course in a gale en route to Halifax from Boston in 1868. In this account, MacMechan notes the oddity of his own organization of the story: "This story is told end for end. Against all the rules of art, the sequel comes at the beginning, because the latter part of the tale explains and illuminates the first." The tale is relatively simple and, by the standards of most of his stories, relatively short. What remains of MacMechan's notes and correspondence, however, indicates the kind of attention and care he employed in his rendering of accurate details in such stories. As we have already seen, MacMechan's polished style can subsume the factual portion of his stories and inform the reader of matters essential to a comprehension of what is at stake in the drama by means of almost offhand description and exposition. For example, MacMechan is able to sketch in a fairly detailed background by means of vivid figures of speech:

In 1918, when the German submarine warfare was unlimited, and one out of every four ships leaving British ports, failed to return, the Truro Queen was built at Economy, Nova Scotia, to meet, in her own small way, the clamour for tonnage to make good such awful loss. She was a tidy little tern schooner of three hundred and eighty-six tons. A lucky error which lengthened her keel beyond the plan, endowed her with almost supernatural powers as a carrier and a swift sailer. Incredible cargoes could be stowed in her well-moulded hold, or piled on her trim deck, and she would walk away with them like a witch on a broomstick, passing plodding freighters and other sailing vessels as if they were anchored. Experience soon proved her to be an excellent sea-boat in all weathers, dry, and rising on the waves like a sea-bird, the pride and delight of her master. In short, she was a modern triumph of the ship-builder's honest craft, which flourished nowhere more brilliantly than in the maritime province of Nova Scotia.⁷²

Having given half a dozen pages to various situations in which the reader can appraise the indomitable nature and the strength of

character of Captain Marsh, MacMechan sums up his account of the man with these words:

Such was Jonathan Borden Marsh. In daring, in seamanship, in ability to deal with men and to enrich his owners, he was a typical old-time Bluenose master mariner. It was not he who lost the charters and piled up the dainty Truro Queen on Egg Island in the fog. He came ashore from his last command on July 2nd, 1920. At eighty-one a man is entitled to rest from his labours.⁷³

MacMechan then introduces himself into the story.

In one day, I travelled nearly two hundred miles to have speech with Borden Marsh in his own house at Economy, a curious corruption of the Indian word Okonoma. [MacMechan the philologist cannot resist this detail.] It was well worth while. I found him in his shirt-sleeves, papering his kitchen. He was a light, little man, with a broad forehead, clear brown eyes, and a clear, brown, healthy skin. In speech he is deliberate and direct, dryly humorous. He has never touched tobacco or liquor. He has all his faculties keenly alert, and I was not long in discovering that he was a Christian mystic. He knows his Pilot Who has guided him throughout his long life from the Arctic to the Line over all the waste of waters. Nor has he ever carried fire-arms of any kind. He believes that if the Power he trusts in cannot protect him, nothing can.⁷⁴

It is in the setting so described by MacMechan that Marsh then relates the story of what occurred in 1868, when the brigantine Cleo was driven off course during a storm. MacMechan's own appreciation of the heroism of Marsh and his men in saving the ship is dependent to a large extent on his knowledge of the intricacies of such a situation -- a ship caught in what is known as a cross-sea and beginning to be swamped. MacMechan's task as a chronicler is to inform his readers, most of whom are uninformed about the fine points of such a situation, in an exact and interesting manner. This he does in the following manner:

Even the landsman can perceive that a fierce wind working its will on the fluid element, water, first from one quarter and then from the very opposite, would stir up such a hurly-burly of warring waves as might dismember the strongest wooden ship that ever floated.

The sailor calls the phenomenon a cross-sea. "In such a cross-sea the Cleo laboured heavily. An ocean billow represents uncounted tons, and it flings its weight with the fury of a cataract. Waves swept the Cleo. This is no figure of speech but a statement of literal fact. Boats and everything movable on deck went first, and then the heavy bulwarks. Moreover, the constant fierce buffetings from side to side wrenched and raked the stout fabric of the vessel with the heavy load of coal, and the Cleo began to leak badly."⁷⁵

MacMechan's narrative is made vivid by turns of phrase that put matters succinctly into perspective; for example, he writes that the Cleo "was only a little collier in distress, with the lives of six men at stake, but the problem was the same as for the ice-gored Titanic. Save the ship or save life."⁷⁶ The problem is immediately made vivid for the reader. MacMechan is frequently able to convey the significance of incidents by means of his well-chosen figures of speech. In the following quotation, for example, his description of the state of the Cleo is rendered vivid by various figures:

A fresh peril menaced the little brigantine. When the terrific cross-seas smashed the bulwarks, the broken stanchions remained sticking up all around like so many ragged fangs. As every wave had now free access to the Cleo's deck, the water poured round the stanchions and rotted the oakum packed about them where they fitted into the water-line board. This would cause a leak from above. The water would seep into the timbers which form the skin of a vessel, and rend the fabric of the little ship in pieces. The sea assaulted from without, and sapped and mined within. The end would come speedily. There was nothing to be done but caulk the seams.⁷⁷

Phrases such as "like so many ragged fangs" and "the skin of a vessel" and "sapped and mined within" all contribute to the effect of the passage. In the section which follows this description of the vessel's plight, MacMechan's powers of exposition are clearly to be seen. Such explanation and lucidity of expression are doubtlessly part of what made him effective in the classroom, for the reader senses the patience and care with which the problem is set before readers who are potentially ignorant of such

matters:

Now, [MacMechan writes] caulking requires two hands to do the work, the right, to wield the heavy mallet, and the left, to hold the caulking-iron and feed the oakum into the seams. The holes were in the Cleo's water-line board. Whoever undertook the difficult and dangerous job of work must go outboard. It was so difficult and so dangerous that it could not be entrusted to any of the men. The captain himself went over the side in a double bowline.

Let the landward reader try to grasp the factors of the problem.

A sailor is lowered in a rope over the side of a pitching, heaving vessel in a storm. He has a hammer in one hand and a piece of iron in the other, and between the uncertain rolls of the labouring vessel, he tries to drive ravelled rope into gaping apertures. The only time to do the work is when the vessel rolls away from him. When she rolls the other way, the sailor is buried under the water and half drowned. As he comes up, he clears the water from his eyes, and strikes a few hurried blows with his tools. Then, before he has drawn half a dozen breaths, he is plunged under the waves again. The action is repeated and repeated.

Aaron Churchill went over the side of the Research with snatch-blocks to hobble the broken rudder, and was drawn up unconscious; but Marsh's job was even more exacting. One would think he would need as many arms as a Hindu god, and he was slowly starving. He was hauled back on deck exhausted, with his task not completed, but he had done enough to keep the little ship from dissolving in the waves.⁷⁸

The story of Captain Marsh and the Cleo lacks the excitement and the drama of several of the historical tales -- the stories of the Rover, the Tribune, the Shannon, for instance. This story is distinguished by the simplicity of its subject and by the admiration the author displays for the unassuming "hero" of the story. Marsh is a small and rather insignificant figure, but in MacMechan's presentation he assumes heroic proportions and comes to typify an age that is rapidly vanishing.

From perusing letters from Marsh to MacMechan, it is possible to discern the quality of their friendship, which lasted for a period of ten years, from 1923 to 1933, ending with MacMechan's death. Ironically,

Marsh, who MacMechan perceived as a relic of the past and a representative of a former age, outlived MacMechan. The correspondence between the two men began with a letter from Marsh addressed to "Dear Mr. MacMechan", dated December 26, 1923, and written in an aged, shaking hand. (Marsh was then eighty-two.) The letter is obviously written in answer to some query from MacMechan and is quite formal in tone. Over the years, his salutations go from "Dear Professor" to, finally, "Dear Friend", revealing, with their accompanying photographs and their lengthy and personal revelations, what was obviously a deep bond between the two men and revealing as well the sort of involvement MacMechan often attained with the subjects of his stories. One letter in particular indicates the sort of detail MacMechan is at pains to verify when writing these stories: it is written on behalf of Captain Marsh by one Velma Moore and contains diagrams the accuracy of which Marsh has endorsed to enable MacMechan to understand in more detail the action of a makeshift pump used to keep the Cleo afloat. The information has obviously been of use to MacMechan, for in "A Master Mariner" he writes of the crucial work of these pumps in considerable detail:

Pumps in small craft like the Cleo are of the simplest construction. Two logs bored hollow were fitted, each with an iron shaft and a leather-covered piston. In sea language, the shaft is a spear. It is worked by a short lever terminating in an iron hook, which locks into the bent end of the "spear". Leverage is obtained by means of a stout arm running out at an angle from the top of the pump. The pump-handle works up and down on a bole through this post. Suction brings the water to the open top and spills it on the deck to run off through the scuppers.⁷⁹

MacMechan's stories seem to have brought him unsolicited material, and he was apparently regarded in various quarters as a chronicler. One letter, from a C. Perry Foote of Lakeville, Kings County, N.S., indicates this view. In a letter dated December 21, 1927, Foote wishes to inform

