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Creating a “Home Feeling”

The Canadian Reading Camp Association and the Uses of Fiction, 1900–1905

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ARTICLE

Creating a “Home Feeling”: The Canadian Reading Camp Association and the Uses of Fiction, 1900–1905

Jody Mason

CANADA'S OLDEST AND BEST-KNOWN adult literacy organization, Frontier College, is more or less invisible in both Canadian labour and literary history; however, the history of this organization and of Canadians' engagement with it has much to say of relevance to them both. Founded as the Canadian Reading Camp Association in 1899 by a former Presbyterian minister named Alfred Fitzpatrick, the history of Frontier College runs straight through the heart of Canada's early 20th-century social gospel movement, which perhaps explains its lack of appeal to scholars of both labour and literary history.¹ Recently,

1. Researchers affiliated with Frontier College have drawn on the association's archive to write brief institutional histories or biographies of Alfred Fitzpatrick. See, for example: George Cook, “Alfred Fitzpatrick and the Foundation of Frontier College (1899–1922),” *Canada: An Historical Magazine* 3, 4 (1976): 15–39; George Cook and Marjorie Robinson, “The Fight of My Life: Alfred Fitzpatrick's Struggle for the Frontier Charter, 1902–1933,” *Histoire Sociale / Social History* 45, 23 (1990): 81–112; Marsha Forest and James Morrison, “The Women of Frontier College,” *Canadian Women's Studies* 9, 3–4 (Fall / Winter 1988): 21–23; Philip Fernandez and Sarah Thompson, “Frontier College: A Century of Lifelong Learning Outside the Boxes,” *Education Canada* 40, 2 (2000): 12–14; Larry Krotz, Erica Martin and Philip Fernandez, *Frontier College Letters: One Hundred Years of Teaching, Learning and Nation Building* (Toronto: Frontier College Press, 1999); James Morrison, *Alfred Fitzpatrick: Founder of Frontier College* (Tantallon: Four East Publications, 1995); and Shirley K. Wigmore, “Mining the Frontier College Archives: Labourer-Teachers at the Castle-Tretheway Mine, Northern Ontario, 1925–1930,” in H.K. Baskett and Morris H.K. Baskett, eds., *Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Conference of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education* (Kingston: Queen's University Faculty of Education, 1991), 268–281. Some unpublished theses have also undertaken preliminary studies. See Ross Kidd, “The Frontier College Labourer-Teacher: A Study of His Role, Perception, and Performance,” MA thesis, University of Toronto, 1975; Erica Martin, “Action and Advocacy: Alfred Fitzpatrick and the Early History of Frontier College,”

Jody Mason, “Creating a ‘Home Feeling’: The Canadian Reading Camp Association and the Uses of Fiction, 1900–1905,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 76 (Fall 2015): 109–131.

however, post-colonial literary scholars in Canada have called for renewed attention to the incredibly popular but frequently disparaged fiction that issued from the social gospel movement. Yet their methodologies stop short of actually examining the circulation, reception, and use of popular literatures in early 20th-century Canada. Such materialist investigations of popular culture will help us understand not just the literary preferences of the postwar critics who shaped what has become the early canon of Canadian literatures; it will also aid us in answering questions such as who was reading, what were they reading, in what social and political contexts were they reading, and how and why they were reading.²

The answers to these questions will surely be of interest to labour historians, who, like literary historians, have often dismissed or ignored religion, including the social gospel movement and Canadian workers' participation in it. Pursuing, but sometimes modifying Ian McKay's conception of Canada's "liberal order," I contend that the Canadian Reading Camp Association's enmeshment in a social gospel-inspired literacy movement can help us to understand some major questions about the operations of liberalism in early 20th-century Canada: how were leisure and culture used in the service of liberal government in the first decade of the 20th century – a crucial period of nation building – and how were workers presented with, and, in turn, how did they engage this culture?³ Studying the first decade of Fitzpatrick's association

MA thesis, University of Toronto, 2000; Eric Robinson, "The History of Frontier College," MA Thesis, McGill University, 1960; and Marjorie Elizabeth Zavitz, "The Frontier College and 'Bolshevism' in the Camps of Canada 1919–1925," MA thesis, University of Windsor, 1974. To date there has been no single comprehensive study of the history of Frontier College.

2. For a recent post-colonial revisiting of social gospel fiction, as well as a discussion of the postwar disparagement of this fiction, see Daniel Coleman, *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 128–167. For materialist studies of reading and reception in Canada, see articles by Heather Murray and Andrea Rotundo, Lorna Knight, and Michel Verrette in Carole Gerson and Jacques Michon, eds., *History of the Book in Canada: Volume Three: 1918–1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Clarence Karr, *Authors and Audiences* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000); articles by Yvan Lamonde and Michel Verrette in Yvan Lamonde, Patricia Lockhart Fleming, and Fiona A. Black, eds., *History of the Book in Canada: Volume Two: 1840–1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); and Heather Murray, *Come, Bright Improvement!: The Literary Societies of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

3. For the argument that labour and left history have generally ignored the social gospel movement, see Ian McKay, *Reasoning Otherwise: Leftists and the People's Enlightenment in Canada, 1890–1920* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2008), 219 and Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 7. McKay first outlined the "liberal order framework" in "For a New Kind of History: A Reconnaissance of 100 Years of Canadian Socialism," *Labour / Le Travail* 46 (2000): 69–125. While I find many elements of McKay's "liberal order" helpful for thinking about the Canadian Reading Camp Association and its work, the debates that his work has generated offer some useful modifications. See,

using a variety of methodologies – labour history, cultural and literary history, the history of education, and the history of reading – this article will provide some answers to these admittedly large questions.

Fiction played a crucial role in the early years of the Canadian Reading Camp Association's work. Although literature was prominent in the print culture of 19th-century British workers' education, Fitzpatrick's early 20th-century promotion of literacy via fiction for frontier labourers signaled a new acceptance in Canada of the notion that workers might actually be *improved* through fiction. Central to Fitzpatrick's initial vision was a utilitarian conception of literature amenable to the liberal values he espoused.⁴ Fitzpatrick set himself no small challenge. What he sought was a rapprochement of worker and state; what he feared was a state that was failing to assume responsibility for isolated and uneducated men on the frontier, as well as working-class men who responded to their poor working conditions by succumbing to "moral diseases" that left them incapable of governing themselves, leading their families, or functioning as rational citizens. For Fitzpatrick, these men represented a potential crisis for liberalism – a "menace to civilization."⁵ He developed a double strategy to head off this crisis: he lobbied the state for structural change, and at the same time promoted a homelike environment for reading, as well as the act of reading itself, as a means of reminding male workers of their duty to self, family, and nation.

When Alfred Fitzpatrick arrived in the 1890s as a travelling missionary for a Presbyterian church in the Georgian Bay region, he was confronted with the men who populated the numerous lumber camps of the area, and

for example, the consideration of the relation between the individual and society and the discussion of McKay's "hierarchical ranking" of fundamental liberal values in Jean-François Constant and Michel Ducharme, "Introduction: A Project of Rule Called Canada – The Liberal Order Framework and Historical Practice" in Constant and Ducharme, eds., *Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 3–31. For a discussion of the new history of leisure and its relation to the liberal order, see Darren Ferry, *Uniting in Measures of Common Good: The Construction of Liberal Identities in Central Canada* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 18.

