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CANADA

SUNSHINE SKETCHES OF A LITTLE TOWN

STEPHEN BUTLER LEACOCK was born in Swanmore, Hampshire, England, in 1869. When he was six his family emigrated to Canada, settling on a farm near Sutton, Ontario, south of Lake Simcoe. Leacock was educated at Upper Canada College and the University of Toronto. He received a Ph.D. in political economy from the University of Chicago in 1903, and thereafter became a professor of economics and political science at McGill University in Montreal, where he would teach until his retirement. In 1906 he married Beatrix Hamilton, an aspiring actress; their son, Stephen Lushington, was born in 1911. Leacock's first book, *Elements of Political Science*, became a standard university text and was his bestselling book during his lifetime. He wrote several books on economics, politics, and history, among which are *The Unsolved Riddle of Social Injustice*, *Canada: The Foundations of Its Future*, and *While There Is Time: The Case Against Social Catastrophe*. He also wrote biographies of Mark Twain and Charles Dickens. But Leacock's lasting fame would come from his comic writings. His first book, *Literary Lapses*, is a compilation of magazine pieces; it was a great success and paved the way for the many books that followed, including *Nonsense Novels*, *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich*, *Frenzied Fiction*, *Winsome Winnie and Other New Nonsense Novels*, *My Discovery of England*, and *Too Much College*. The work for which he is best known, *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, was published in 1912. Leacock, one of Canada's most prolific writers, was also a charismatic public speaker, touring widely giving lectures and readings from his work. Leacock died in 1944 in Toronto.

WILL FERGUSON's debut novel, *Happiness*TM, has been published in thirty-three countries and twenty-six languages around the world. It was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers Prize (Canada and the Caribbean: First Novel) and went on to win the Leacock Medal for Humour and the Canadian Authors Association Award for Fiction. With his brother Ian, he wrote the wildly successful humour book *How to Be a Canadian*, which won the CBA Libris Award for Non-fiction Book of the Year. Will's travel memoir *Beauty Tips from Moose Jaw* was an immediate bestseller and won Ferguson his second Leacock Medal for Humour. His most recent book is *Hitching Rides with Buddha: A Journey Across Japan*. Ferguson lives in Calgary with his wife and their two young sons.

STEPHEN LEACOCK

Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town

With an Introduction by
WILL FERGUSON



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Painting of Stephen Leacock on page vi by Cyrus Cuneo. Courtesy the Stephen Leacock Museum.

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Contents

Chronology

Introduction by Will Ferguson

Suggested Further Reading

A Note on the Text

Preface

- I The Hostelry of Mr. Smith
- II The Speculations of Jefferson Thorpe
- III The Marine Excursions of the Knights of Pythias
- IV The Ministrations of the Rev. Mr. Drone
- V The Whirlwind Campaign in Mariposa
- VI The Beacon on the Hill
- VII The Extraordinary Entanglement of Mr. Pupkin
- VIII The Fore-Ordained Attachment of Zena Pepperleigh and Peter Pupkin
- IX The Mariposa Bank Mystery
- X The Great Election in Missinaba County
- XI The Candidacy of Mr. Smith
- XII L'Envoi. The Train to Mariposa



Stephen Leacock, as painted by Cyrus Cuneo, 1912

Chronology

- 1869** Stephen Butler Leacock is born on December 30 in Swanmore, Hampshire, England, the third of an eventual eleven children.
- 1876** The Leacock family moves to Canada and settles on a farm near the south shore of Lake Simcoe in Ontario.
- 1882** Leacock enrolls in Toronto's Upper Canada College.
- 1887** His father, Peter, abandons the family. Leacock enters the University of Toronto, where he studies literature and modern and classical languages. He completes two years in one.
- 1888** Leacock is obliged to leave university for financial reasons, and goes on to obtain a teacher's certificate at Strathroy Collegiate Institute in Western Ontario. He begins teaching modern languages at Uxbridge High School.
- 1889** Becomes language master at Upper Canada College, where he'll teach for ten years, until June 1899. Meanwhile, he returns to university to study part time.
- 1891** Receives his honours B.A. from the University of Toronto.
- 1894** His first comic writing is published in *Grip*, a Toronto humour magazine.
- 1899** Begins graduate work at the University of Chicago in economics and political science, studying under Thorstein Veblen.
- 1900** Appointed sessional lecturer in political science at McGill University. On August 7 he marries Beatrix Hamilton in New York City.
- 1903** Receives a Ph.D. in political economy, and is appointed a full-time assistant professor of economics and political science at McGill.
- 1906** Publication of his first book, *Elements of Political Science*.
- 1907** Leacock embarks on a speaking tour of the British Empire to promote imperial unity. His book *Baldwin, Lafontaine, Hincks: Responsible Government* is published.
- 1908** Buys thirty-three acres of waterfront property on Lake Couchiching near Orillia, Ontario, which he dubs Old Brewery Bay. Appointed William Dow Professor of Political Economy and chairman of the Department of Economics and Political Science at McGill University—a position he'll hold until his retirement almost thirty years later.
- 1910** Self-publishes his first book of humour, *Literary Lapses*, a collection of pieces previously published in magazines.
- 1911** *Nonsense Novels* is published. In the run-up to the Dominion election, Leacock campaigns for Conservative candidates and speaks out against free trade with the United States. The Liberal government of Wilfrid Laurier goes down to defeat over the issue of reciprocity.
- 1912** *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* is first published serially in the *Montreal Star*, then in book form.
- 1914** Publication of *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich*.
- 1915** Beginning in February and continuing throughout World War I, Leacock gives readings from his humorous work in aid of the Belgian Relief Fund. His only child, Stephen Lushington Leacock, is born on August 19. In October, *Moonbeams from the Larger Lunacy* is published.
- 1920** Publication of *The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice*.
- 1921** He goes on a lecture and reading tour of Great Britain. The Canadian Authors' Association is established, with Leacock as a founding member.
- 1925** Leacock's wife, Beatrix, dies of breast cancer on December 14.