MacMechan of certain facts related to Hall's Harbour in an attempt to preserve this material while there still exist witnesses who can provide relevant information. Foote concludes his letter with "believe me, to you and you alone have I told what I have written", surely an indication of the regard in which MacMechan and his work were held by Nova Scotians who read his tales. They appear to have seen in MacMechan an articulate spokesman for their disappearing way of life. Reciprocally, it is often the understated manner of telling their stories that impresses MacMechan with the speakers' mettle: he repeatedly marvels at the laconic manner in which sailors have recorded their activities in the logs of ships. Often, for instance, a spectacular rescue is noted, merely in passing: "of course, MacMechan writes saving life at sea is more or less a habit with sailors, all in the day's work, and nothing to call for remark. A dry, matter-of-fact entry in the log... would close the incident". This sort of understatement he also encounters in his interviews with sailors: one of MacMechan's "heroes" "could not be described as a willing witness, when he told of his experience":

The facts had rather to be dragged out of him. One would almost think the gold watch and chain awarded him officially by President Woodrow Wilson in the name of the Great Republic for saving the lives of seven American sailors involved some sort of scandal. But the Lunenburg way is not effusive.⁸¹

One often feels, in reading MacMechan's accounts of these adventures, that his fascination with the events comes as much from their understated and humble telling as from their intrinsic drama. One often senses MacMechan's own humility -- that he realizes his own powers of articulation and wishes to be of service in giving a voice to those who by default or by design remain silent about their achievements.

MacMechan's idea of himself as a chronicler or as a recorder of such material is indicated in many places. His letters to Harvey,

quoted above, reveal this idea, and he explicitly mentions, in Sagas of the Sea, the role he consistently takes for himself -- that of the chronicler, Hakluyt: "Nova Scotia has need of another Hakluyt", he writes, "to record the traffics and discoveries, the disasters and the heroic deeds of the seafaring provincials. For more than a century Nova Scotian keels ploughed the seven seas in peace and war".⁸² The prose of the Elizabethan chronicler is clearly in MacMechan's mind quite often as a standard for the recounting of vivid action in language appropriate to the occasion. For instance, one of MacMechan's main points in his essay on Moby Dick is that Melville's prose there possesses the sweep and the freshness of Elizabethan English, especially of the English used by Hakluyt in Principal Navigations, Voyages, and Discoveries of the English Nation (1589-1600). J.A. Froude, MacMechan's opponent, characterized Hakluyt's work as "the prose epic of the modern English nation".⁸³ It has also been described as

[a] collection of more than one hundred long narratives... composed by as many hands. Some of these hands were of exceeding skill, like Raleigh's and like Hakluyt's own in his translations. Some were crude and unfinished, like those of many of the sailors who copied their log books... The romance of action runs through even the most pedestrian account of perils and profits, to reach its height in the naval exploits against Spain and in the exploring of the frozen north. The romance of wonder at the marvels of man and of nature illumines the whole fabric of the work which portrays the epic enterprise of England.⁸⁴

The similarities between Hakluyt's endeavour as so described and MacMechan's seem to lie chiefly in the "romance of action" both writers chronicled and the nationalistic fervor implicit in both.

A quality one might define as a sense of the "romance of place" is another aspect of MacMechan's interest in these stories. In various areas of Nova Scotia, particularly in regions in which ship-building was important, MacMechan perceived attractively unique qualities. As we have seen in the previous chapter, his emphasis in The Book of Ultima Thule

concerned the celebration of regions in the province that had remained unrecognized for their particular qualities. In his books of sea stories, the same emphasis is perceptible. His description of the village of Maitland, Hants County, is an example of this sort of writing: when MacMechan wrote of Maitland, the once-bustling village of the late nineteenth century had become a ghosttown.

Maitland is the Deserted Village of Nova Scotia /MacMechan writes/. In the heyday of sail, its shipyards rang from daylight till dark with the clamour of saw and broad-axe and adze on hardwood, of mallet on caulking-iron, of hammer on trenail. At night, nine hundred men would be free to walk about the one long street. Maitland was the home port of famous ships and able captains. Here was built the Great Ship, which made the Lawrence fortune in one voyage, the tragic Esther Roy, and many another staunch Bay of Fundy vessel.

Now the hamlet is shrunk and silent. Rarely does a human figure cross the street. The shore farms, and the few remaining big houses look across the restless red waters of the Bay, in their portentous ebb and flow, towards Economy and Masstown and Great Village, and beyond, to the blue range of the Cobequids. Sunset over these hills is like a gate opened in the Celestial City letting free the splendour of God.⁸⁵

Descriptions such as these abound in the books and indicate his passionate involvement with his material. Again, like some of the descriptive passages in The Book of Ultima Thule, such effusive description in these sea stories inspires a love of place in a reader. MacMechan's allusions to ships such as the W.D. Lawrence and the Esther Roy make it seem that it is the reader's obvious responsibility to know the histories of the ships. MacMechan appears to be taking for granted that any well-informed reader will recognize at once the names to which he refers. This is also the case with his place names — Economy, Masstown, and Great Village are listed as though they are well-known. This technique fosters in the reader a confidence that these places deserve celebration, and the concluding simile, extravagant as it may at first glance seem, is hardly

overwritten if one has in fact witnessed such a sunset. Like the Book of Ultima Thule, these three books contain confident, proud passages which render MacMechan's deep feelings about the areas which he describes.

It is very probable that such descriptions and such emotions have given rise to many kinds of re-appraisals of places close to home by native Nova Scotians. One example comes immediately to mind. In her autobiography, Dr. Helen Creighton writes of taking her collection of ballads from Devil's Island to MacMechan and of the enthusiasm he showed for her work.⁸⁶ (His own private journals record one of her visits to him, on February 16, 1933.) Obviously she regarded MacMechan as a mentor in such work, and her record of her first glimpse of Devil's Island echoes the sense of wonder MacMechan's descriptions of hitherto unremarked local scenes can evoke, although her writing is less felicitous than his: "Devil's Island seemed unreal, this setting so near home, yet so remote. It was like stepping into a different world and we were loathe to leave."⁸⁷ In reviewing Songs and Ballads of Nova Scotia, Dr. W. Roy MacKenzie, a pioneer in collecting folk-songs from the province, notes this feeling for Devil's Island expressed by Dr. Creighton:

Devil's Island is a windy, treeless, fog-ridden spot, with a circumference of one mile in the waters where the Atlantic Ocean begins to converge upon Halifax Harbour. But to all true devotees of folk-song it will henceforth be viewed as a place fairer than the balmy isles of the Pacific, for it was here that Miss Helen Creighton with a rare combination of good luck, resourcefulness and tact discovered and made articulate -- and also melodious -- an extraordinary family by the name of Henneberry.⁸⁸

The point here is that MacMechan's influence, while possibly not susceptible to direct documentation, is nevertheless to be felt by the manner in which he pioneered the work of enabling Nova Scotians to view their surroundings in a fresh way and so to appreciate the uniqueness of their environment. Later popularizations of Halifax history, for

example, seem indebted to MacMechan: Tales Told Under the Old Town Clock, for one, has as one sentence in its Introduction "Nova Scotia is a land of romance" (author's italics), something MacMechan was one of the first to note, and the book itself contains tales very similar to some collected by MacMechan. Similarly, Thomas Raddall's Halifax: Warden of the North takes its title from Kipling's phrase which was used extensively by MacMechan and contains several explicit references to MacMechan's writings. MacMechan's emphasis on the necessity of looking to one's immediate environment for topics of interest is made explicit in a letter he wrote to D.C. Harvey on August 9, 1921. Writing to congratulate Harvey on his address on Joseph Howe, MacMechan asserts that "the root idea -- the value of local patriotism -- seems to me wholly admirable, and you have illustrated and enforced it. Another feature, which I like very much is finding your material at home, instead of going to the ends of the earth for it."

That interest in these books was not confined to the province about which they were written is indicated by the reviews the books received. A representative sample from reviews of Old Province Tales will demonstrate some of the attitudes of readers elsewhere in Canada and the United States. The Saskatoon Phoenix of January 20, 1925, carried a fairly trite review praising the book, by a vice-president of the Canadian Authors' Association, Austin Bothwell. The Winnipeg Free Press of February 7, 1925, ran a review signed "The Bookman": presumably this was D.C. Harvey, who called MacMechan "the Hakluyt of Nova Scotia" and said "I venture to predict that his reputation in letters will rest on his affectionate though doubtless strenuously patient work in rescuing these fascinating records for popular reading... Canadians are debtors to him." In the Canadian Bookman for February, 1925, there appeared a fairly

extensive review of the book, which said in part

Dr. MacMechan's part has been to recount the incidents and he has done so in a way that should leave no regret that Robert Louis Stevenson or any one else should have had his task....they are models of dramatic story-telling In these days when fiction is taking the edge off our appreciation of real life, it is well to be brought back to the realization that literature in its final analysis is history. On this true basis Canadian Literature has nothing to fear." Dr. MacMechan shows what can be done.