4. Recent articles on Frontier College have focused on the connections between books and citizenship in the association's early camp work; to this scholarship, I add an emphasis on Fitzpatrick's liberalism, his particular view of fiction, and his use of particular authors, especially Ralph Connor, in the first camps. See Lorne Bruce, "Reading Camps and Travelling Libraries in New Ontario, 1900–1905," *Historical Studies in Education / Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 26, 2 (2014): 71–97; Lorna R. McLean, "'The good citizen': Masculinity and Citizenship at Frontier College, 1899–1933," in Robert Adamoski, Dorothy E. Chunn, and Robert Menzies, eds., *Contesting Canadian Citizenship: Historical Readings* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2002) 225–245; and Pierre Walter, "Literacy, Imagined Nations, and Imperialism: Frontier College and the Construction of British Canada, 1899–1933," *Adult Education Quarterly* 54, 1 (2003): 42–58.

5. *Library Extension in Ontario: Reading Camps and Club Houses with Second Annual Report of Canadian Reading Camp Movement 1901–02*, p. 19, Frontier College Papers (hereafter FCP), MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC).

he immediately ascertained that poor working conditions left these largely Canadian-born men unable to exercise the rights proper to them as individuals. In the first two decades of the 20th century, the pulp and paper and hardrock mining industries developed rapidly in the part of the Canadian Shield that stretches from Manitoba east to the north shore of the St. Lawrence River. This period was also one of unprecedented economic growth and immigration, and, infamously, nation building.⁶ The primary sector of the pulp and paper industry remained “primitive” for the first half of the 20th century, meaning that the logging was done in winter camps by seasonally employed wage earners – seasonally unemployed general labourers, agriculturalists working for winter wages, and professional bushworkers, who often laboured in the secondary (manufacturing) sector of the logging industry during the summer months.⁷ In his first annual report for the Canadian Reading Camp Association, Fitzpatrick estimated that there were “at least” five hundred such camps in northern Ontario with “an average of seventy men at work in mid-winter,” but Ian Radforth contends that in almost every winter prior to 1945 (except during the Depression), Ontario lumber camp operators offered jobs to two or three hundred thousand men.⁸ During the first five years of the 20th century, this workforce included some non-British immigrants, but it was not until after 1905, when the association began working in Prairie rail construction camps, that Fitzpatrick’s organization encountered camps populated almost entirely by such immigrants.⁹

The men who were employed in these northern Ontario work camps were housed in the fashion of all frontier workers in this period – in log cabins fitted out with straw-lined bunks. Although generally warm, these bunkhouses were home to vermin-infested camp blankets, had poor ventilation, and were dimly lit. Typically, a 60- by 30-foot bunkhouse had only two small windows; consequently, as one early labourer-teacher reported, it was “impossible to read or write in such domiciles except in a limited space under the lights.”¹⁰ Such meagre living conditions, in addition to the remote situation of the camps,

6. Between 1896 and 1914, Canada’s railway mileage doubled, as did its wheat and lumber production, and its mining production tripled. Donald Avery, *Reluctant Host: Canada’s Response to Immigrant Workers, 1896–1994* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1995), 20.

7. Ian Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900–1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 26–28.

8. *Library Extension in Ontario: Reading Camps and Club Houses*, p. 7, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC; Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 27.

9. Still, northern Ontario’s economic boom after the turn of the century, coupled with the influx of non-British immigrants in the same period, created a population with a much larger concentration of both French Canadian (just under 24 per cent) and non-British residents (just over 25 per cent) than in the rest of the province. Morris Zaslow, *The Opening of the Canadian North, 1870–1914* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), 192.

10. Edmund Bradwin, *The Bunkhouse Man: A Study of Work and Pay in the Camps of Canada, 1903–1914* (1928; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 76–78.

low wages, and fees charged for board, supplies, and by labour agents, encouraged the habit popularly known in the period as “jumping” camp (quitting outright or leaving one camp for another) – what Radforth describes as “a form of labour protest in which bushworkers engaged whenever employment conditions permitted.”¹¹ This habit was abhorrent to Fitzpatrick, who attributed it not to a lack of commitment on the part of the workers but to the “isolation, and consequent moral degradation,” as well as to the “dangers and great privations” of camp life.¹² In Fitzpatrick’s estimation, “jumping” was not simply a labour problem for employers and a symptom of workers’ illiberal behaviour; it was a crisis for the state. In shirking its responsibility for camp workers, whom it failed to protect through legislation, the state was nurturing the “nursing beds of the tramp, the drunkard, licentious and insane,” men who were a “menace to any state.”¹³

To stave off this crisis, Fitzpatrick engaged in a vigorous print campaign that was meant to attract the attention of provincial and federal governments. In this campaign, he rejected what Richard Allen calls the Canadian social gospel movement’s conservative focus on “personal ethical issues” and individual sin;¹⁴ challenging the efficacy of both temperance campaigns and missionary work, Fitzpatrick was generally aligned with the more progressive elements of the movement. In its first decade, the Canadian Reading Camp Association’s immediate goal was to convince provincial governments to assume financial and practical responsibility for the education of the isolated frontier workers who had contributed so much to the economic growth of the Dominion. A dominant theme in this print campaign is the dignity of labour; Fitzpatrick urged the state and its citizens to recognize camp labourers as individuals whose reason was compromised by isolation and poor camp conditions. In a period when collectivist, worker-led education initiatives were beginning to emerge in Canada, Fitzpatrick’s association prized individual development via state-sponsored education as a means of realizing a common social benefit.¹⁵ In his estimation, what these men required was education that would

11. Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 39.

12. Fitzpatrick, “Social Amelioration in the Lumbering Camps,” *The Canada Lumberman*, May 1904, http://eco.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8_04953_200/2?r=0&s=1; Fitzpatrick, “The Neglected Citizen in the Camps,” *The Canadian Magazine*, May 1905, http://eco.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8_06251_147/1?r=0&s=1.

13. *Camp Education by Contact, With Ninth Annual Report of the Reading Camp Association*, 1909, p. 15, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC.

14. Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914–1928* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 17.

15. After the *fin-de-siècle* demise of mechanics’ institutes, the field of adult education was increasingly contested, as elite sponsors and worker-led interests jostled for control. The Workers’ Educational Association, the Antigonish Movement, and the Women’s Institute movement all witnessed this sort of internal contest in the first part of the 20th century. See Gerald Friesen, “Adult Education and Union Education: Aspects of English-Canadian Cultural

enable them to understand their individual sovereignty, their ensuing rights, and the important limitations on these rights: "An enlightened and healthy citizenship is a better asset than ignorant and filthy slaves. Camp Schools are cheaper than soldiers, paupers, drunkards and criminals."¹⁶ In his fourth annual report, Fitzpatrick further advocated the state's duty to ensure the rule of law in the name of the common good: "To give employers and contractors a free hand in determining their relation to their employees is to grant a licence of [sic] them to compel men to work overtime and on Sundays, to live in small and unsanitary quarters, and is nothing short of criminal."¹⁷ His public campaign to improve camp sanitation and other working conditions was aimed at producing legislative change, and in this he was modestly successful.¹⁸ As long as Fitzpatrick was convinced that the men in the camps *were individuals*, and this conviction was challenged after 1905 as the proportion of non-British immigrants in the camps swelled, he sought to reform the state that governed the society they constituted.