- 1928** The new and much larger house is built on Old Brewery Bay.
- 1932** ~~Mark Twain, his biography of Mark Twain, is published.~~
- 1933** Publication of his biography of Charles Dickens, *Charles Dickens: His Life and Work*.
- 1935** Leacock is given the Mark Twain Medal. Publication of *Humor: Its Theory and Technique*.
- 1936** Reluctantly takes compulsory retirement from teaching at McGill. Embarks on last speaking tour of western Canada.
- 1937** *My Discovery of the West: A Discussion of East and West in Canada* is published and goes on to win the Governor General's Award.
- 1940** Stephen Leacock Jr. graduates with a B.A. from McGill University.
- 1942** *My Remarkable Uncle and Other Sketches* is published.
- 1944** Leacock dies of throat cancer on March 28 in Toronto.
- 1945** Posthumous publication of *Last Leaves* and of *While There Is Time: The Case Against Social Catastrophe*.
- 1946** *The Boy I Left Behind Me*, Leacock's unfinished autobiography, is published. The Leacock Society establishes an annual award, known as the Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour, for the best book of humour published in Canada.

Introduction

by Will Ferguson

Imagine a town where the leading citizen is a 280-pound illiterate saloonkeeper. A town where a dumb-luck barber stumbles into money—and is immediately heralded as a financial wizard. A town where the elections are rigged and the leaders are blowhards. A town where the local Tory candidate urges his supporters to “vote and keep on voting till they make you quit.” A town that burns down its church for the insurance money.

Now. Imagine that this same town has come to represent everything that is sweet and idyllic, bucolic and gentle in the Canadian soul and you will appreciate just what Stephen Leacock has accomplished with *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*. Because the fictional Mariposa, for all its flaws and shortcomings, truly is idyllic. There is an innocence that permeates it, a lack of cynicism that is absolutely disarming. It is a town inhabited almost entirely by eccentrics, where even something as innocuous as a government census is cause for grandstanding civic pride and finger-wagging huffery.

It's a town of false fronts, in every sense. A town where boats sent to rescue passengers from a sinking steamer have to be rescued themselves—by the very vessel they were trying to save. A town where the heroic cry of “Women and children first!” is put forward mainly as a way of testing the lifeboats. (As Leacock's narrator explains, “What was the sense, if it should turn out that the boats wouldn't even hold women and children, of trying to jam a lot of heavy men into it?”)

“The root of all comedy,” Leacock noted, “lies in the deeper contrasts offered by life itself; the strange incongruity between our aspirations and our achievements.” And nowhere is that strange incongruity more deftly—or more lovingly—depicted than in the little town of Mariposa.

Leacock's own life embraced paradox, transcended incongruities. Raised in the genteel poverty that comes from being the offspring of a remittance man (those disgraced misfits and second sons, sent off to the colonies and supported by funds from Olde England), he nonetheless attended some of North America's finest schools, earning a Ph.D. in economics and political science from the University of Chicago before joining the faculty at McGill University in Montreal.

His first book, and single biggest money-maker, was *Elements of Political Science*, a textbook that was eventually translated into eighteen languages and became required reading in more than thirty American universities. At the age of thirty-seven Stephen Leacock toured the British Empire as a Rhodes Scholar, giving rousing speeches in support of the imperial status quo. By the age of thirty-eight he was the head of political science and economics at McGill.

This early success allowed him to buy a rustic slice of heaven in the Ontario town of Orillia, not far from where he had grown up. He bought thirty-three acres on Lake Couchiching in a secluded inlet known as The Old Brewery Bay, and with his brother Charlie's help built a temporary summer shelter, not much more than a lean-to shack, down near the water's edge.

It was at Lake Couchiching that Leacock relaxed, gardening and fishing in his wrinkled jacket and an equally wrinkled tie—a crumpled gentleman in rumpled clothes. When he sailed into town, and docked his vessel and walked through Orillia in bare feet, he was occasionally mistaken for a tramp.