In Book Parlance (February, 1925), V.B. Rhodenizer writes "Is there not material here to stimulate the imagination of some novelist to the production of fiction of a kind and quality not yet produced in Canada despite the rich romantic backgrounds of her history?" The Saturday Review of Literature (May 9, 1925), speaks of the book as "containing material for a Joseph Conrad", and the New York Times Book Review (June 14, 1925) observes that "the present book is fact, not fiction, but its realism reads like romance." Both the Ottawa Citizen (September 19, 1925) and the Chicago Tribune (December 4, 1925) review it favourably, the former saying "Professor MacMechan is doing excellent work in popularizing the history of the Old Province." The one dissenting voice was that of a Margaret Lawrence in the Christian Guardian (February 25, 1925), who calls the book "a procession of pallid pictures smelling faintly of stale blood" and claims that it "belongs to the cries of the side-sitters, who indulge and encourage the imaginative intoxication of a perverted taste for atrocity, and spread the unctuous magic of illusion to hide the catastrophe of fact." In the copy of this review clipped and retained by MacMechan, he has written "the complete or perfect prig". In general, however, most critics indicated their approval of the work MacMechan had done in preserving this material from oblivion.

One result of MacMechan's writing was a friendship that evolved between MacMechan and Frederick William Wallace, the author of Wooden Ships and Iron Men, a book published in 1923, the same year as Sagas of the Sea. In the autumn of 1924, Wallace wrote to MacMechan, urging him to continue his work of collecting material while it was still available:

There is so much material to be collected re the old shipping days in the Maritime Provinces that I hope you will find time to record more of it before it is lost for all time. Repetition by ourselves and other writers of Nova Scotia's sea sagas is eminently desirable. No one man can cover the subject fully.

Apparently at Wallace's instigation, MacMechan wrote a long letter to the editor of the Halifax Morning Chronicle (February 2, 1925) entitled "Our Ships of Yore" in which he advocates the founding of a permanent museum of maritime history for the province. The fruits of this enterprise can to-day be seen in the Public Archives of Nova Scotia where a collection of ship models and paintings surround a tablet inscribed "Marine Collection/Made by/Archibald McKellar MacMechan/For the history of Nova Scotia/and presented to Dalhousie/As a permanent expression of his love/For the college and the province." In many ways, this collection is as eloquent as anything MacMechan ever wrote: the delicacy and precision of the models collected from his "old salts" in places such as Economy and Maitland bring the abstractions of his verbal descriptions of ships to concrete and tangible reality.

MacMechan's intuition that he would be remembered best for his work as a collector of material relating to the sea would seem to have been accurate. These last books have something of urgency in them: it is as if MacMechan, aware that his days were growing few, somehow identifies with the transience of the way of life that he is attempting to arrest for posterity in his work. The books have about them a nostalgia that might, in George Grant's phrase, be called a "lament".

There is in these books the plangency of one who is celebrating a vanished time that he recalls as a good time, better than the present time in which he is rooted. In thinking that he would be remembered longest for these books, MacMechan was perhaps expressing his intuitive feeling that these were his most congenial writings. It would seem that in them he felt most at ease, and this feeling communicates itself to readers to-day. Certainly a number of aspects of MacMechan can be discerned in these books. Perhaps their most outstanding aspect is their sense of vicarious living: MacMechan's love of the "heroic" life and of "manly" deeds is nowhere in his writings as clearly to be seen. The reasons for his fascination with heroic action seem fairly obvious from even a brief acquaintance with the circumstances of his life. An essentially introspective nature, combined with a slight physical infirmity⁹² and a sensitive and imaginative turn of mind all contributed to his "academic" life. He was a contemplative man by nature and occupation, but he was powerfully attracted by the active life of sea-faring, a life in which the qualities he so much admired could be actually and even dramatically displayed.

Secondly, these books reveal MacMechan the man more completely than any other of his works. His penchant for warm friendships is evident, particularly in There Go the Ships, in his obvious delight in sitting by the fireside in the homely surroundings he frequents in order to obtain first-hand information for these books. In one letter, in which he asserts the importance to him of human relationships, he speaks of an

abundant harvest in the shape of letters chiefly from old pupils, giving me such pleasant glimpses of various hearthfires. It is a good joy, as Shelley said, to be taken into a home. I have never been in homes enough, just as I have never heard enough music. I shall die with both longings unsatisfied.⁹³

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One senses often MacMechan's essential simplicity, and especially in these books.

Thirdly, these books show MacMechan as a teacher. In having to explain to readers ignorant of the ways of the sea, he is often at his best: the explanations are usually lucid, telling, possessed of a clarity that can bring scenes and situations into focus for those to whom the things described might be unfamiliar. Often, too, his training as a philologist adds clarity to his explanations. This aspect of his prose is evident, for instance, in the following paragraph:

"Lashing" is not what landsmen and uninformed artists make of it. A sailor lashes himself to the mast, or, in this case, to the mizzen-chains, by fastening one end of a rope to something solid and slipping the other end, made into a loop, over his head and under one arm. This secures him from being washed away, but leaves his arms and legs free. He can cut his lashing at any moment.⁹⁴

This type of writing can, obviously, verge on the didactic, and in some of his accounts, notably in versions of these stories in school readers, there is an element of talking down to an audience that can be slightly irritating. On the whole, however, his inherent enthusiasm for the subject matter saves most of these stories from didacticism.

In short, then, these books furnished MacMechan with an ideal medium for writing what was most congenial to him -- an easy, genial prose. They combine the writing style evident in his essays with a form of research very much suited to his taste. In these stories of the sea, MacMechan appears to have combined his interest and his talents in a form peculiarly suited to him and so to have produced books which were his true forte and which he rightly regarded as his chief legacy to future generations.

¹⁵MacMechan's work with original historical material has been noted. See, for example, D.C. Harvey, "Notes and Comments", The Canadian Historical Review (September, 1933), p. 343, C. Bruce Fergusson, "Preface", Nova Scotia Archives, IV.

¹⁶Harvey, op.cit., p. 344.

¹⁷This quality in MacMechan is one familiar to intellectuals who enjoy puzzles and mysteries. Three such authors come to mind in this connection: Ronald Knox, author of The Three Taps; "Josephine Tey" (Gordon Daviot), author of The Daughter of Time; and Dorothy Sayers, author of a number of mystery thrillers. While there exists no evidence to suggest that MacMechan enjoyed such writing, what I am suggesting here is that he shares with many intellectuals an interest in piecing together disparate bits of information that eventually add up to an intelligible whole. Such an interest appears to be central to his study of history -- he is fascinated with the minutiae of the overall picture, as well as with the total picture itself.

¹⁸He was required to study Old Norse for his doctoral work at Johns Hopkins, as he testifies: "My second minor is Old Norse, on account of its intrinsic interest and close relations with English" (MacMechan in Testimonials of Archibald MacKellar MacMechan, p. 4).

¹⁹This should read "Popular".

²⁰This should read "1713". The "sketch" Harvey mentions was originally given as a lecture series over a period of six weeks, beginning in January, 1914, at the School for the Blind in Halifax. See Letter to D.C. Harvey, January 14, 1914.

²¹Harvey, op.cit., p. 344.

²²Harvey, op. cit., p. 345. The poems to which he refers are chiefly the ballads, "The Ballad of The Rover" and "The Ballad of La Tribune". These were both included in Late Harvest, a posthumous collection of MacMechan's poetry published by Lorne Pierce.

²³MacMechan, Testimonials, p. 5.

²⁴MacMechan to Harvey, March 23, 1925.

²⁵MacMechan's "S. Thomas de Carlyle" is a characteristic and somewhat facetious appellation. In this case, he had been using the name for more than thirty years. See his reminiscences of life as an undergraduate, "This is Our Master" in Life of a Little College, p. 151, where he recalls "our greatest oath was, by Saint Thomas of Carlyle". He frequently praises people he admires in this manner, referring to Sir Andrew MacPhail, for instance, as "the great MacPhail" (Letter to D.C. Harvey, April, 1913). His sonnet "Andrew MacPhail" (reprinted in Appendix F) is similar in tone.

²⁶As we have seen in Chapter IV, particularly in his early writing and The Porter of Bagdad.

²⁷See above, Chapter I, p. 34, particularly the passage from the Introduction to Heroes: "To go to Heroes for minute, solid, moderate statements, as one would go to Gardiner or von Ranke, is a mistake, but for suggestion, and stimulus to seek further into the spiritual history of the race, there is simply no one book like it" (LXXXI).

²⁸At least one critic found MacMechan's liberties with "Fact" too great. MacMechan kept among his scrapbooks a review of Old Province Tales that included the following comment: "we are not to deny Professor MacMechan's facility of expression, a certain degree of ability as a writer, but that ability shows best when he deliberately closes his eyes to facts and thereby hoodwinks his own mind."

²⁹For a discussion of this facet of MacMechan, see above, Chapter I, pp. 11-12. His aversion to strict scholarship is apparent in comments such as he often made in referring to "the deadening title of 'professor'" (DW, January 10, 1920).