History in the 20th Century," *Labour / Le Travail* 34 (1994): 163–188 and Ian Radforth and Joan Sangster, "A Link Between Labour and Learning: The Workers' Educational Association in Ontario, 1917–1951," *Labour / Le Travail* 8/9 (1981/82): 41–78. For a discussion of Canada's early 20th-century co-operative movement, see Ian MacPherson, *Each for All: A History of the Co-operative Movement in English Canada, 1900–1945* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1979). There are also fascinating examples of early worker-led educational initiatives in early 20th-century immigrant communities. See, for example: Irving Abella, *A Coat of Many Colours: Two Centuries of Jewish Life in Canada* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1990), 115–122; Michel Beaulieu, *Labour at the Lakehead: Ethnicity, Socialism, and Politics, 1900–35* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011), 20–22; Varpu Lindström, *Defiant Sisters: A Social History of Finnish Immigrant Women in Canada* (Beaverton: Aspasia Books, 2003); Orest T. Martynowych, *Ukrainians in Canada: The Formative Period, 1891–1924* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1991), 265–297.

16. *Home Education Extension: Reading Camps, Camp Schools, Reading Tents, Camp Churches, With Third Annual Report of the Canadian Reading Camp Association, 1902–03*, p. 8, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC. This emphasis on education as an inexpensive form of crime prevention runs throughout the history of education in Canada. For example, Egerton Ryerson, Chief Superintendent of Schools in Upper Canada, promoted mechanics' institutes and public libraries for adults as a means of rendering individuals unlikely to "sink down into melancholy, slothfulness or resort to places of sensual and intemperate indulgence for relaxation or pleasure." Quoted in Philip C. Candy, "From Homo Canadiannus Colonialus to Homo Canadiannus Nationalus: Adult Education and Nation-Building in Late Nineteenth-Century Canada," in Marcel Savaria, ed., *Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Conference of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education* (Montréal: Université de Montréal, 1985), 8–9.

17. *Camp Education Extension*, p. 10, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC.

18. Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 103. For an analysis of the way that liberalism's focus on the individual does not necessarily preclude society or ideas of the social good, see Constant and Ducharme, "Introduction," in *Liberalism and Hegemony*, 8–9. For a discussion of the way that classic liberalism frames public education in relation to the social good, see Stephen Holmes, "Liberal Guilt: Some Theoretical Origins of the Welfare State," in J. Donald Moon, ed., *Responsibility, Rights, and Welfare: The Theory of the Welfare State* (London: Westview Press, 1988), 77–106.

To demonstrate what kind of educational work could be done in the camps, Fitzpatrick developed a model that included reading rooms, books and periodicals, and, eventually, labourer-teachers. His remedy should not surprise us: his methods of social amelioration drew on his heritage as a Presbyterian Scots-Canadian. Presbyterianism's insistence on literate parishioners influenced Fitzpatrick, as did the 18th-century Scottish Enlightenment's privileging of democracy and practicality in education. This Enlightenment included not just educating well beyond the aristocracy but also emphasizing subjects such as science, agriculture, mathematics, and moral philosophy (from which the study of vernacular literature emerged in the 18th century).¹⁹ Fitzpatrick was also shaped by the "democratic" influence Scottish emigrants to British North America wielded on the formation of 19th-century educational institutions.²⁰ A key North American inheritor of the Scottish Enlightenment was Reverend Thomas McCulloch, the founder of Pictou Academy in Pictou, Nova Scotia.²¹ It was to Pictou Academy that Alfred Fitzpatrick went in 1876, at the age of fourteen. The principal of Pictou Academy in the late 19th century, Alexander H. MacKay, was committed to both democracy in education – "opening the doors to all" – and the belief that "knowledge should be made available beyond the walls of the classroom."²² Fitzpatrick followed his Pictou Academy formation with years at Queen's College. George Monro Grant, the principal of the university and Fitzpatrick's mentor, was a fellow alumnus of Pictou Academy; he was also a leader in Canada's first experiments in university extension and a strong but moderate voice in the nation's emerging social gospel movement.²³

It is therefore unsurprising that, in addition to offering medical and religious services to lumber camp workers in the Georgian Bay area, Fitzpatrick handed out books, "popular literature" that he hoped would "replace the

19. Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900* (1957; Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 9–10; Henry A. Hubert, *Harmonious Perfection: The Development of English Studies in Nineteenth-Century Anglo-Canadian Colleges* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994), 9–15.

20. This influence is frequently cited in the historiography of Canadian education. J.D. Wilson, R.M. Stamp, and L.P. Audet, eds., *Canadian Education: A History* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 39.

21. McCulloch established his school in 1816 as a means of contesting the elitist restrictions of the Church of England's King's Collegiate School in Windsor, Nova Scotia. See Bruce C. Fergusson, *Mechanics' Institutes in Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1960), 11–13.

22. Morrison, *Alfred Fitzpatrick*, 12–13.

23. Grant's sympathy with the theological liberalism that was transforming Protestant churches in this period (and particularly his Presbyterian church) included a belief in the "application of ethics to economics," but he was an "outspoken opponent" of the socialist ideas of men like T. Phillips Thompson, preferring instead to view the diffusion of education as linked to inexorable human progress. Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 184–187.

sensational dime novels that the men usually read.”²⁴ In the summer of 1900, he reached out to the state for the first time, seeking support from the Ontario Department of Education for a plan to develop reading camps in northern Ontario; he was ignored. The following autumn, Fitzpatrick addressed himself to the Little Current free library as well as to lumber camp managers in the area around Georgian Bay, asking them to support the interim organization of camp library clubs until the Ontario government developed a travelling library service. This appeal was successful, and Fitzpatrick organized four camps in makeshift shacks in the fall of 1900 – three of which received their books from a local library and one of which obtained a case of ten books from McGill University’s travelling library service. The camps also received book and periodical donations from various church and philanthropic organizations, including the Aberdeen Association, which collected and distributed reading material to settlers in Canada.²⁵ In early 1901, Richard Harcourt, the Minister of Education, altered his response to Fitzpatrick’s entreaties and announced his intention to create travelling libraries for northern Ontario’s work camps. The government subsequently made good on its promise and supplied 8 cases of books to camps during the 1901–1902 season; by 1904, 37 travelling libraries had been prepared and sent out by the Department of Education.²⁶ However, if the Ontario government came to accept its role as a provider of library services to remote communities, it consistently declined to assume responsibility for the project at the heart of the Reading Camp Association’s enterprise – the education of adults on the frontier.

Beginning in 1901, Fitzpatrick published an annual report as a means of publicizing his project and garnering financial and other support. In these reports, he explicitly connected the practical tasks of the association – the distribution of books and other reading material to frontier camps, the creation of reading rooms, and the possible development of camp instruction – to a utilitarian project couched, somewhat contradictorily, in a romantic philosophy of labour. According to Fitzpatrick, the “Association aims to dignify

24. Morrison, *Alfred Fitzpatrick*, 24.

25. Registers 1901–1955, McLennan Travelling Library 1901–1968, RG 40 Libraries, McLennan Library, McGill University. In 1899, the family of Hugh McLennan endowed McGill’s travelling library service, which operated until the late 1960s, mostly in rural Québec. The Aberdeen Association was formed in Winnipeg in 1890 under the leadership of Lady Aberdeen (wife of the seventh Governor General of Canada). The object of the association was to “collect good and attractive periodicals and other literature, and distribute it in monthly parcels to settlers who apply for it from outlying parts of Canada.” The “rigidly” undenominational association aimed to ameliorate the isolation of settlers and their children, as well as that of “bachelor settlers, ranchers, miners and lumbermen.” See “Report of the Aberdeen Association, 1898,” File 12, Aberdeen Papers, MG 127 IB5, Vol. 5, LAC. For more information about the Aberdeen Association, see Stewart Mein, “The Aberdeen Association: An Early Attempt to Provide Library Services to Settlers in Saskatchewan,” *Saskatchewan History* 38, 1 (1985): 2–19.