He might well have grown old as an academic, summering in Orillia and teaching in Montreal, marinating in a world of tenure and tweed, but in his fortieth year Leacock's career took an unexpected turn. He'd been publishing short comedic pieces in various magazines, more or less as

hobby, when—ever the economist—he thought, Why not increase the return on labour expended? Why not gather these pieces up and submit them to a publisher? Maybe make a bit of extra cash? With certain naïveté, he sent his collection of humorous sketches to the company that had published his textbook. If they were interested in economic theories of capital, he reasoned, surely they'd also be interested in funny little spoofs. Nope. Feeling a bit miffed, Leacock decided to publish the book himself, and so it was that a cheaply printed chapbook entitled *Literary Lapses* appeared in 1910.

He had dropped a small acorn into a very large lake—and had harvested a tidal wave. As luck would have it, a distinguished British editor happened to be visiting Montreal and picked up a copy of Leacock's chapbook for the voyage home. When he arrived in England he immediately wired Leacock an offer.

The success was immediate. The following year a second collection appeared, and Leacock the humorist quickly surpassed Leacock the academic. American reviewers loved his light, literary style which they considered very British. The British, meanwhile, hailed him as an important new "American" voice. He was neither. He was both. He was, in a word: Canadian.

Leacock purchased a cozy home in an affluent Montreal neighbourhood, and with his literary income now tripling that of his university salary, he faced a hard choice. One of his fellow professors at McGill had warned him against publishing humorous stories, fearing it would damage Leacock's reputation. Forced to decide between one career path and the other—between economics and humour, between the hallowed irrelevance of academia and the crass joys of commercial literature—Leacock chose ... both. In much the same way that he divided his time between Montreal and Orillia, he would divide his life between the classroom and the popular press, between the university and Old Brewery Bay. Between the ivy-clad and the sun-dappled, so to speak.

Leacock was the most famous author Canada had ever produced, and he loved the attention. A natural-born ham, his classes were popular as much for his theatrical presence and rambling humour as they were for his ability to distill complicated ideas into easily grasped summaries. When he swept into a classroom and took command of the podium, his students said it was as though "a gust of wind had entered.

He once almost killed a man with laughter. It was during one of his public lectures; a fellow in the audience laughed so hard he passed out and had to be rushed away. The man survived, much to Leacock's regret. "My fortune would have been made," he said wistfully. "Think of the headline: MAN DIES LAUGHING AT LEACOCK!" Damn rude of him to have lived.

Stephen Leacock was a grab bag of contradictions. He admired Jefferson, yet exalted the British monarchy. He loved money, but hated wealth. He was scathing in his assessment of the capitalist class, yet just as caustic about the muddle-headed left. ("Socialism," he noted, "would work only in Heaven, where they don't need it, or in Hell, where they already have it.") He described himself as a liberal Conservative, or, if you will, a conservative Liberal with a strong dash of sympathy for the Socialist idea, a friend of Labour, and a believer in Progressive Radicalism." It was enough to make your head spin.

He penned—quite literally, working with ink and nib—more than sixty books over the course of his remarkable career, including works of Canadian history, literary biography, and social commentary. He was prolific to the point of promiscuity; at one point three of his books appeared within the span of seven months.

Over the years, Leacock's ramshackle shanty on Lake Couchiching grew, piecemeal and pell-mell, with other rooms and wings added every which way. Chicken coops, greenhouses, woodsheds, and other additions would appear one year only to be torn down or refitted the next.

Leacock tried to turn his property into a profitable hobby farm, but failed to grasp the notion that the cost of transporting one's produce to market should not exceed the amount *received* for sale.

produce. As a farmer, Leacock was an excellent professor. “Expectation greater than realization,” he jotted down in reference to one of his failed fresh-vegetable schemes—unwittingly paraphrasing his own earlier definition of humour. (And what is life itself but a note in the ledgers that reads “Expectations greater than realization”?)

It’s often said that Mariposa is an idealized version of Canada, but there are several ways to connect the dots, and hidden in the constellation of Mariposa is another portrait, that of the author himself. Stephen Leacock was very much a Leacockian character. And Mariposa, with its eccentric tics and blithely unresolved contradictions, has a personality oddly reminiscent of its creator.

In his bulky racoon coat and tattered academic robes, with his ill-fitted watch chain and permanently loosened tie, Leacock often looked as though he’d gotten dressed by crawling through a clothes hamper. Even the nickname his students gave him, “Leaky Steamcock” (a moniker he did not find particularly amusing), could have been lifted right out of *Sunshine Sketches*.

He once sent the following request to a university librarian: “I wish you would send me a copy of G. Ball’s *Mathematical Recreations* (?),—if it is called *Mathematical Recreations*, and if it is G. Ball’s. If not, please send me the book I am trying to think of.” It was the sort of thing Leacock might have put in one of his stories. True, he had a volcanic temper and was known for firing his entire household staff in a fit of pique, but—and this is very much a Leacockian *but*—he inevitably ended up hiring them all back the next day ... and at higher pay, something you could easily imagine the thundering Judge Pepperleigh doing in *Sunshine Sketches*.

Although hailed as “the Canadian Mark Twain,” Leacock never had the depth or narrative scope of Twain. He wrote only two novels—*Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* and *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich*—and even these are more a series of linked stories than proper novels. But he had a wonderful ear for dialogue and was superbly skilled in creating polished, self-contained scenes and evoking character with a few sure strokes—talents more theatrical than novelistic.