³⁰DW, September 13, 1913.

³¹DW, September 27, 1913.

³²Thomas Raddall, Foreword, Tales of the Sea (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1947), p. vii. His emphasis on MacMechan's "aloof" manner is corroborated by at least two other writers. Harvey speaks of "a certain aloofness from sordid realism, which often made him appear to be in the crowd but not of it" (Op. cit., p. 343) and C.L. Bennet mentions "A.M.'s aloofness" in a private letter, April 17, 1976.

³³This is the one of the four not published by McClelland and Stewart. Sagas appears under the general editorship of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch in the Kings Treasuries of Literature series published by Dent. Speaking of the three titles, R.P. Baker observes that There Go the Ships is "a good title" but has "not quite the tang of the others" (letter to MacMechan, July 21, 1928).

³⁴This is true in general, although the War of 1756 is frequently mentioned in all four. MacMechan's own comments on Red Snow are apposite here. In the Introduction he writes "Under my hand, this book turned into something quite different from what I had in mind. I planned a second Book of Ultima Thule, vignettes of Nova Scotia scenes with touches of historical background, but instead it is all about the French and Indians" (Preface, p. 7).

³⁵MacMechan, There Go the Ships, p. 7.

³⁶"People" rather than just "men". MacMechan's inclusion of two female figures is remarkable. See his accounts of Mary Hitchens, keeper of the Seal Island light ("A Beacon Light" in There Go the Ships) and Margaret Douglas, wife of a sea-captain who was aboard ship when the crew mutined ("The Captain's Wife", same volume) for just two examples.

³⁷ See his involvement with the Nova Scotia Historical Society.

³⁸ Harvey, op. cit., p. 343.

³⁹ Raddall, op. cit., p. viii.

⁴⁰ The date is July 17, 1885. A later account of this trip appears in The Week, October 17th and October 24th, 1890. In "This is Our Master", in Life of a Little College, MacMechan mentions the trip as part of the undergraduate life at the University of Toronto during the 1880's. "We went to England as cattle-men, that we might stand in the Abbey in Poet's Corner and see with our own eyes those sacred places which had belonged to the geography of Fairy-Land...."(p. 151).

⁴¹ See above, Chapter III, p. 107.

⁴² MacMechan, Sagas of the Sea, p. 117.

⁴³ Sagas, 112.

⁴⁴ Old Province Tales, p. 258. This phrase comes from MacMechan's account of how David Cook, master of the Sarah, effected the rescue of over three hundred passengers of the packet-ship Caleb Grimshaw in November, 1849. A very interesting relationship between MacMechan's account of this rescue and Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" has been presented by V.L.O. Chittick. See "A Footnote to Tales of the Sea", Dalhousie Review, Vol. 36(1956), pp. 275-78.

⁴⁵ It was his custom to walk the ten miles to Bedford from Halifax, to have tea at "Miss Murphy's Tea Room", and to return to Halifax by train. The accuracy of both the length of his walk and the date of his swims was corroborated by his daughters Jean (Mrs. Willetts) and "Polly" (Mrs. Dobson) in private conversation, October, 1973.

⁴⁶ Raddall's phrase, op. cit., p. xiii. MacMechan's own description is interesting to compare: he speaks of private journals as "that refuge of the lonely and impulsive" (Sartor Resartus, Introduction, p. xvii).

⁴⁷ C.L. Bennet has drawn attention to this in "A Scholar and a Gentleman", Dalhousie Review, XIII(1933), p. 380.

⁴⁸ The stories and artifacts will be discussed below, pp. 217 ff. The songs were of interest to him, but the collecting of them he left to others. See, for example, Roy MacKenzie's acknowledgement to MacMechan in his Preface to Ballads and Sea Songs from Nova Scotia (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928). William Roy Mackenzie (1832-1957) was one of the earliest collectors of Nova Scotian folksongs. His friendship with MacMechan influenced his work in the area, as several of his letters to MacMechan imply. See also MacMechan's review of MacKenzie's The Quest of the Ballad, "Foolish Old Songs", The Review, Dec. 12, 1919.

⁴⁹ Raddall, op. cit., xiv.

⁵⁰ See William B. Hamilton, Local History in Atlantic Canada (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), p. 43.

51 Letter to Harvey, July 6, 1922. The chap-book would presumably be Three Sea Songs, published that year.

52 Letter to Harvey, February 21, 1923.

53 Harvey, op. cit., p. 343.

54 Sagas, p. 5.

55 See MacMechan's private journals, December 21, 1916, for the origin of the story.

56 The former is based on a book entitled Narrative of a Shipwreck on the Island of Cape Breton in a Voyage from Quebec, 1780, by S.W. Prenties, published in London in 1782; the latter, on M.B. Des Brisay's History of The County of Lunenburg, 1870.

57 MacMechan, Sagas of the Sea, p. 8.

58 MacMechan, op. cit., p. 43.

59 MacMechan, private journals, October 18, 1893.

60 MacMechan, Old Province Tales, pp. 200-201.

61 MacMechan, op. cit., p. 202.

62 MacMechan, op. cit., pp. 202-203.

63 See above, p. 210.

64 MacMechan, There Go the Ships, p. 11.

65 See above, Chapter I, note 50.

66 A recent instance of this custom occurs in a poem by Alden Nowlan. In "The Bull Moose", Nowlan wrote "the oldest man in the parish remembered having seen a gelded moose yoked with oxen!".

67 This observation was made by Dr. M.G. Parks who based his comment on personal knowledge of Nova Scotian sailors' attitudes. Corroboration of the idea of such prejudice can also be seen, for example, in F.W. Wallace's novel Blue Water (Toronto: Musson, 1935), Chapter 2.

68 MacMechan, Old Province Tales, pp. 325-327.

69 MacMechan, op. cit., pp. 344-345.

70 MacMechan, There Go the Ships, p. 121.

71 See above, p. 216.

72 MacMechan, op. cit., pp. 121-122.

- 73 MacMechan, op. cit., pp. 125-126.
- 74 MacMechan, op. cit., p. 126.
- 75 MacMechan, op. cit., pp. 128-129.
- 76 MacMechan, op. cit., p. 130.
- 77 MacMechan, op. cit., p. 132.
- 78 MacMechan, op. cit., pp. 132-133.
- 79 MacMechan, op. cit., p. 129.
- 80 MacMechan, Sagas, p. 133.
- 81 MacMechan, There Go the Ships, p. 282.
- 82 MacMechan, Sagas, p. 103.
- 83 Quoted in Baugh, ed., Literary History of England, p. 433.
- 84 G.B. Parks, Richard Hakluyt and the English Voyages, pp. 189-190.
- 85 MacMechan, There Go the Ships, pp. 227-228.
- 86 Helen Creighton, A Life in Folklore, p. 45.
- 87 Creighton, op. cit., p. 58.
- 88 W. Roy MacKenzie, Canadian Historical Review, Vol. XIV(1933), pp. 334-336.
- 89 William Borrett, Tales Told Under the Old Town Clock (Halifax: Imperial Publishing Company, 1942), p. iii.
- 90 Kipling's line, "the Warden of the Honour of the North", from "The Song of the Cities - Halifax". MacMechan frequently quotes it.
- 91 George Grant, Lament for a Nation (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), pp. 2-3.
- 92 This refers, of course, to MacMechan's slight limp. One might interpret some of his enthusiasm for long walks as compensation for this infirmity: an entry in his journal, September 23, 1892, is poignant in its candour. He writes "I dreamt I woke and found my lameness gone". It is perhaps no coincidence that one of MacMechan's most admired figures was Sir Walter Scott, who was also lame. MacMechan writes, often, of the sight of the great man with his limp striding through the streets of Edinburgh. It frequently seems that Scott was another "hero" for MacMechan, one who triumphed over great odds through perseverance and will-power.
- 93 MacMechan, letter to D.C. Harvey, January 14, 1916.
- 94 MacMechan, There Go the Ships, p. 183.