26. Bruce, “Reading Camps and Travelling Libraries,” 75–81.

isolated manual labor and to free it from sordid and degrading conditions. Both believe that labour thus ennobled and made intelligent will become what Carlyle foresaw it would become, 'the grand sole miracle of man' and the key to the industrial, social and religious problems of our time."²⁷ Victorian cultural critic Thomas Carlyle was hardly a proponent of either liberalism or utilitarianism, but his conviction that the labourer should be dignified was easily adapted to the utilitarian desire to improve individual workers' skills and the more general liberal goal of self-improvement. From the mid-19th century to the first part of the 20th century, educational efforts aimed at British and Canadian workers drew robustly on this conflation of skill acquisition and moral improvement. The 19th-century Mechanics' Institute movement in Britain, for example, aimed to train workers in the fullest sense. In this movement, literature in the English vernacular was privileged for its purported ability to improve the individual, to allay class conflict and otherwise incendiary thinking, to foster independent and quiet reflection, and to stimulate further self-improvement.²⁸ While "self-improvement" for evangelicals verged toward the ideal, for those of a more utilitarian bent of mind, Western literary education was understood as a means of teaching the individual to exercise reason, moral will, and critical understanding, which are crucial capacities in the functioning of liberal government.²⁹ Yet governments in Canada only very reluctantly accepted fiction in their attempts to regulate mechanics' institutes during the 19th century, viewing it not as a positive moral influence but as comparable to betel nut chewing and opium eating.³⁰ Even in the early 20th century, when the longstanding conflation of character formation and manual training became known in Canada as the Macdonald-Robertson movement, fiction did not play a primary role in utilitarian ideas about the education of young people and workers.³¹ Although Fitzpatrick drew frequently from the

27. *Camp Education Extension*, p. 10, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC.

28. Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism 1848–1932* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 65–66.

29. Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 19.

30. The comparison is Samuel May's, superintendent for the Ontario Department of Education. Despite his apparent reservations, May conceded that mechanics' institutes could supply "light reading" as long it was selected from a list prepared by the Education Department. Ontario, Ministry of Education, *Special Report of the Minister of Education on the Mechanics' Institutes* (Ontario) (Toronto: C. Blackett Robinson, 1881), 43. Egerton Ryerson's establishment in the early 1850s of public libraries in Canada West reveals that "useful knowledge" (natural history, manufactures, "useful" arts, agriculture) and character formation were common themes in early state initiatives to encourage mass reading. See Bruce Curtis, "'Littery Merit,' 'Useful Knowledge,' and the Organization of Township Libraries in Canada West, 1840–1860," *Ontario History* 78, 4 (1986): 285–311. For a fuller discussion of the 19th-century utilitarian view of reading, see Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 129–140.

31. The Macdonald-Robertson movement (named after education reformer James W. Robertson and philanthropist Sir William Macdonald) championed manual training in schools

lexicon of the early 20th-century manual training movement, his ideas about the importance of literary texts, and fiction in particular, in worker education signaled an important difference in his thought.

Fitzpatrick enthusiastically adopted utilitarian ideas in describing and promoting what eventually came to be a key figure in the association's work – the labourer-teacher. Although the very first camps in the fall of 1900 were unsupervised, this arrangement proved immediately unsatisfactory. As Fitzpatrick observed in a 1901 article in *Canadian Magazine*, the government-sponsored travelling libraries would be a "great boon" to literate lumbermen and miners, but, for the estimated 35 per cent of men in the camps who were neither able to read nor write, "the system will require extension" in the form of "specially qualified" instructors.³² This slight shift of emphasis from "library" to "school" is a crucial one in the history of the Canadian Reading Camp Association. Lacking government funds to pay instructors, Fitzpatrick turned in the 1902–1903 season to the solution of the labourer-teacher – instructors who would be "willing to work in the woods during the day, and conduct informal classes at night."³³ He soon began to emphasize what he perceived as the reciprocal benefit of the plan: for example, in the fourth annual report, he referred to "neurasthenia" – the "arrested development" of the urban student who works only with his brains, and who must, for the sake of his physical and moral health, engage in manual training, and, by 1904, Fitzpatrick was insisting on the "benefits to both teacher and taught."³⁴ By 1903–1904, Fitzpatrick was

as a means of encouraging and equipping young people to stay in declining rural areas and as a method of training a workforce in a rapidly industrializing economy. Like Canada's 19th-century Mechanics' Institute movement, it privileged character formation as an end to the means of manual training. Neil Sutherland, *Children in English-Canadian Society* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2000), 183–188.

32. "Life in Lumbering and Mining Camps – A Plea for Reform," *Canadian Magazine*, May 1901, http://eco.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8_06251_99/1?r=0&s=1.

33. *Home Education Extension*, pp. 23–24, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC. As this report indicates, Fitzpatrick engaged eight such labourer-teachers in 1902–1903, the balance of his instructional staff provided by missionaries and a medical doctor. According to James Morrison, the concept of the labourer-teacher came from Angus Grey, a reading camp instructor and librarian who proposed the idea in the winter of 1903 as a remedy to the problem of poor attendance in his cabin. *Alfred Fitzpatrick*, 27–28. Fitzpatrick's suggestion that this plan had already been put in place for the winter of 1903 contradicts Morrison's account; nevertheless, Grey's role in the birth of the labourer-teacher is a central feature of the institutionally authored history of Frontier College, a fact that suggests the organization's consistent privileging of pedagogy and guidance over self-directed reading, as well its commitment to teaching methods forged by field experience. See references to the story of Angus Grey in Fernandez and Thompson, "Frontier College," 12, and Robinson, "The History of Frontier College," 36–37.

34. *Camp Education Extension*, pp. 11–12, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC; Fitzpatrick, "Social Amelioration," 15. This is a theme Fitzpatrick pursued consistently during his career with the association. See Alfred Fitzpatrick, *The University in Overalls: A Plea for Part-Time Study* (1920; Toronto: Frontier College Press, 1923), 76, 85, 92, 87.

readily deploying the language of the educational reform of the era, which married manual training to character formation, calling his labourer-teacher scheme the complement of the nation's new manual training schools, which were "aimed at the useful and the ethical, the development of character being the chief consideration."³⁵

In the first decade of the Canadian Reading Camp Association's work, most of the books that arrived in frontier camps were supplied via the government-sponsored Ontario Travelling Libraries. As was the case with Ontario's 19th-century mechanics' institutes, there was considerable state anxiety regarding the use of public education funds to promote and enable the reading of popular fiction and a simultaneous desire to see such funds channeled toward the encouragement of what 19th-century utilitarianism deemed "useful knowledge," particularly when the education of workers was the goal. In 1901 *The Globe* reported that Minister of Education, Richard Harcourt, "in the first instance would be glad if it were insisted upon that a reasonable percentage of each box of books would be devoted to work on practical agriculture, horticulture, etc." As the Department of Education was preparing its first round of travelling libraries in the spring of 1901, it consulted "the heads of several colleges as well as a number of literary men in Ontario" in order to ensure the quality of the libraries. According to *The Globe*, these men produced libraries that contained not more than ten per cent of "good fiction," the balance constituted by travel, adventure, biography, science, agriculture, domestic science, and so on.³⁶

In his second annual report, Fitzpatrick affirmed the feasibility of "technical education" for workers in the camps, noting that government-supported efforts to teach mineralogy, geology, and metallurgy in the mining camps had met with great success.³⁷ In the summer of 1901, he advised *The Globe* regarding the type of reading material he was seeking for the following season, and he prioritized "clean, healthy literature," such as the animal tales of Ernest Thompson Seton and William Alexander Fraser, Booker T. Washington's autobiography *Up From Slavery* (1901), and William Drummond's *The Habitant and other French-Canadian poems* (1897).³⁸ In the first decade of the 20th century, Seton's *Wild Animals I Have Known* (1898) was being used to implement the "nature study" component of the new "practical education" promoted by the Macdonald-Robertson movement, and Fitzpatrick's choice

35. *Camp Education Extension*, p. 10, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC.