Indeed, Leacock’s great love was, in a very real sense, the theatre. He married an actress, after all, Beatrix Hamilton, from Toronto, who was performing in New York when Leacock asked her to marry him. He considered trying his hand at commercial theatre but never quite took the plunge. He wrote several theatrical spoofs and “playlets” that appear in his humour collections, most notably in *Behind the Beyond*. He was, as his students and audiences would attest, a grand performer. And during his holidays at The Old Brewery Bay, he would often write short plays for his guests to perform.

Still, we must not consider Leacock an “unfulfilled play-wright” any more than we might a “failed novelist.” He was a master of his realm: the perfect vignette, the quick spoof, the gentle poke to the eye delivered with a chuckle so warm you could only think, “Why yes! A poke to the eye is just what was needed.” As a humorist—as a pure, undiluted, and unrepentant humorist—Leacock was second to none. Robertson Davies considered him a genius. And Robertson Davies was right.

Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town first appeared as a newspaper serial—and it shows, in the best possible way. Quick anecdotal tales with richly interconnected characters, the sketches were originally commissioned by an editor at the *Montreal Star*, whose only stipulation was that they be “typically Canadian.” Typically Canadian? They would prove to be *definitively* Canadian.

The sketches ran from February through June, 1912, and many of them grew out of the stories Leacock liked to tell around the dinner table in Montreal about the small town in Ontario where he spent his summers. He didn’t even try to camouflage this, and when the serial first ran he used the actual names of people in Orillia.

“Mariposa is not a real town,” he declares with breezy insincerity. “On the contrary, it is about seventy or eighty of them. You may find them all the way from Lake Superior to the sea....” But the “sinking” of the *Mariposa Belle* was almost certainly taken from an incident that occurred on Lake Couchiching when the steamer *Longford* ran aground on a sandbar. (Once the passengers were

evacuated, the *Longford* floated free ... and continued merrily on its way.) Orillia's Anglican church ~~did burn down~~ (though hopefully not for the insurance money) and the local hotel owner ~~was~~ a man of enormous girth.

When the sketches later appeared in book form, Leacock changed many of the names, but the half-hearted pseudonyms he assigned were as transparent as a thin coat of paint. You wonder why he bothered. Orillia's undertaker Bingham was now named Gingham. Jeff Shortt the barber was now Jeff Thorpe the barber. And Orillia's beloved church rector Canon Greene was caricatured (unfairly, many people thought) as the Rev. Drone. Even the name "Mariposa" was not wholly invented, but was taken from that of a settlement which had once existed next to Orillia. Orillia's Mississaga Street became Missinaba Street. Hatley's General Store became Netley's.

The barber in question, who had chatted so freely with Leacock whenever he shaved him, now found himself forced to apologize to his customers: "How in hell was I to know he would put these things in a book?" A lawyer in Orillia threatened to sue Leacock for libel, but Leacock insisted, years later, that the threat had only been made "in fun." The editor of *The Orillia Packet and Times* also mentioned "mutterings about libel suits," but nothing ever came of it.

Bruised small-town pride aside—and small-town pride is so easily bruised—the humour in *Sunshine Sketches* is never mean-spirited, never vindictive. Leacock was always tolerant of—indeed quite enamoured with—the constancy of human foible. No moral high horse (not in his humour at least). No withering takedowns. No vivisectionist-style satire. Just irony, affection, good humour, and an understanding that none of us are perfect, that we are all of us susceptible to flattery, all afflicted with blind spots, convinced of our inner nobility, our buried talents, our true callings.

In Mariposa, your point of view dictates what you see. It's an observer-affected universe, where perspective is everything and reality is all in how you look at it, where the *Mariposa Belle* grows larger and grander the longer you live there, and where the foyer of a Paris opera house pales next to the gaiety and buzz of Jim Eliot's drugstore.

Leacock certainly wasn't run out of town after *Sunshine Sketches* appeared. Far from it. As the years went by, he spent more and more time in Orillia, soaking up the sun, tending his garden, and boating along the shimmering waters of his own personal Eden.

He eventually decided to replace his patchwork of a summer house with a proper mansion. A major undertaking, but Leacock, ever the shrewd economist, had a cunning plan. He assured the young architect he hired that they could save money by building the new house with the material from the old house.

There was a long, awkward pause. The architect turned to Leacock. "You want me to build a bigger house out of a smaller house?"

Leacock paid for the extra materials. The result was a handsome home overlooking the bay, with a wide veranda and oak panelling throughout.

When he passed away in 1944, Stephen Leacock was remembered as Orillia's "most distinguished citizen." And that's saying something, because Orillia has a knack for producing iconic national figures: Sam Steele of the Mounted Police, songwriter Gordon Lightfoot, and the unsinkable Stephen Leacock—Orillians all. (Leacock, Lightfoot, and Steele: how's that for an all-Canadian triumvirate?)

If there was any resentment about the way Leacock lampooned Orillia, it has long since dissipated. A medal for humour is awarded annually in Leacock's name—in Orillia—and his home at The Orillia Brewery Bay is now a national historic site.