Conclusion

In attempting to place Archibald MacMechan in his context as a Canadian man of letters, one encounters many contradictions in his personality. Perhaps the most intimate, and most satisfactory, insight into his personality and character comes from his early journals his later entries are, generally, without the inwardness of the earlier writing. What he recorded a week after his thirty-first birthday (June 28, 1893) best reveals his essential self and provides the reader with MacMechan's curiously prescient idea of the course his life did, in fact, take

Last Wednesday I was thirty-one. I can't realize exactly what it means. I have done literally nothing, plenty of schemes and no energy to carry them out. I have had all my warnings. My father really a failure from the same cause -- don't disguise it -- laziness. That is my rock ahead. I don't want to make a reputation as a compiler of a dictionary or a grammar. My dearest hope is to make something worthy while the problem of providing well for Edith is first ... It is impossible to forget that. I will get out from under this load of debt and this year, but after all providing for the family is a secondary consideration. The other thing tortures me day and night. I have only nine years now to do it in and if I let the chance go I shall be a disappointed man all my life. I think often of the thousands of men with my dreams and my ambition who have failed -- What is it Thomson says about the thrill of sympathy "in all disastrous fight". I feel that: and then again I feel that I must succeed: that I cannot die till I do. Even now I know the sentence is written and the limit appointed: it was before I was born. But to dwell on thoughts like those would spoil all work. In an old journal kept when I was a boy I found an entry like this. "I wonder if I shall ever be able to write anything" and now Besant says that my stuff is good stuff: some advance in fourteen years. Possibly in another 28 I may amount to something. Anyway I'll die trying. I won't sit down and confess to myself that I'm a failure even if the magazines do reject me and my leg fails me as it seems inclined to do....It took me seven of the best years of my life to make a home for Edith: from 1882 to 1889 every important action of my life was dictated by one desire. That made my life perfect and harmonious. This other task of my maturity is harder; but if tenacity can do it and foresight, I will do it. Something

tells me that I shall live and die in Halifax and I have never been deceived in these premonitions. It would not be a sorry fate. I love the place: it made Edith and home and the dear children possible. I should be ungrateful not to love it. Dirty disreputable old wooden town: it shall give my living and pay my debts and make me independent if I do not become idle and smug and contented with easy chair and slippers and dressing gown.

In this passage, remarkable among his journals for its sustained candour and introspection, one sees MacMechan's chief concerns revealed. His fears of failure to achieve anything of lasting value because of what he considers his most dangerous tendency -- laziness -- are combined with his desire to become something other than a pedant or grammarian. One can judge the measure of his success in becoming something else -- a creative writer -- by reading what he wrote later in life: his essays, his lively literary criticism, his historical narratives are all infused with a vitality that is characteristic of MacMechan. In the passage we also see reference to the sustained activity that is characteristic of him. In looking at his work as a whole, one sees that the early years, spent in scholarly and academic work, were without the relative security and relaxation of his later years in which his writing came into its own through an easy familiarity of style that came naturally to him and which, through its very ease, perhaps masks the essential work that went into its composition. Until his death at the age of seventy-one, MacMechan seems to have continued his fight against "laziness", and his last years were, in fact, among his most productive. One might choose as an epitaph for him lines from one of his favorite poems, Tennyson's "Ulysses":

How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!

Appendix A

The omission of Isabella Crawford and D.C. Scott from MacMechan's consideration of Canadian poets in his Headwaters of Canadian Literature is likely to strike the modern reader as odd, or even markedly eccentric. One is therefore tempted to speculate on MacMechan's reasons for excluding them. Perhaps the most satisfactory explanation is that given by E.K. Brown, in 1943. Though Brown is writing about Scott only, the comment could apply equally well to MacMechan's exclusion of Crawford.

In 1924 Archibald MacMechan, who was then nearing the end of a long career as professor of English at Dalhousie University, brought out his Headwaters of Canadian Literature. The fruit of a course given for many years, this is the most distinguished and sensible book about the national literature yet written by an English-speaking Canadian. "It is," he says in his preface, "emphatically a sketch"; and on the first page of the copy I possess the warning not to expect too much is repeated in MacMechan's elegant Victorian hand. What he meant was that he preferred to keep his two hundred and thirty small pages for the major figures, to speak of the lesser worthies only when their work had shaped the development of letters or culture. Still, MacMechan's standards are not rigorous; space is found to refer to more than forty poets and to study with care some dozen of these. Duncan Campbell Scott is not of the dozen; he is not even of the forty. The only allusion to him is the mention in passing that he had written the life of a governor of the ancient Province of Upper Canada. When MacMechan wrote, Scott's first collection had been before the public for more than thirty years, half a dozen others had followed it; and Scott's productive career was indeed approaching its end.

How is such an omission to be explained? It was assuredly not the result of any personal spite -- it simply reflects the long failure of the Canadian public and Canadian critics to do anything like justice to Scott's powers.¹

¹ E.K. Brown, "Duncan Campbell Scott", in S.L. Dragland, ed., Duncan Campbell Scott: A Book of Criticism (Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 1974), pp. 74-75.

Appendix B

Pen Pictures Portraying Popular Profs

Un Canadien errant
 Banni de ses foyers,
 Parcourait en pleurant
 Des pays etrangers.

Archibald MacKellar MacMechan is the Senior Professor at Dalhousie, and is proud of the title. He is worthy of such honour as is paid to the senior professor, which is scant enough.

He likes golf, yachting, the Army, the Navy, reading aloud—especially Tennyson,—and being supercilious.

He has the best reading voice in Nova Scotia, and the worst golf manners in America.

He came to Dalhousie when he was twenty-seven years old. He is now sixty-eight years young. He was born in Ontario, and secretly considers himself something of an expatriate.

For years, when a young teacher, he wore a straw hat even in winter time. He discarded that in favour of his present mortar-board.

He was not born with that beard, but he wears it effectively. It imparts dignity.

Toronto is his university home, but his best student work was done in post graduate days at Johns Hopkins.

He never did study in England. Nobody knows where he got the accent. His degrees are B.A.(Tor.), Ph.D.(J.H.U.), LL.D(Tor.). He is also a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada.

His German is excellent. His French is passable. He reads in other languages. Every Spring he tells all and sundry, "Mai ist gekommen." And he has a French quotation for any occasion.

He detests gum-chewing, college yells, and the wearing of sweaters. He has the greatest contempt for a certain preaching poetaster, and little less for a certain preaching philosopher.

He has not got a good sense of money value. He would buy the Dartmouth Ferry and place it on the Library mantle if he could wrest sufficient money from the Science Library of German Periodicals. It is said that he once bought a necklace for his charming wife with the money given him to pay the butcher's bill.

He is liked by most though few will admit it. He is not a good clubman, but he is a good home-man.

His editions of Tennyson and of Carlyle are standard. His books on Nova Scotia ships and sailormen enjoy a continent-wide sale. A Nova Scotian only by adoption, the province owes him much.

He is a good friend, but a bad enemy. Max MacOdrum is his assistant. That was a wise choice

Archie is one of the old guard. He is Homene, adamant against the inflowing tide of commercialism and vulgarity.

And he spoke three thousand proverbs; and his songs were a thousand and five.

Si tu vois mon pays,
 Mon pays malheureux,
 "Ja, dis a mes amis,
 Que je me souviens d'eux.

Appendix B (cont'd)



MacMechan's reply:

Conspicuous in your last issue was the feature entitled "Pen Pictures Portraying Popular Profs," supposedly from the clever pen of "One who knows." The article certainly shows that "One who knows" does not know his place. "Smart Alec" would perhaps be a more appropriate cloak for his crude witticisms. From beginning to end, the "artist's" object seems to be not to produce a pen-portrait, but a distorted picture, a cartoon. The result by no means assists the undergraduates to become "better acquainted with a member of the Faculty," but puts before them a caricature, something at which they can, and are expected to laugh. In other words, it leaves an entirely false impression of one whom the writer professes to honour as the Senior Professor. The impression is false in that it is inadequate; it includes a few trivial and impertinent details and passes over the reputation, the spirit, and the dominant personality of the man.

It is apparent also that "One who knows" is ignorant of that early impressed and fundamental truth that "Personal remarks are never in good taste." It is to be hoped that the forthcoming "Pen Pictures" will give real characterization of the man and playless to the gallery.

Thanking you,

Yours respectfully,

"ONE WHO KNOWS" = better.

Appendix C

MacMechan's open letter to Virginia Woolf

Madam,

May I thank you for a delightful evening?

Your essay on the wrongs of women, "A Room to Oneself", came to me in the regular way of business -- reviewer's business, -- and, pencil in hand, I sat down to read it, in my armchair, by the study fire, and I did not get up till I had finished the last sentence. Some pages I read aloud to the Miserable Inhabitant of the Inner Chamber, as she lay on the sofa, resting after the labors of the day. Then I read to myself. The book is defaced with underscorings, marginalia and symphographic squiggles of delight. Finally, I took formal possession of it by pasting in my book-plate in which the chief device is a woman with wings, the Victory of Samothrace. Your tale did not keep this particular old man from the chimney-corner, it held him there, in fetters, until he had read the last word.

The sources of my pleasure in your work are not far to seek. If you will pardon the suspicion of patronage, I like the way you write. Lacking as I do your ability to discriminate between style and style, I can apply only one test of excellence to writing -- is it readable? That your mode of writing answers this test is plain from what I have already set down. I read on and on, until there was no more to read. Could a battered, biased old professional book-taster offer stronger proof of the charm that informs your style?

* * *

Still disclaiming the least semblance or shadow of patronage, may I add that I liked the indirectness of your "attack"? You let the reader into the meditative, generative process from which came in due time and

order the finished, rounded argument. The contrast between the sketch of the conventional lecture you did not write and this irregular, subtle, and convincing plea measures the distance between you and the ordinary feminist. Your contrast between the luxurious college luncheon and the scant commons of the women's hostel proves that you can judge of the pleasures of the table and spare to interpose them off. This power of appreciation renders you a sympathetic being to the own son of Epicurus. I like also your marshalling of evidence, your illustrations, such as that sister of Shakespeare, who never lived, and the cumulative victorious effect of your reasonings like the advance of the whole British line at Waterloo, at the end of the day.