36. "Travelling Libraries," *The Globe* (Toronto), 24 January 1901; "Books for Michipicoten: First Travelling Library Starts on its Round," *The Globe* (Toronto), 24 May 1901.

37. *Library Extension in Ontario: Reading Camps and Club Houses*, p. 17, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC.

38. "Free Reading Camps to Benefit Workmen in Isolated Northern Districts," *The Globe*, 26 August 1901, <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/docview/1412104472?>

of the Washington autobiography signals his approval of the latter's program of education for US-American blacks, which emphasized agricultural and industrial training as a means of self-improvement.³⁹

Though he shared with government officials and the reformers of the Macdonald-Robertson movement an enthusiasm for "practical" and "technical" education, Fitzpatrick clearly favoured fiction over the technical and scientific literature they preferred. This choice may appear rooted in his own Christian idealism, or the Arnoldian idealism that swept Anglo-Canadian universities and, in particular, their departments of English, at the turn of the century;⁴⁰ however, Fitzpatrick was more interested in literature's application to a political and social order that could be ameliorated via individual reason than in the self-enclosed moral subject. Fitzpatrick thus envisioned a new place for fiction in the lives of Canada's workers. The act of reading could function as a powerful antidote to the "moral diseases" of bunkhouse life that rendered individuals "reckless of the responsibilities of home."⁴¹ Yet unlike many of his more idealist 19th-century predecessors in Britain and Canada, Fitzpatrick linked the self-governance apparently encouraged by reading to a wider vision of legislative reform, which he hoped would produce state technologies for diminishing risk in the camps.

In the fall of 1901, soon after the first provincial travelling libraries began their rounds, Fitzpatrick wrote to the Minister of Education to suggest that a third of the books in the libraries should be "elementary" readers and to ask for books in French. One month later, he noted the importance of "up-to-date fiction": "The men ask for stories." "Do you not think," he queried, "the first step is to interest as well as educate and elevate?" He suggested that the men "prefer" books such as William Kirby's *The Golden Dog* (1877), H.S. Merriman's *The Sowers* (1896), Edward Westcott's *David Harum* (1898), Gilbert Parker's *Seats of the Mighty* (1896), Ernest Thompson Seton's *Wild Animals I Have Known*, Ralph Connor's *Black Rock* (1897) and *The Sky Pilot* (1899), and W.H. Drummond's *The Habitant*.⁴² At the second annual meeting of the Ontario Library Association, both Fitzpatrick and E.A. Hardy (first president of the association and also librarian for the Canadian Reading Camp Association) insisted on the need for "fiction and light reading" in the camps, and Hardy even suggested that as much as 50 per cent of the material in the travelling library cases should be fiction.⁴³

39. Sutherland, *Children in English-Canadian Society*, 186–187.

40. On the influence of Arnoldian idealism in Anglo-Canadian universities in the late 19th century, Hubert, *Harmonious Perfection*.

41. Fitzpatrick, *The University in Overalls*, 8.

42. Fitzpatrick to Richard Harcourt, 2 September 1901 and Fitzpatrick to Harcourt, 14 October 1901, Department of Education Library Correspondence Files (hereafter DELC), RG 2-29-4-4, MS 913, Archives of Ontario (hereafter AO).

43. "The Ontario Library Association, Toronto, March 31, April 1 1902." *The Library Journal* 27

Fitzpatrick's favouring of fiction clearly had some effect on the Department of Education, but the department also had proof of workers' preferences in the form of "fingermarks" (or marks of use) on the volumes of fiction that they sent out in their first libraries. By the end of 1901, the department modified its position and agreed to include more "standard and recent fiction" in its travelling libraries, complemented, of course, by a "sprinkling of biography and general science."⁴⁴ Yet this modification was slow and, even in 1904, Fitzpatrick was writing to Harcourt with the complaint that many of the books in the travelling libraries, such as the titles by Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray, were not "elementary enough" for the purpose of teaching workers to read: "I find a good simple story, in words of one syllable, to be the best for adult beginners. They do not like primers, etc. They realize that they are grown up men, and will begin with a story, while they hesitate to work with ordinary readers." He recommended one-syllable versions of titles such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped* (1886), Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877), and John Brown's short story "Rab and His Friends," (1859) as well as other books he had long been requesting, such as Ralph Connor's *Black Rock*, *The Sky Pilot*, and *The Man from Glengarry* (1900), and W.H. Drummond's *The Habitant*.⁴⁵ In the 1903–1904 annual report (and again in the one that followed and in 1906–1907), Fitzpatrick stated his preference for the animal stories of Ernest Thompson Seton, William Alexander Fraser, and Charles G.D. Roberts; W.H. Drummond's humorous (and stereotypical) poetry of the *habitant*; the plays and poems of the liberal and anticlerical French-Canadian Louis Fréchette; the masculine, historical, and often imperialist adventures and mysteries of Winston Churchill, Conan Doyle, G.A. Henty, and Stewart White; the travel writing of missionary Edward Thwing; popular illustrated weeklies, such as *The Boy's Own*, an immensely successful periodical published by the British Religious Tract Society; and the novels of Ralph Connor.⁴⁶ By 1905, Fitzpatrick's pleas were landing on fertile ground: the government's list of books "received and labeled" for 1905 includes an overwhelming proportion of fiction (92 per cent) and, significantly, not a single title that might fall into the categories of history or science.⁴⁷ Moreover, there is not a single title by Sir Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, or William Thackeray; instead, one finds Gilbert Parker (ten titles), W.A. Fraser (seven titles), W.H. Drummond

(Jan.-Dec. 1902): 271.

44. "Rural School Reading," *The Globe* (Toronto), 14 December 1901.

45. Fitzpatrick to Harcourt, 1 Jan. 1904 and Fitzpatrick to Harcourt, 14 Jan. 1904, DELC, RG 2-29-4-13, MS 913, AO.

46. *Camp Education Extension*, p. 26, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC; *The Education of the Frontier Laborer*, p. 36, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC; *Camp Education*, p. 71, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC.

47. "Registers of Books 1901–1907: Register of Books Received and Labelled by the Ontario Travelling Library," Public Libraries Branch Files (hereafter PLB), RG 2-146, MS 918, reel 1, AO.

(six titles), Stewart White and Ralph Connor (four titles each) – authors whom Fitzpatrick had long been requesting.