Any lingering doubts were laid to rest in 1995 when some five thousand volunteers and spectators came together over a single weekend in September to help rebuild Leacock's boat-house, where the author had done so much of his writing. The event had the sunshine air of an old-fashioned barn-raising. And people don't show up in the thousands to honour the memory of someone they disliked.

(Though, if it were a proper Leacockian tale, it would have ended with the boathouse sliding into the bay.)

Visiting the Leacock home today is akin to stumbling upon an English estate tucked into the Canadian woods. Condos have crowded up to the edge of the protected property line, but the spirit of the place—like the spirit of Mariposa—remains intact.

Steeped in its gentle delusions and coddled in the summer sun, Leacock's Mariposa is both the source and template of a particular Canadian myth. The Myth of Canada as Small Town. Canada as "The Mariposa of Nations."

It's true that Leacock's mythical little town was rooted in a very specific time and place: an Anglo-Ontario community, an outpost of Empire, blissfully unaware of the fact that it exists at the end of an era, in a world about to be destroyed forever by the horrors of the Great War. A town sleepwalking toward a larger nightmare. In the death of Judge Pepperleigh's son in the South African War, and in the pictures of Canadians marching off—but none of them returning—we find an unintended foreshadowing of this, and the book itself ends with a eulogy.

Mariposa was just a dream, but it was a collective dream. It was a dream we once shared, and perhaps still do. A dream nurtured not because it is real, but because we want it to be real. And that is the strangest incongruity of all: although based firmly on a real place and real people, Mariposa itself never really existed.

A SUMMER HAZE lies low along the water. It mutes the sun and reduces the lake to pastels and blurred borders. I am at the Leacock home on Old Brewery Bay with Elizabeth Kimball, Leacock's niece and the author of *The Man in the Panama Hat*, a memoir about her famous uncle.

Elizabeth is turning ninety, still sharp, very funny, and always engaging. A natural-born raconteur, she tells tales, tall and otherwise, of her various uncles and aunts and the holidays she spent at the Leacock summer home. "Uncle Stephen had a great hospitable spirit. He loved to have the family around him."

We make our way down to the boathouse, and then turn and look back at the home with the grand veranda and sweeping views. In spite of the mosquitoes and the memory of shivering cold swims in her youth, she misses the old place. "It was always summer when I came here."

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~~*Hoodoo McFiggin's Christmas*. National Film Board of Canada, 1995. 8 minutes, 38 seconds, colour, animated. Directed by Eva Szasz; voice and narration by Alan Maitland.~~

My Financial Career. National Film Board of Canada, 1962. Distributed by Sterling Education Films. 6 minutes, 30 seconds, colour, animated. Directed by Gerald Potterton; animated by Gerald Potterton and Grant Munro; voice and narration by Stanley Jackson.

A Note on the Text

This Penguin Classics edition of *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* has been reset from its first Canadian edition, published by Bell and Cockburn in 1912.

Stephen Leacock began work on *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* in early 1912, after he'd been commissioned by the *Montreal Star* to write a series of connected pieces. The first of these appeared in the *Star* on February 17, with the series continuing into June on alternating Saturdays. For the book version, Leacock added a preface and reorganized some of the sketches; he also altered the names of various characters that were based on real people. The first English edition was published by John Lane, The Bodley Head in August 1912. The American and Canadian editions appeared in September.

Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town

Preface

I know no way in which a writer may more fittingly introduce his work to the public than by giving a brief account of who and what he is. By this means some of the blame for what he has done is very properly shifted to the extenuating circumstances of his life.

I was born at Swanmoor, Hants, England, on December 30, 1869. I am not aware that there was any particular conjunction of the planets at the time, but should think it extremely likely. My parents emigrated to Canada in 1876, and I decided to go with them. My father took up a farm near Lake Simcoe, in Ontario. This was during the hard times of Canadian farming, and my father was just able, by great diligence to pay the hired men and, in years of plenty, to raise enough grain to have seed for the next year's crop without buying any. By this process my brothers and I were inevitably driven off the land, and have become professors, business men, and engineers, instead of being able to grow up as farm labourers. Yet I saw enough of farming to speak exuberantly in political addresses of the joy of early rising and the deep sleep, both of body and intellect, that is induced by honest manual toil.

I was educated at Upper Canada College, Toronto, of which I was head boy in 1887. From there I went to the University of Toronto, where I graduated in 1891. At the University I spent my entire time in the acquisition of languages, living, dead, and half-dead, and knew nothing of the outside world. In this diligent pursuit of words I spent about sixteen hours of each day. Very soon after graduation I had forgotten the languages, and found myself intellectually bankrupt. In other words I was what is called a distinguished graduate, and, as such, I took to school teaching as the only trade I could find that needed neither experience nor intellect. I spent my time from 1891 to 1899 on the staff of Upper Canada College, an experience which has left me with a profound sympathy for the many gifted and brilliant men who are compelled to spend their lives in the most dreary, the most thankless, and the worst paid profession in the world. I have noted that of my pupils, those who seemed the laziest and the least enamoured of books are now rising to eminence at the bar, in business, and in public life; the really promising boys who took all the prizes are now able with difficulty to earn the wages of a clerk in a summer hotel or a deck hand on a canal boat.