You remember -- for you confess you like reading -- what R.L. S. says in one preface. "Every book is in an intimate sense a circular letter to the friends of him who writes it. They alone take his meaning, they find private messages." Though I cannot aspire to friendship, or even to acquaintance with you, I do find in this book of yours such private messages which establish electric vibrations of sympathy between the unknown writer and the unknown reader. I was so fortunate as to be born in that golden clime when the song of Alfred and the song of Christine were still to be heard at luncheon tables, and elsewhere. It was a time of marvel, but it is a chapter of the human story with 'finis' written at the end. These songs, or that one song, for the two are one, I discovered for myself. I know its overtones and all its implications. Like yours, my heart was chilled to find that Romance died in the War. His tomb is with the millions of dead youths. Like you, I believe that never will that song be sung again. Something is lost for ever like a precious jewel in a flood. It sparkled for a moment, it slipped away and vanished. It will never be recovered. The new song of your Alans and Phœbes is as old as Priapus, It is much

simpler, it is all discord, and, I agree with you, it soon becomes a weariness.

You are inclined to speak ill of professors, poor dears, swelling the general chorus of dispraise. They are everywhere spoken against, for they are an unattractive race. I know, for I am a member of the guild. But there was, at least, one who earned a wreath of unfading laurel from perhaps the most advanced feminist of her day, the beautiful, learned, gracious girl, who had the ring forced on her finger, as you say, and was made a tool by foolish and cowardly plotters. She was queen for nine days; then she laid her lovely head upon the block, -- "that noble and worthy lady" Jane Grey. She was brutally treated by her hard-hearted Tudor parents, "till time comè that I must go to Mr. Elmer who teacheth me so gently, so pleasantly, with such fair allurements to learning, that I think all the time nothing whiles I am with him." That was what she told Roger Ascham, when he found her reading Plato in her chamber, -- she had a room to herself -- while the family were hunting in the park. That is my modest confutation and humble remonstrance. One swallow does not make a summer; one true teacher cannot redeem from reproach the tribe of pedants, but, surely the name at least of this wise and gentle tutor deserves to be remembered. Mr. Elmer understood the teaching art.

Pleasure, however, passed over into pain as I followed your argument, for the chief effect of your essay was to convince me of sin, I and my fathers in all our generations, --

"In Adam's fall
We sinned all."

We have been to blame, not indeed for being rich while women have been poor. In truth, madam, for the vast majority of men in all times and in

all places, life has been one long struggle to keep body and soul together, and to maintain a roof over the heads of his mate and her children. And the struggle most often ends in defeat. There has been scant leisure for man to encourage woman to burgeon out and have a room of her own. For that matter, how many sons in the average European household, in the last three centuries could have had rooms of their own? Still, as you put it, we others, we men have created (not unaided by women themselves) an atmosphere of repression in which genius could hardly flourish. Your essay, madam, leaves me humiliated and ashamed.

It also leaves me extremely apologetic. I wish to apologize for

(a) The Beadle who would not allow you to profane the Sacred Turf

(b) The Silvery Old Gentleman who refused you access to the college library. (If you should ever do us the honor of visiting our Little College in these hyperborean wilds, I promise you that every door will fly open at your approach.)

(c) All men of all time.

(d) My own existence.

Sometimes I could wish that I had been born a chimpanzee instead of a man, so should I escape the just reproaches of such women as you. But I promise amendment of life. Indeed, I have already begun to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. I have tossed your argument, like some live spiritual bomb into the minds of such young women as I have the fortune to instruct in this northland, beside this wintry sea. What effect it will have is yet to be seen.

In the meantime, Madam, pray accept my best thanks for much pleasure and some salutary pain, and believe me to be at all times,

Your obliged and humble Servant,

THE DEAN.

Dean's Window,
December 27, 1930.

Appendix D

The following titles, together with the date of the review in which they appeared and MacMechan's opinion of them in brief, will supplement the commentary on MacMechan as a critic of fiction, Chapter III. "The Dean's Window" is abbreviated to "DW".

- Sara Jeannette Duncan -- The Imperialist: The Halifax Herald, March 14, 1905. MacMechan considers it "the only Canadian novel".
- Gilbert Parker -- his novels in general: Montreal Standard, April 20, 1907. "His French-Canadian tales are all unreal".
- Ralph Connor -- his novels in general: Montreal Standard, April 20, 1907. Connor's novels are "superior Sunday-School books".
- James De Mille -- Ashdod Webster and his Starring Tour: DW, July 11, 1914. Posthumous review of witty novelist whose own opinion of his fiction was low: MacMechan speaks of the "sly fun" of the novel.
- George F. Millner -- The Sergeant of Fort Toronto: DW, November 28, 1914. Noted as an historical romance replete with inaccuracies.
- Isabel Paterson -- The Shadow-Riders: DW, May 20, 1916. The novelist's intent is realistic and satiric. Canadians deserve the "vinegar" of this realistic novel.
- Norman Duncan -- Billy Topsail, M.D.: DW, January 20, 1917. The author belonged to the class of Canadian writers who found it necessary to look in the United States for opportunities denied them at home. Newfoundland was Duncan's "happy hunting ground". This novel ought to appeal to boys.
- Louis Hemon -- Maria Chapdelaine: DW, February 3, 1917. "Hemon supplies the prose of Dr. Drummond's verse; only the poet admits the note of joy which the prose-writer excludes."
- Marshall Saunders -- The Wandering Dog: DW, January 6, 1917. This novel is "an advance over anything she has done so far".
- Enoch McKown -- Janet of Kootenay: DW, November 8, 1919. MacMechan congratulates the author on his success.
- W.A. Fraser -- Bulldog Barney: DW, November 15, 1919. MacMechan is equivocal, allowing that the author spins a good yarn and concluding with "Mr. Fraser, I throw up my hands."

- L.M. Montgomery -- Rainbow Valley: DW, November 15, 1919.
MacMechan considers it successful within the limits it sets itself.
- Gilbert Parker -- Wild Youth: DW, March 22, 1919. "What I resent as a Common Canadian is the misrepresentation of my country, my countrymen and my countrywomen."
- Peter McArthur -- The Red Cow: DW, April 19, 1919. "The matter is bucolic...with a plentiful mingling of American slang."
- H.A. Cody -- Glèn of the High North: DW, November 6, 1920. "Why do not our novelists learn the meaning of plain, ordinary English before they begin to write?" Pokes fun at some of Cody's errors of fact.
- Arthur Stringer -- The Prairie Child: DW, September 8, 1922. "A skillfully told, true, moving story."
- L.M. Montgomery -- Emily of New Moon: DW, December 22, 1923.
Considers that Montgomery is "improving steadily in technique".
- Mabel Dunham -- The Trail of the Conestoga: DW, November 8, 1924.
"The sort of novel we need in Canada."
- Ralph Connor -- Treading the Winepress: DW, November 21, 1925.
"Another of the same".
- M.B. Margeson -- A Tale of Old Acadia: DW, April 17, 1926.
"It will make Wolfville 'classic ground'".
- Martha Ostenso -- Wild Geese: DW, March 6, 1926. Observes that it is not a Canadian novel: "no doubt the author has been forced to point out 'Canadian' colour in order to secure an American market."
- Mazo de la Roche -- Jalna: DW, November 12, 1927. Not Canadian: the novel might be set in Texas as far as realism of setting is concerned.

Appendix E

Dr. Archibald MacMechan

A few reminiscences by an old student (J.A.B.)¹

First glimpses. English 2 held in the chemistry theatre. A fairly large class, though the First World War was just beginning. Students banked in a semi-circle around a desk, with some space between.

A professional figure clad in an academic gown enters by a door at the right. He walks with dignity, without self-consciousness, to a chair midway between the desk and the rising tiers of students. He is in late middle age, with a closely trimmed beard, and is of medium height. His appearance is really an epitome of what he was and of the ideals he sought to uphold.

He chose to lecture sitting rather than standing. Years of experience had given him an ease of manner combined with an inner authority which won him instant attention from his students. There was never any problem of discipline in his classes.

He combined profound learning with an easy unaffected manner of presentation. Almost conversationally at first he gave us the background to a study of Shakespeare, with a partial bibliography of the important critical works relative to the theme.

Through years of experience he had learned a great deal about the mentality of his students, their lack of background and intellectual sophistication. He read aloud the Shakespearean plays on the course pleasantly and without affectation. He used the unexpurgated text of King Henry IV, part 1, and did not omit the bawdiness of the passages dealing with Falstaff. He knew that many of his students needed to learn a great deal about the world they lived in. Once, when he saw that some

¹J.A. Bentley, B.A.(Dalhousie), Class of 1918. Later, Professor of English, University of Saskatchewan.

of his listeners were shocked, he remarked with bland irony: "How good you young people are."

He stood for the humanities, the finer elements of the civilized centuries of the past, only dimly acknowledged - let alone understood - by to-day. Enemies of polite and higher learning had been termed by Matthew Arnold "philistines", and Archie (as he was called by the students in their comments among themselves) always directed his remarks against the blatantly uncultured.