No fiction played as prominent a role in the association's early work as the novels of Ralph Connor. By the turn of the century, Ralph Connor, pseudonym for Charles Gordon, a Presbyterian minister and former missionary in the work camps of the Canadian West, was widely known across the English-speaking world as a popular writer of muscular Christian fiction. Fitzpatrick observed in his first annual report that the "majority of the men on the frontier seem prejudiced against the so-called religious literature"; he thus discouraged donations of "sectarian literature" and insisted on the undenominational character of his work.⁴⁸ Although many instructors continued to use the Bible at informal Sunday gatherings, it ceded place in the everyday work of the association to fiction by authors like Ralph Connor. Charles Gordon was an active supporter of the Canadian Reading Camp Association: his letters of encouragement appeared in its first annual reports, and he consistently donated money to the association in its early years.⁴⁹ In the association's second and third seasons, Gordon also contributed six copies each of his popular novels *Black Rock*, *The Sky Pilot*, and *The Man from Glengarry*, all of which draw on his experiences with frontier mining and lumber camps as a missionary in the West. Other donated copies of Ralph Connor's novels arrived in the camps during its first few seasons. A clerk at a Rat Portage Lumber Company camp, for instance, reported in 1902 that his manager donated *The Man from Glengarry*, and, in the same year, J.B. McWilliams, superintendent of Woods and Forests, donated a dozen copies of *The Man from Glengarry* to the camps.⁵⁰ The catalogue for the Ontario Travelling Library lists eighteen Connor titles for the period 1901–1905.⁵¹ In the association's seventh season, labourer-teacher Thomas Hindle wrote from a Saskatchewan camp asking for

48. *Library Extension in Ontario*, p.12, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC; "Free Reading Camps to Benefit Workmen in Isolated Northern Districts." Despite the fact that Catholic priests were often invited to use the association's tents and cabins, some commentators were unhappy with its promotion of an obviously Protestant author like Ralph Connor, whose novels express "something like a hate for the Catholic people of Ireland." See M.C.M., Untitled, *Catholic World* (June 1905): 429.

49. In a 1908 letter, Fitzpatrick thanked Gordon for his "valuable assistance," noting that he had "doubled" his contribution in the preceding year and had "accommodated the Association with a temporary loan." He then asked Gordon to consider endorsing a fundraising letter with his signature because of his "great patience and interest in these men" and because "you have pictured their life better than anyone else, and your name has more weight on this subject, than that of any other." Fitzpatrick to Gordon, 7 March 1908, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 3, "Gordon, C.W., 1908," LAC.

50. *Library Extension in Ontario: Reading Camps and Club Houses*, pp. 34, 25, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC.

51. "Registers of Books 1901–1907: Register of Books Received and Labelled by the Ontario Travelling Library," PLB, RG 2-146, MS 918, reel 1, AO.

more books because “the only books I have yet received are those by ‘Ralph Connor.’”⁵² In December of 1901, Fitzpatrick wrote to Gordon, thanking him for his donations of his novels and for his continuing support: “These books are sure to do good to these lonely men and I am sure the consciousness of this is to you an all sufficient reward. They have already been forwarded to six different reading camps – three to each. Our work is very encouraging and perhaps no one has given us a stronger impetus than yourself.”⁵³

Fitzpatrick was unabashedly modeling his efforts among frontier labourers after the example fictionalized in Connor’s novels. The epigraph to Fitzpatrick’s first annual report is taken from Gordon’s preface to his first novel, *Black Rock*: “The men of this book are still there in the mines and lumber camps of the mountains, fighting out that eternal fight for manhood, strong, clean, God-conquered. And, when the west winds blow, to the open ear the sounds of battle come, telling the fortunes of the fight.”⁵⁴ Fitzpatrick’s concept of the reading room drew on the representation of the temperance “league” in *Black Rock*. The league comprises a group of hard living miners in the Selkirk mountains who are bound together by the spiritual guidance of Mr. Craig, a missionary, and Mrs. Mavor, a miner’s widow whose gentleness pervades the “cosy room” in which she hosts the men of the league. Yet, to a significant extent, Fitzpatrick secularized Gordon’s concept, adapting the proposal of a camp manager in *Black Rock*, who calls for a “comfortable club-room” with “books, magazines, pictures, games, anything, ‘dонтcheknow, to make the time pass pleasantly.”⁵⁵ Moreover, in *The Man from Glengarry*, a young, working-class boy who has learned to be a muscular and merciful man demonstrates his strength and goodness by operating a reading room and a library in the western lumber camps he manages.

Fitzpatrick also drew on the gendered discourse of the Connor novels in his conception of what came to be the labourer-teacher. In his advocacy of the physical challenge of the wilderness (instead of the playing field) for the enervated university students who would become his labourer-teachers, Fitzpatrick was obviously alluding to the figure of the muscular Christian, whose battles for a particular kind of manhood populated the pages of Gordon’s fiction. However, Fitzpatrick commonly evoked not just the need for a contest for

52. *Camp Education, With Seventh Annual Report of Reading Camp Association, 1906–1907*, p. 39, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC.

53. Fitzpatrick to Gordon, 20 December 1901, Charles Gordon Papers (hereafter CGP), MSS 56, Box 48, Folder 1, Department of Archives and Special Collections, University of Manitoba (hereafter UM). Between 1899 and 1914, Gordon’s novels made the top ten on the Canadian Bestseller List of the trade journal the *Bookseller and Stationer* fourteen times, more than any other author, and his work also sold well internationally. See Clarence Karr, “Popular and Best-Selling Fiction,” in Gerson and Michon, eds., *History of the Book in Canada*, 399.

54. *Library Extension in Ontario*, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC.

55. Ralph Connor, *Black Rock* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), 34, 36.

manhood, but also for the merciful, forgiving, and self-sacrificing qualities of women such as Ralph Connor's character Mrs. Murray. If the labourer-teacher was to be a "hero" to the workers around him – the epitome of vigorous skill and strength in labour – Fitzpatrick also imagined him in ideal terms, as a model character of gentleness and steadfastness, a man who "lives not for himself, but for others."⁵⁶ These latter qualities are much more commonly associated with the feminized self-abnegation that seems to have little to do with muscular Christianity. Although most recent studies of the history of Frontier College have emphasized the "overwhelmingly masculine" construction of citizenship in the first frontier camps, feminized characteristics were in fact crucial to Fitzpatrick's project of cultivating "homelike influences" in the camps.⁵⁷ Fitzpatrick believed that such influences could be a powerful antidote to the problem of "jumping" – a practice that demonstrated clear disregard for contract law, that threatened the success of industry and the worker's own individual advancement, and that further imperiled the male worker's identity as breadwinner and head of family.

While admiring the "Herculean thighs and massive limbs of our stalwart toiling sons," Fitzpatrick wished also the development of "the shapely head and calm divinity of brow"; in other words, the vigorous masculinity that gave the Christian his muscularity in this period was crucial to Fitzpatrick's vision, but these qualities were to be tempered with gentleness and grace.⁵⁸ In adopting this line of thinking, Fitzpatrick was stepping into a current of thought that swept up many reform-minded Presbyterians in the early 20th century – the ideas of Henry Drummond, a Scottish clergyman and self-styled scientist whose attempts to reconcile evolutionary biology with Christian theology were particularly influential in Canada. Drummond's contention that the

56. *Camp Education by Contact*, p. 7, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC; Fitzpatrick, *The University in Overalls*, 126.

57. Walter, "Literacy, Imagined Nations, and Imperialism," 54; Fitzpatrick, "Social Amelioration," 15. For more on the figure of the muscular Christian and its resistance to feminized Christianity, see Susan Curtis, "The Son of Man and God the Father: The Social Gospel and Victorian Masculinity," in Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen, eds., *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 67–78 and John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). For an analysis of the way that conceptions of masculinity, in particular, shaped the ideals of citizenship that Fitzpatrick promoted in frontier camps, see McLean, "'The good citizen'" and Terry Wilde, "Literacy at the Resource Frontier: A Matter of Life and Death," *Historical Studies in Education* 24, 1 (2012): 130–149. For further explorations of the ways that Charles Gordon and the Ralph Connor novels negotiate both masculinity and femininity, see Coleman, *White Civility*, 139–145 and David Marshall, "A Canoe, and a Tent and God's Great Out-of-Doors: Muscular Christianity and the Flight from Domesticity, 1880s–1930s," in Heather Ellis and Jessica Meyer, eds., *Masculinity and the Other: Historical Perspectives* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars' Publishing, 2009), 23–42.