In 1899 I gave up school teaching in disgust, borrowing enough money to live upon for a few months, and went to the University of Chicago to study economics and political science. I was soon appointed to a Fellowship in political economy, and by means of this and some temporary employment by McGill University, I survived until I took the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in 1900. The meaning of this degree is that the recipient of instruction is examined for the last time in his life and is pronounced completely full. After this, no new ideas can be imparted to him.

From this time, and since my marriage, which had occurred at this period, I have belonged to the staff of McGill University, first as lecturer in Political Science, and later as head of the department of Economics and Political Science. As this position is one of the prizes of my profession, I am able to regard myself as singularly fortunate. The emolument is so high as to place me distinctly above the policemen, postmen, street-car conductors, and other salaried officials of the neighbourhood, while I am able to mix with the poorer of the business men of the city on terms of something like equality. In my point of leisure, I enjoy more in the four corners of a single year than a business man knows in his whole life. I thus have what the business man can never enjoy, an ability to think, and, what is still better, to stop thinking altogether for months at a time.

I have written a number of things in connection with my college life—a book on Political Science and many essays, magazine articles, and so on. I belong to the Political Science Association of

America, to the Royal Colonial Institute, and to the Church of England. These things, surely, are proof of respectability. I have had some small connection with politics and public life. A few years ago I went all round the British Empire delivering addresses on Imperial organization. When I started that these lectures were followed almost immediately by the Union of South Africa, the Banana Riot in Trinidad, and the Turco-Italian war, I think the reader can form some idea of their importance. In Canada I belong to the Conservative party, but as yet I have failed entirely in Canadian politics, never having received a contract to build a bridge, or make a wharf, nor to construct even the smallest section of the Transcontinental Railway. This, however, is a form of national ingratitude to which one becomes accustomed in this Dominion.

Apart from my college work, I have written two books, one called "Literary Lapses" and the other "Nonsense Novels." Each of these is published by John Lane (London and New York), and either of them can be obtained, absurd though it sounds, for the mere sum of three shillings and sixpence. Any reader of this preface, for example, ridiculous though it appears, could walk into a bookstore and buy both of these books for seven shillings. Yet these works are of so humorous a character that for many years it was found impossible to print them. The compositors fell back from their task suffocated with laughter and gasping for air. Nothing but the intervention of the linotype machine—or rather, of the kind of men who operate it—made it possible to print these books. Even now people have to be very careful in circulating them, and the books should never be put into the hands of persons not in robust health.

Many of my friends are under the impression that I write these humorous nothings in idle moments when the wearied brain is unable to perform the serious labours of the economist. My own experience is exactly the other way. The writing of solid, instructive stuff fortified by facts and figures is easy enough. There is no trouble in writing a scientific treatise on the folk-lore of Central China, or a statistical enquiry into the declining population of Prince Edward Island. But to write something of one's own mind, worth reading for its own sake, is an arduous contrivance only to be achieved in fortunate moments, few and far between. Personally, I would sooner have written "Alice in Wonderland" than the whole Encyclopaedia Britannica.

In regard to the present work I must disclaim at once all intentions of trying to do anything so ridiculously easy as writing about a real place and real people. Mariposa is not a real town. On the contrary, it is about seventy or eighty of them. You may find them all the way from Lake Superior to the sea, with the same square streets and the same maple trees and the same churches and hotels, and everywhere the sunshine of the land of hope.

Similarly, the Reverend Mr. Drone is not one person, but about eight or ten. To make him I clapped the gaiters of one ecclesiastic round the legs of another, added the sermons of a third and the character of a fourth, and so let him start on his way in the book to pick up such individual attributes as he might find for himself. Mullins and Bagshaw and Judge Pepperleigh and the rest are, it is true, personal friends of mine. But I have known them in such a variety of forms, with such alternations of tall and short, dark and fair, that, individually, I should have much ado to know them. Mr. Pupkin is found whenever a Canadian bank opens a branch in a county town and needs a teller. As for Mr. Smith, with his two hundred and eighty pounds, his hoarse voice, his loud check suit, his diamond watch, the roughness of his address and the goodness of his heart,—all of this is known by everybody to be a necessary and universal adjunct of the hotel business.

The inspiration of the book,—a land of hope and sunshine where little towns spread their square streets and their trim maple trees beside placid lakes almost within echo of the primeval forest,—is large enough. If it fails in its portrayal of the scenes and the country that it depicts the fault lies rather with an art that is deficient than in an affection that is wanting.

*McGill University,
June, 1912*

THE HOSTELRY OF MR. SMITH

I don't know whether you know Mariposa. If not, it is of no consequence, for if you know Canada all, you are probably well acquainted with a dozen towns just like it.

There it lies in the sunlight, sloping up from the little lake that spreads out at the foot of the hills on which the town is built. There is a wharf beside the lake, and lying alongside of it a steamer that is tied to the wharf with two ropes of about the same size as they use on the *Lusitania*. The steamer goes nowhere in particular, for the lake is landlocked and there is no navigation for the Mariposa Belt except to "run trips" on the first of July and the Queen's Birthday, and to take excursions of the Knights of Pythias and the Sons of Temperance to and from the Local Option Townships.