I doubt whether Canada has produced many cultivated scholars with his gifts. He lived in a world of high ideals and values. His literary knowledge was wide and extensive, embracing not only his favourite 18th and 19th century English writers but many eminent continental writers such as Goethe, Dante and Saint-Beuve. He had an excellent knowledge of French, German and Italian. He lived most intensely in his upstairs study, the walls of which were lined with books - reading in a comfortable chair with a desk and writing materials in front of him. His charming wife told me that she could hardly get him away from his beloved study. He was also the university librarian. If one was reading in the Macdonald Memorial library he might observe the swinging doors part some time in the middle of the afternoon and a familiar figure followed by a pet poodle enter. The advanced courses in English were given late in the afternoon. "Archie" stepped into the library to collect a number of books, passages of which he would read during the course of his lecture.

Perhaps the lateness of the day and the fact that the professor had literary work of his own, which must have been often tiring at times, made his advanced courses seem a bit routine. But his method of teaching, based on Taine and Saint-Beuve, relating a writer's work to the author himself and the time in which he lived, was the true one to follow. No

harping on purely linguistic or otherwise irrelevant matters, no mannerisms nor academic wasting of time. He had kept up with the recent revival of interest in Chaucer and taught a small but enthusiastic class how to read that great poet's lines with the original pronunciation and prosodic rules observed.

He was not very well-known to the public at large. He had his own world of higher values and was sometimes reproached as aloof and un-cooperative. He moved in a limited but select milieu and Mrs. MacMechan with her gay and light-hearted temperament was a delight to his friends. Occasionally members of his advanced classes were invited to tea at 72 Victoria Road. They were highly honoured but some seemed entirely overwhelmed by the honour and were so shy that they were virtually tongue-tied and unable to converse.

It was rather late in his life that people became aware of his literary achievements. He edited works by Carlyle and Tennyson which were used as texts in university courses, published a book of personal essays, made significant contributions to an encyclopaedia of American authors and wrote weekly reviews for the "Montreal Standard". Something moved him to write poetry which a local printer published in "chapbooks", -- elevated verse animated by a high intensity.

Though born in Ontario and receiving his doctorate from Johns Hopkins, he adopted Nova Scotia in his later years with an intense devotion. This province during the early part of the nineteenth century, before the advent of the steamboat, was among the leading maritime nations of the world. There lay unrecorded but still clear in the minds of many people in towns and villages, exciting and harrowing tales of adventure and achievement of Nova Scotian sea captains and their crews.

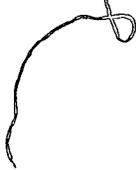
It was MacMechan who patiently gathered these stories together and published them in three volumes. Much was being said at this time about the alleged neglect by Canadians of their own poets. "Archie" greatly admired in particular Archibald Lampman, Bliss Carman, and Marjorie Peckthall, and spoke and wrote many things in their praise.

Many who sat at his feet in English 1 and 2 did not realize how skillfully they were being taught one of the most valuable of human techniques. Speaking and writing English correctly and with some measure and distinction was - and still is - by no means a common gift. Dr. MacMechan in the lecture hall stressed all the important do's and don't's of good writing. He stressed the use of the correct word that would express exactly the desired meaning; simplicity; the need to organize one's thoughts so that what one wrote had a beginning, middle, and end; avoidance of repetition, and intrusion of one's ego, etc. He stressed the necessity of using good diction and deplored the growing tolerance of slang, cliches, and Americanisms. What one wrote should be neatly and precisely expressed and all unnecessary or redundant words deleted.

It is a delusion still widely prevalent that one can learn to write well without having his work checked over and corrected by some competent person. In English 2 a student wrote twenty "themes", short essays on topics taken from the books studied in class. These were carefully corrected and evaluated by a skillful assistant, Miss Josephine Shannon, who underlined all errors, substituted apt for faulty phrases, and did her best to follow the progress of the student whom she saw was really trying. Her help was invaluable and my own debt to her in this regard is great. What Dr. MacMechan urged in the classroom about writing could be taken to heart by the student, and the result was often seen in his efforts to write.

I personally was privileged to a closer friendship with Dr. MacMechan. I wished to take an M.A. and he suggested that I take it in Anglo-Saxon - or Old English - as he preferred to call it. This rather uncouth dialect was spoken in England before 1066. It reads now like a foreign language and I found the labour of translation of this ancient and, on the whole, dull literature tolerable only because it took me to the study at 72 Victoria Road every Thursday at 8 P.M. There, for a couple of hours, I would translate the week's assignment and enjoy the more human side of the revered professor. It was a privilege I shall never forget. Although I deplored the stress on the Germanic element which I found ten times worse later at Harvard, I profited greatly by the knowledge I gained through those evenings at the feet of a friend and master.

Dr. MacMechan has never been given his due as a man and literary force. He was no cloistered recluse. He loved conversing with a few chosen friends on terms of familiarity. His interests embraced music, art, and he loved the outdoors, although he suffered from a physical difficulty. I once saw him on the road near Bedford making his way along with the help of the walking-stick that he always used. When I mentioned seeing him, he shrugged it off, saying "Yes, I do that every summer."



Appendix F

THE REVIEWER
 "Irresponsible, indolent—"

Tennyson is dead. What those words mean to thousands to-day, no tongue or pen can tell. Sixty-eight years ago, the old singer who lies silent in Aldworth, walked out alone, a stormy-hearted boy and carved on a stone, "Byron is dead." It seemed to him, in his own words that the world had come to an end. For the news had just reached the quiet Lincolnshire rectory that the darling poet of the Revolution had met a hero's death striving to liberate a down-trodden people. The boy's grief and his sense of irreparable loss are felt at this hour, all the world over for him who was that boy. To men and women who have now reached their thirtieth year, no living poet, no poet who may yet arise can hold the same place in their hearts, can ever exercise over their lives the same moulding power.

For Tennyson is more than a mere maker of dulcet rhymes, a mere musician in words. He has laid at least two generations of English speaking people under a debt of personal gratitude. Without seeming to teach, he taught us:

"high thoughts and honourable words
 And courtliness and the desire of fame,
 And love of truth—"

In an age perhaps the most sordid that the world has ever seen, he never lost faith in the ideal. Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are love-worthy, —these were his constant theme, his constant inspiration. He did more than please. He made us love what he loved, and try to follow what he followed. Our lives were richer for him. And now, he is silent. Carlyle is gone, Tennyson is gone, the fiery purity

of Ruskin's mind is in eclipse. The world is darker than it was. Who is there that we can reverence?

The singer passes away; the songs remain. That is our consolation. We cannot keep the poet with us always; but his poems become the inalienable possession of the race. It may indeed be that sullen Lethe is rolling doom on all things here, that all our Christianity, philanthropy, political reform and the rest of it is simply hewing out a road to a wall of adamant. It may be that in a few years, few in the revolutions of solar systems, this planet we call Earth will wheel as rapidly as ever, with the dust of another vanished race upon it. It may be, but meanwhile it is something to be cheered into activity and courage in the toilsome march to the end. We have found in Tennyson strength and refreshment when every other cistern was either dry or poisoned.

One of the problems which puzzles the mind of the French and German critics, is how the unartistic, prosaic nation of shopkeepers, the English, has produced the richest, grandest, most various poetry the world has heard since the Greeks ceased singing. It remains unexplained like a lily growing out of granite. When every other trace of the English has vanished into nothingness, their poetry will be remembered as the one thing they did supremely well. It is today a greater glory than our wealth, than our world-wide empire. Not a century has passed since Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, are like the names of demigods. Tennyson is the latest name worthy to set beside these.

Tennyson's has been the ideal life of the poet. Without haste, without rest, he worked at his chosen craft. His sense of self-dedication to the work was as holy and deep as Milton's. His life was set apart to poetry; and for years this resolution meant absolute poverty. But he never swerved from the self-appointed orbit. He did not hurry, there was

no need of it. He grew slowly, his genius did not flower rapidly, he did not force the poetic growths in any kind of hot house. His aim was to utter what was in him; not to achieve a cheap and sudden popularity. He was true to himself and his vocation of poet. And he had his reward, the world came over to his side. He sought first the poetic kingdom of God and all other things were added unto him. He never rested any more than the oak rests from putting forth green leaves spring by spring till it dies. How can the tree rest, when the vital sap is in it?

The world has been deceived in Tennyson. The combination of strength and finish in work is what the world is not accustomed to, and when it finds them always twinned in the work of one master hand, it thinks there must be something wrong. It cries, "faultily faultless", and is ready to banish Aristides because praise is a-weary of him. The surface beauty of Tennyson is gold inlaid in steel armor of proof, the damascening on the sabre that can divide a floating veil and cleave a millstone. We live too near the poet to know his greatness, it is only as we travel from the mountain that it looms high and broad.