58. *Home Education Extension*, p. 19, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC.

Darwinian “Struggle for Life” gave way to a “Struggle for the Life of Others,” in which the “Mother Principle” was the guiding force, presented maternal self-abnegation and care as the cause of spiritual development. As a student in Glasgow in the late 1880s, Charles Gordon was captivated by these ideas, and they subsequently appeared in various forms in his popular novels.⁵⁹ In *The Man from Glengarry*, for example, it is not the physically and morally powerful minister, Alexander Murray, who leads the protagonist, Ranald MacDonald, to manhood, but rather the gentle and merciful Mrs. Murray, who has “the power of one who sees with open eyes the unseen, and who loves to the forgetting of self those for whom the Infinite love poured itself out in death.”⁶⁰ In *Black Rock*, it is Mrs. Mavor alone who has the power to elicit the true gentleness of the miners of the Selkirk Mountains, and in *The Sky Pilot*, it is the young minister’s combination of masculine expertise on the playing field and feminized characteristics – extraordinarily beautiful violet eyes, eager admiration of others, naïve charm, susceptibility to emotion – that make him ultimately so necessary to the rough-edged men and women of the Alberta foothills.

With the exception of a few foremen’s wives, cooks, and some remarkable women who served as teachers for the association, women were scarce in frontier camps. Fitzpatrick condemned the absence of women in camp life as one of its “greatest evils.” He contended that “only through the presence of women and children can the single man in camp as well as the husband, be taught the proper way of life. No amount of preaching or teaching will take their place.”⁶¹ Camp workers had their own strategies for coping with the absence of women: “buck” or “stag” dances were common entertainments in northern Ontario’s lumber camps before World War I, for example.⁶² The homosocial environment of the camps clearly concerned Fitzpatrick, who, by 1920, was advocating family housing for the married man whose “wife and children help him to live the normal life.”⁶³ This worrying absence of women could be addressed partially through carefully selected fiction, but Fitzpatrick also emphasized the necessity of the homelike reading tent or cabin, and he often employed the well-tended cabin and its reading matter as a kind of metaphor for the female presence that was lamentably absent in the camps. An instructor in a Parry Sound lumber camp during the 1904–1905 season followed the injunction, noting that he was “using every moment at my disposal to make a cosy nest of

59. Barry D. Mack, “Modernity Without Tears: The Mythic World of Ralph Connor,” in William Klempa, ed., *The Burning Bush and a Few Acres of Snow* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1994), 142–145.

60. Ralph Connor, *The Man from Glengarry* (1901; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993), 300.

61. Fitzpatrick, *The University in Overalls*, 14, 16.

62. Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 95.

63. Fitzpatrick, *The University in Overalls*, 15.

our little school.”⁶⁴ Using similarly feminized diction, instructors frequently reported improvements such as stoves, lace curtains, photographs and maps on the walls, and good lighting. These improvements, in addition to carefully selected reading material and posted rules discouraging loud talking, swearing, the spitting of tobacco on the floor, and ill treatment of the books and magazines, were, like the Connor novels, meant to temper masculine vigour with “homelike and restraining influences” (see image on opposite page).⁶⁵

The comfortable and homelike reading room and the seemingly female influence it could provide, both in its strong evocation of a “woman’s touch” and in the surrogate form of novels such as *The Man from Glengarry*, was also a place where labourer-teachers encouraged workers to write letters home – to maintain or re-establish bonds with their families. Letter writing materials were always in abundance. In the association’s eighth season, labourer-teacher T. Richards reported his efforts had borne fruit: the worker who played the violin for their Sunday song service had written to Richards, urging him to

keep on with those Sunday night sing-songs, they will do good to some poor soul; they brought me back to the days of my childhood, when everything was gay, and when I used to go to church with my darling old mother. Keep on with them, Tom, you will do good. I have written to my mother, the first for a long time. I was ashamed to write; but I braced up courage at last and wrote a few lines.⁶⁶

The social structure of the family might seem at odds with the liberal individual that Fitzpatrick was attempting to nurture with reading; yet the invocations of the family and the absent wife / mother in the culture of the reading room demonstrate the centrality of the apparently private family – as well as its affective and unpaid labour – to the maintenance of the lumber camp economy. As women’s historians such as Bettina Bradbury have shown, the shift to industrial capitalism in early 20th-century Canada required the unpaid labour of women to perform, on a daily basis, the domestic duties that reproduced the new wage labour.⁶⁷ In the context of the northern Ontario work camp, which demanded the seasonal sundering of the family, this reproductive labour is very difficult to see, but Fitzpatrick’s attempts to shape the leisure time of male camp workers render it immediately visible. Moreover, it is not simply housekeeping that is at stake here; absent from the camps was

64. *The Education of the Frontier Laborer*, p. 24, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC.

65. *Library Extension in Ontario: Reading Camps and Club Houses*, p. 21, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC.

66. *Canada’s Frontiersmen, With Eighth Annual Report of the Reading Camp Association, 1907–1908*, p. 17, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC. This practice of group “sing-songs” was a particularly powerful method borrowed from evangelicals, and it is one that the Ralph Connor novels encouraged and modeled in careful detail (even including sheet music) so that readers could replicate the practice for themselves.

67. Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montréal*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 26–27.



The Canadian Reading Camp Association's emphasis on the reading room as a "cosy resting place" is evident in this undated image from the association's early period. "Historical Photographs of Camps in Winter, [ca. 1910–1980]," FCP [multiple media], R3584-1-2-E, Vol. 489, LAC.
Courtesy of Frontier College.

also the reproductive labour of an idealized femininity that could restrain and temper working-class masculinity.⁶⁸ The family presents a rich historical resource for scholars who would like to reclaim the illiberal past and its quotidian practices; however, it is also crucial to recognize how Canada's liberal order depended on the family, and perhaps particularly on the illiberal practices of families affected by the occupational pluralism and mobility that the industrializing Canadian economy of the late 19th and early 20th centuries demanded.⁶⁹ As Adele Perry reminds us, the patriarchy that privatized women and privileged the male breadwinner as head of the self-governing household

68. Adele Perry observes that the masculinity imagined by 19th-century reformers on Canada's western frontier was "pessimistic" insofar as it insisted that working-class men, in particular, required careful regulation by family (or institutions serving as families). Perry's comments are helpful for thinking about the surveillance of working-class masculinity in the context of the early 20th-century reform movement, as well. *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849–1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 95.

69. On this point, see R.W. Sandwell, "The Limits of Liberalism: The Liberal Reconnaissance and the History of the Family in Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 84, 3 (2003): 423–453. For Sandwell's discussion of the illiberal practices associated with occupational plurality, see pages 437–439.

was not a complication of or exception to the liberal order; it was necessary to its very production.⁷⁰

It is now a commonplace to assert that the social gospel movement – its leaders, its organizations, and its print culture – was out of touch with and had little influence on the working class; moreover, labour historians who have discussed the Canadian Reading Camp Association, in particular, have been skeptical about its actual reach, suggesting, for example, that “only a tiny minority of logging camp workers” ever came into contact with the association’s work, largely because it was an effort generally confined to the summer months.⁷¹ Despite the limited scope of the association’s influence, there is some evidence from both workers and employers that Fitzpatrick’s view of fiction’s power in urging men to choose habits of steadiness was accurate.