In point of geography the lake is called Lake Wissanotti and the river running out of it the Ossawippi, just as the main street of Mariposa is called Missinaba Street and the county Missinaba County. But these names do not really matter. Nobody uses them. People simply speak of the "lake" and the "river" and the "main street," much in the same way as they always call the Continental Hotel "Pete Robinson's" and the Pharmaceutical Hall, "Eliot's Drug Store." But I suppose this is just the same in every one else's town as in mine, so I need lay no stress on it.

The town, I say, has one broad street that runs up from the lake, commonly called the Main Street. There is no doubt about its width. When Mariposa was laid out there was none of that shortsightedness which is seen in the cramped dimensions of Wall Street and Piccadilly. Missinaba Street is so wide that if you were to roll Jeff Thorpe's barber shop over on its face it wouldn't reach half way across. Up and down the Main Street are telegraph poles of cedar of colossal thickness, standing at a variety of angles and carrying rather more wires than are commonly seen at a transatlantic cable station.

On the Main Street itself are a number of buildings of extraordinary importance,—Smith's Hotel and the Continental and the Mariposa House, and the two banks (the Commercial and the Exchange) to say nothing of McCarthy's Block (erected in 1878), and Glover's Hardware Store with the Oddfellows' Hall above it. Then on the "cross" street that intersects Missinaba Street at the main corner there is the Post Office and the Fire Hall and the Young Men's Christian Association and the office of the Mariposa Newspacket,—in fact, to the eye of discernment a perfect jostle of public institutions comparable only to Thread-needle Street or Lower Broadway. On all the side streets there are maple trees and broad sidewalks, trim gardens with upright calla lilies, houses with verandahs which are here and there being replaced by residences with piazzas.

To the careless eye the scene on the Main Street of a summer afternoon is one of deep and unbroken peace. The empty street sleeps in the sunshine. There is a horse and buggy tied to the hitching post in front of Glover's hardware store. There is, usually and commonly, the burly figure of Mr. Smith, proprietor of Smith's Hotel, standing in his chequered waistcoat on the steps of his hostelry, and perhaps, further up the street, Lawyer Macartney going for his afternoon mail, or the Rev. Mr. Dron, the Rural Dean of the Church of England Church, going home to get his fishing rod after a mother's auxiliary meeting.

But this quiet is mere appearance. In reality, and to those who know it, the place is a perfect hive of activity. Why, at Netley's butcher shop (established in 1882) there are no less than four men working on the sausage machines in the basement; at the Newspacket office there are as many more jobs in printing; there is a long distance telephone with four distracting girls on high stools wearing steel caps and talking incessantly; in the offices in McCarthy's block are dentists and lawyers with their coats off, ready to work at any moment; and from the big planing factory down beside the lake where the

railroad siding is, you may hear all through the hours of the summer afternoon the long-drawn music of the running saw.

Busy—well, I should think so! Ask any of its inhabitants if Mariposa isn't a busy, hustling, thriving town. Ask Mullins, the manager of the Exchange Bank, who comes hustling over to his office from the Mariposa House every day at 10.30 and has scarcely time all morning to go out and take a drink with the manager of the Commercial; or ask—well, for the matter of that, ask any of them if they ever knew a more rushing go-a-head town than Mariposa.

Of course if you come to the place fresh from New York, you are deceived. Your standard of vision is all astray. You do think the place is quiet. You do imagine that Mr. Smith is asleep merely because he closes his eyes as he stands. But live in Mariposa for six months or a year and then you will begin to understand it better; the buildings get higher and higher; the Mariposa House grows more and more luxurious; McCarthy's block towers to the sky; the 'buses roar and hum to the station; the train shriek; the traffic multiplies; the people move faster and faster; a dense crowd swirls to and fro in the post-office and the five and ten cent store—and amusements! well, now! lacrosse, baseball excursions, dances, the Fireman's Ball every winter and the Catholic picnic every summer; and music—the town band in the park every Wednesday evening, and the Oddfellows' brass band on the street every other Friday; the Mariposa Quartette, the Salvation Army—why, after a few months' residence you begin to realize that the place is a mere mad round of gaiety.

In point of population, if one must come down to figures, the Canadian census puts the number every time at something round five thousand. But it is very generally understood in Mariposa that the census is largely the outcome of malicious jealousy. It is usual that after the census the editor of the Mariposa Newspacket makes a careful re-estimate (based on the data of relative non-payment of subscriptions), and brings the population up to 6,000. After that the Mariposa Times-Herald makes an estimate that runs the figures up to 6,500. Then Mr. Gingham, the undertaker, who collects the vital statistics for the provincial government, makes an estimate from the number of what he calls the "demised" as compared with the less interesting persons who are still alive, and brings the population to 7,000. After that somebody else works it out that it's 7,500; then the man behind the bar of the Mariposa House offers to bet the whole room that there are 9,000 people in Mariposa. That settles it, and the population is well on the way to 10,000, when down swoops the federal census taker on his next round and the town has to begin all over again.