With Tennyson there was no such decline as we find in most poets after fifty. His imagination did not die down; his style did not harden into mannerism. His right hand did not lose its cunning, and in very little was his natural strength abated. There is nothing that he himself wrote and thought worthy of remembrance for which we have to apologize. No Keatsian, Wordsworthian or Shelleyite can say that. There is nothing to condone like the Fitzgerald sonnet of Browning's, nothing to explain away like the second part of Faust. Tennyson was artist to the finger tips. His sense of form, his ear for melody, his power of self-restraint were as good as perfect. He had the rarest gift of a poet, the power of self-criticism. Any one who has noticed his careful revisions will understand

this. And because there is no joint in his harness, we do not understand him and appreciate him. The most serious fault critics have found with him, is that he actually believed in a God and was not indecent, as they thought a poet should be.

Three Christmases ago, he published what seemed his swan-song, the incomparably tender and sweet "Crossing the Bar".

We who had taken him for our leader
 "We that had loved him so, followed him, honored him,
 Lived in his mild and magnificent eye,
 Learned his great language, caught his clear accents,
 Made him our pattern to live and to die—"

thought with sadness that this was the end. But, only last year, he surprised us all with a merry drama of the wild-wood. He worked to the last. He was true to himself to the end. He was one of the far-shining men of whom the whole world is the tomb.

His career was closed by this short poem. In it he felt that he was taking leave of the world, and so it is repeated here and now:

Sunset and evening star,
 And one clear call for me
 And may there be no moaning of the bar,
 When I put out to sea.

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
 Too full for sound and foam,
 When that which drew from out the boundless deep
 Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell.
 And after that the dark!
 And may there be no sadness of farewell
 When I embark.

For though from out our bourne of time and place
 The flood may bear me far,
 I hope to see my pilot face to face
 When I have crossed the bar.

THE END

The room was dark, where, round the dying bed,
Children and children's children watched and wept,
Save that the moonlight o'er the pillow swept,
And bathed in silver the unmoving head.
He did not strive nor cry; his last sigh sped
So soft, the watchers knew not when he slept.

Archibald MacMechan.
Dalhousie College, Halifax, N.S.

The Week, October 21, 1892

Appendix G

Mr. Robert Graves is a modern, twentieth century Englishman, who served through the War, and who has written acceptable prose and verse. His lyric, "Star-Talk", has always pleased me, ever since I knew it, because it seemed to reveal military virtue enduring hardship, not stoically, but with a certain gaiety. It is a poem of night and cold sapping manhood, but the spirit that is in man triumphs. That he is a friend of T.E. Lawrence is a letter of recommendation, for Lawrence is the complete ascetic, denying himself even friends. He presented Graves with four chapters of his priceless "Pillars of Wisdom". It was Mr. Graves who wrote "Lawrence and the Arabs," as a useful corrective to the superficial account of the same hero by Lowell Thomas. His book was reviewed in this column. I thought, and I think still, that it really explains Lawrence, and gives the key to his character, a notable achievement.

Now Mr. Graves has taken the world into his confidence by writing his autobiography -- at the age of thirty-three! The idea administers a shock of mild surprise to the conservative mind. Autobiography implies gradual retrospect over a long and important life, such as the turbulent confessions of John Stuart Mill, or the profuse and lurid self-revelation of Charles Darwin. But Mr. Graves is only thirty-three, and, though his life may not have the significance of Mill's or Darwin's as yet, some undiscovered scheme of values may give it precedence over both. Who knows? Beyond all peradventure, it is more interesting than either of those classic records. Mr. Graves has had a far more varied and adventurous life, and he does not possess Kent's dubious tale in the telling of it. Besides there is precedent for him. Mr. Beverley Nichols has anticipated him by offering the public his "factes et guests" up to the mature age of twenty-

five. Youth will be served. This is the age of self-expression.

An attempt has been made to exploit this book, "Good-Bye To All That" (Cape), as a "succes de scandale." This is, I think, a tactical mistake. As autobiography, "Good-bye To All That," has intrinsic interest because Mr. Graves has felt and suffered much; but also because he is a type of war casualty, a leading case. The book impresses the unprejudiced reader with its honesty of purpose, it is a round, unvarnished tale; certainly nothing is extenuated, opinions will differ as to whether aught is set down in malice. There are revelations of the stupidities of English public school life, and the more costly and more puerile stupidities of Army life. There are plain statements of repulsive fact; there is plenty of modern "frankness," but the excuse and explanation lie in the phrase "He went to the War."

* * *

War is a madness. The term is to be taken literally. It is insanity, craziness, neurasthenia, mental breaking down, spiritual disintegration. It afflicted not only the millions who were actually engaged in the glorious work of wholesale murder, but the millions behind the lines, the decent, peace-loving, stay-at-home men and women. We were all afflicted with war madness. We became as credulous as four-year-old children. We threw away our critical sense with our religion. We believed the most outrageous lies, like the army corps of Russians passing through England in 1914, to select one of the least malignant falsehoods which we swallowed. We believed anything and everything about our national enemies; they believed anything and everything about the Allies. This was the effect of the war on the civilian population. What was its effect on the fighting men?

"If these things be done in a green tree, what shall be done in a dry?" Personally, I do not see how any man came through the war with any nerves left. No one has added up the "casualties" of our returned men, the increase of cases in our hospitals, or the sudden deaths that we hush up. The books on the war tell the same tale. Is "All Quiet On The Western Front" the work of a sane, normal man? or "Sous Feu?" Can the critics and the public who acclaim them be considered quite right in the head? The truth is that the world is still suffering from shell-shock, universally. No other explanation can account for the general acceptance of such novels. We have not returned to the normal. But I believe we will. I even dare to hope that in a happier, sweeter age, these books and the evil thing from which they sprang will seem as frankly incredible as the Hells of Dante.

But millions of men went through fiercer hells than Dante's cruellest imaginings. Returned men do not want to talk of the war. Privations, danger, exhaustion, wounds, terror, death all seem lesser things than the sense of vile, intolerable degradation with which so many have come back. They seem as if they had been subjected to some dark, filthy torture by particularly ingenious savages, something they can never recover from and never forget. That, at least, is the mainspring of Robert Graves's autobiography. Physically he was a tall, powerful man; he was; but wounds, and sicknesses, and mental distress during the war, his struggles to maintain himself and his family after the war have deeply changed him. It is a sad story, but it is told without whining or self-pity.

Here is a truthful record of an unusual man. On both sides of the house, he is in the truest sense of the term, "well connected"; he was also well brought up, in an old-fashioned Christian family. His re-

religious fundamentalism tumbled to the ground at the first shock, but the morality he was taught, respect for decencies of life seems to have survived every test. That flag he never lowered! He attended different schools. Charterhouse (which Thackeray named "Slaughterhouse") seems to be a typical English public school, devoted to puerilities. Of course, it's a dirty bird that fouls its own nest; but Graves's object is to tell the truth, not to paint everything rose-pink. He joined up in 1914 at the age of seventeen, and there are two hundred and fifty-eight pages about his experiences in the war. It is painful reading, but it should be read by all who do not want these horrors to come back to the world. After the war, he married at the age of twenty-one, a girl of eighteen. They have four children. For six months, they kept a shop at Boar's Head just outside of Oxford. Then he got a professorship of English in a queer Egyptian university founded by King Fuad, and moved to Cairo with his family. This position he resigned and returned to England. His "Apologia" is apparently popular. It was printed some time after July 24th last year and was twice reprinted last November.

A world subject to the bondage of war! Human lives sacrificed by the million, oceans of blood, torrents of tears, storms of lamentation, agonies unspeakable and uncounted; survivors envying the dead—are these things to endure for ever? There are better dreams. And I can fancy some student of the race taking this book from the shelf in some great national library on war, in all languages, turning the pages and wondering who the writer was and why such things were possible or permitted only one of two centuries ago.

THE DEAN.

Appendix H

PRODUCTIVE SCHOLARSHIP VS. JOURNALISM

For eighteen months I laboured at one task,
Glossing a classic author. 'Twas a joy
Which, till my work was ended, could not cloy.
My critics were as kind as I could ask;
And, for a space, it was my lot to bask
In Fortune's printed gains, while, like a boy,
I dreamed of profits that might purchase—Troy,
Till cruel Fortune laid aside her mask.

My publisher hath render'd his account;
His cheque confronts me with a knowing leer,
The which with laughter almost makes me shriek.
I see to what my labour doth amount.
My learned treatise earns me in a year
Just what The Standard gives me every week.

Appendix I

ANDREW MACPHAIL

A close-lipped man; yea, somewhat saturnine;
A good deal of Mephisto in his air;
A red satanic beard; cropt, scanty hair,
A forehead plowed by many a thoughtful line;
A Highland accent with a humorous whine,
A scholar's stoop; a disconcerting stare;
Inclined to stoutness (but he 'does not care);
And Highland legs to prop the whole design.

A Highland voice; and Highland courtesie;
A Highland welcome for the favor'd guest
Who visits him within his Island cell
Embowered in lush potatoes wild and free;
Mephisto—maybe!—to advantage dressed,
But Mr. Greatheart underneath the shell.

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