The few examples of workers’ testimony we have suggest that, during the first five years of the association’s work at least, Connor’s fiction and its message found a receptive audience. Fitzpatrick was listening closely to reports from the camps regarding book selection so that he could properly fit books to readers, and what he heard was that the workers preferred popular fiction to the technical or scientific materials that were initially favoured by those who were tasked with assembling the Ontario Travelling Libraries. A 1904 account from a lumber company official suggests that the fiction of Ralph Connor and G.A. Henty – an author whose work is very similar to Connor’s – was particularly in demand: “a considerable number of the books supplied seem to be rather above the class of men in the camps,” but the “men never seem to tire of reading stories by Ralph Connor, Conan Doyle, Thwing, Stuart [sic] White, and Henty.”⁷² Moreover, Gordon’s correspondence with enamoured readers includes a 1907 letter from one Frederick S. Hartman, a shantyman from a southeastern Saskatchewan rail construction camp who was powerfully transformed by the Connor novels. Hartman was effusive:

I want to express my deep gratitude to you for converting me and leading me to the light. The new life imparted to me thereby is constantly manifesting itself to me for I find life worth living now and everything seems sort of to harmonize with me. For example – foreigners – Galicians and the like, that to a great extent fill up all the laboring camps, from

70. “Women, Racialized People, and the Making of the Liberal Order,” in Constant and Ducharme, eds., *Liberalism and Hegemony*, 275. For a discussion of the importance of the male-led self-governing household to liberal government, see William Walters, *Unemployment and Government: Genealogies of the Social* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 3, 147.

71. Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 103. For arguments that demonstrate the failure of social gospel initiatives in working-class communities, see the introduction and John Springhall’s essay in J.A. Mangan and James Walvin, eds., *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800–1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987).

72. “Lumber Camp Libraries,” *The Canada Lumberman*, December 1904, http://eco.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8_04953_207/2?r=0&s=1.

whom I have always had a strong contempt, I can now see that they too have hearts and are my brothers just the same as my English neighbor.

Hartman claimed that he and two other shantymen were now reading the Bible and praying every day, and he had “no doubt that before many days there will be more here added to those that have formed the straight and narrow road.”⁷³

Moreover, testimony from employers strongly suggests that the pleasant social space of the reading room and the actual act of reading had the effect that Fitzpatrick desired. Employers who wrote to Fitzpatrick in support of his initial efforts were particularly interested in the potential of the reading camps to curb what was often characterized as the “habit” of “jumping.” The association’s first annual report includes many letters to this effect, including prominent lumberman John Charlton’s, which contends that a “supply of literature of this kind at lumber camps would tend to create a home feeling among a class of men whose services are most desirable.” Felix Bigelow, the foreman at a Nairn Centre camp, claimed that such a possibility had been realized in his camp:

The reading camp is a success. In spite of the fact that eighty percent of our men are French Canadians, and fifty percent cannot read English or French, I am surprised to find that a building 20 x 30 feet is filled every evening, and all day Sundays. There is less swearing, gambling, ‘jumping’ and running to the saloons.

Another Nairn Centre foreman, Thomas Shaw, concurred: “Our men appreciate their privilege, are steadier and more reconciled to their lot. The change I am strongly inclined to attribute to this homelike influence.”⁷⁴ In the association’s second annual report, instructor J.F. MacDonald offered further testimony of the “steady influence of the reading rooms,” and agent R. Jackson attributed the diminishment of “jumping” and “visits to the saloons,” as well as the improved “moral tone” of camp life, to the effects of the reading room.⁷⁵

However, testimonies regarding instructional work were much less sanguine. A considerable number of instructors’ reports have been preserved for the 1904–1905 season, and of the thirteen labourer-teachers who commented explicitly on their experiences, six of them lamented the difficulty of convincing even a “fair percentage of [the camp men] to take any active interest in the

73. Frederick S. Hartman to Gordon, 8 March 1907, CGP, MSS 56, Box 49, Folder 7, UM. Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau posit that Ralph Connor’s fan mail proves that his novels were “instrumental in converting numerous middle- and working-class Canadians,” but this fan mail includes only very few letters from readers who are clearly working class. See *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900–1940* (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), 36–37.

74. *Library Extension in Ontario*, pp. 20, 33, 34, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC.

75. *Library Extension in Ontario: Reading Camps and Club Houses*, pp. 29–31, FCP, MG28, I 124, LAC.

school side of our work.”⁷⁶ Camp workers evidently preferred the non-structured, self-guided consumption of reading materials that the reading rooms offered, but were less willing to participate in actively shaped lessons. Camp men wanted to read; they just did not particularly want to be told how to read or to what end.⁷⁷ After about 1905, Fitzpatrick apparently accepted the fact that literate, English-speaking workers would not seek out instruction, and he urged his labourer-teachers to focus their teaching efforts on non-English speaking immigrants.⁷⁸ However, he long insisted that “while actual attendance on classes may lag,” the influence of the labourer-teacher was felt in his “leadership” by example.⁷⁹

The efforts of the Canadian Reading Camp Association may seem to have been mostly for the benefit of employers, who clearly desired a less mobile, more steadfast and loyal workforce. Fitzpatrick, like most reformers influenced by the social gospel, was hoping to render capitalism more benevolent, and, in his view, what was at stake was the set of precarious bonds between the worker, the family, and the state. In treating camp workers like slaves, employers were jeopardizing the possibility of a functioning liberal order: individual progress toward freedom and rationality were at stake, and, in turn, national citizenship and the emergent liberal state. Fitzpatrick imagined that “clean, healthy” fiction could bond men to their absent families, and thus to their roles as liberal citizens.⁸⁰ As I have tried to demonstrate here, an approach that places the history of education and labour history in relation to the study of leisure and, more specifically, the history of reading, opens new sites for examining the workings of Canada’s emergent liberal order in the era of great nation building. What emerges is the crucial and yet often invisible role of the family and of women’s reproductive labour in a liberal order apparently predicated on the nurturing of the individual male as rational citizen.

The project of the Canadian Reading Camp Association began to alter significantly after about 1905, in the context of the massive turn-of-the-century

76. Fred Miller to Alfred Fitzpatrick, 1905, FCP, MG 28 I 124, Volume 1, “Instructors’ Correspondence (Broatch-Ross), 1905,” LAC. The thirteen letters I am referring to may be found in this volume of correspondence, as well as the association’s fifth annual report, *The Education of the Frontier Laborer*, FCP, MG28, I 124, Vol. 107, LAC.

77. Similarly, British workers generally shunned 19th-century mechanics’ institutes because of the omnipresence of employers, the unsuitability of lecture topics, and their own fatigue, but they did partake enthusiastically of the institutes’ reading rooms and libraries. Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 192–196.

78. In May 1905, for example, Fitzpatrick advised an instructor in Humboldt, Saskatchewan that “the work you have to do is largely a matter of primary education. Your chief duty will be to get those Galicians to read and write. Of course the English speaking boys will take advantage of the books and magazines.” See Fitzpatrick to Donald J. Fraser, 20 May 1905, FCP, MG 28 I 124, Volume 1, “Instructors’ Correspondence (Broatch-Ross), 1905,” LAC.

79. Fitzpatrick, *The University in Overalls*, 121–122.

80. “Free Reading Camps to Benefit Workmen in Isolated Northern Districts.”

wave of immigration that crested at the end of this half decade. Because such an unprecedented proportion of these immigrants were non-British and, often, non-English speaking, Fitzpatrick's labourer-teachers increasingly met with work gangs that did not necessarily desire the social gospel mission of the association and could not in any case immediately access it through the medium of fiction written by authors like Ralph Connor. These men, if they took any interest at all in Fitzpatrick's undertaking, wanted lessons in English. Whether or not rational citizenship could be offered to, or acquired by, such men, became the next decade's test of the nation's emerging liberal and imperial ideal of civility.

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