Still, it is a thriving town and there is no doubt of it. Even the transcontinental railways, as any townsman will tell you, run through Mariposa. It is true that the trains mostly go through at night and don't stop. But in the wakeful silence of the summer night you may hear the long whistle of the through train for the west as it tears through Mariposa, rattling over the switches and past the semaphores and ending in a long, sullen roar as it takes the trestle bridge over the Ossawippi. Or, better still, on a winter evening about eight o'clock you will see the long row of the Pullmans and diners of the night express going north to the mining country, the windows flashing with brilliant light, and within them a vista of cut glass and snow-white table linen, smiling negroes and millionaires with napkins at their chins whirling past in the driving snowstorm.

I can tell you the people of Mariposa are proud of the trains, even if they don't stop! The joy of being on the main line lifts the Mariposa people above the level of their neighbours in such places as Tecumseh and Nichols Corners into the cosmopolitan atmosphere of through traffic and the larger life. Of course, they have their own train, too—the Mariposa Local, made up right there in the station yard and running south to the city a hundred miles away. That, of course, is a real train, with a box stove at one end in the passenger car, fed with cordwood upside down, and with seventeen flat cars of pine lumber set between the passenger car and the locomotive so as to give the train its full impact when shunting.

Outside of Mariposa there are farms that begin well but get thinner and meaner as you go on, and

end sooner or later in bush and swamp and the rock of the north country. And beyond that again, as the background of it all, though it's far away, you are somehow aware of the great pine woods of the lumber country reaching endlessly into the north.

Not that the little town is always gay or always bright in the sunshine. There never was such a place for changing its character with the season. Dark enough and dull it seems of a winter night, the wooden sidewalks creaking with the frost, and the lights burning dim behind the shop windows. In olden times the lights were coal oil lamps; now, of course, they are, or are supposed to be, electricity—brought from the power house on the lower Ossawippi nineteen miles away. But, somehow, though it starts off as electricity from the Ossawippi rapids, by the time it gets to Mariposa and filters into the little bulbs behind the frosty windows of the shops, it has turned into coal oil again, as yellow and bleared as ever.

After the winter, the snow melts and the ice goes out of the lake, the sun shines high and the shanty-men come down from the lumber woods and lie round drunk on the sidewalk outside of Smith's Hotel—and that's spring time. Mariposa is then a fierce, dangerous lumber town, calculated to terrorize the soul of a newcomer who does not understand that this also is only an appearance and that presently the rough-looking shanty-men will change their clothes and turn back again into farmers.

Then the sun shines warmer and the maple trees come out and Lawyer Macartney puts on his tennies and trousers, and that's summer time. The little town changes to a sort of summer resort. There are visitors up from the city. Every one of the seven cottages along the lake is full. The Mariposa Belle churns the waters of the Wissanotti into foam as she sails out from the wharf, in a cloud of flags, the band playing and the daughters and sisters of the Knights of Pythias dancing gaily on the deck.

That changes too. The days shorten. The visitors disappear. The golden rod beside the meadow droops and withers on its stem. The maples blaze in glory and die. The evening closes dark and chill, and in the gloom of the main corner of Mariposa the Salvation Army around a naphtha lamp lift up their confession of their sins—and that is autumn. Thus the year runs its round, moving and changing in Mariposa, much as it does in other places.

If, then, you feel that you know the town well enough to be admitted into the inner life and movement of it, walk down this June afternoon half way down the Main Street—or, if you like, half way up from the wharf—to where Mr. Smith is standing at the door of his hostelry. You will feel as you draw near that it is no ordinary man that you approach. It is not alone the huge bulk of Mr. Smith (two hundred and eighty pounds as tested on Netley's scales). It is not merely his costume, though the chequered waistcoat of dark blue with a flowered pattern forms, with his shepherd's plaid trousers, his grey spats and patent-leather boots, a colour scheme of no mean order. Nor is it merely Mr. Smith's finely mottled face. The face, no doubt, is a notable one,—solemn, inexpressible, unreadable, the face of the heaven-born hotel keeper. It is more than that. It is the strange dominating personality of the man that somehow holds you captive. I know nothing in history to compare with the position of Mr. Smith among those who drink over his bar, except, though in a lesser degree, the relation of the Emperor Napoleon to the Imperial Guard.

When you meet Mr. Smith first you think he looks like an over-dressed pirate. Then you begin to think him a character. You wonder at his enormous bulk. Then the utter hopelessness of knowing what Mr. Smith is thinking by merely looking at his features gets on your mind and makes the Mona Lisa seem an open book and the ordinary human countenance as superficial as a puddle in the sunlight. After you have had a drink in Mr. Smith's bar, and he has called you by your Christian name, you realize that you are dealing with one of the greatest minds in the hotel business.

Take, for instance, the big sign that sticks out into the street above Mr. Smith's head as he stands there. What is on it? "JOS. SMITH, PROP." Nothing more, and yet the thing was a flash of genius. Other men who had had the hotel before Mr. Smith had called it by such feeble names as the Royal Hotel and the

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