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Canada

Powerful and Appropriate Discourse:
Sermons and Sermon Scenes in
Five Novels by Ralph Connor

Frederick Arthur Walker

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research,
University of Ottawa, in partial fulfillment of degree
requirements of the Master of Arts program in English,
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UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA
UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

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ABSTRACT

Ralph Connor (the Reverend Charles William Gordon) created nothing less than a sensation with the extraordinary sales of his novels both in Canada and in the United States at the turn of the century. His popularity continued for an extended period after this initial success. In attempting to determine Connor's rightful place as a literary artist, it is important to consider the issue of didacticism, as his novels have strong moral and religious content. In looking at sermons and sermon scenes in Black Rock, The Sky Pilot, The Man from Glengarry, The Prospector, and The Arm of Gold, it is possible to establish that a better balance exists between Connor's artistic and didactic impulses than is often immediately evident.

Black Rock was written to encourage missionary work in Western Canada. It is a simple and restrained novel in which prohibition is the central moral issue. The main sermon scene is vividly depicted, emphasizing immediacy, sincere emotion and understatement. The scene is perfectly in keeping with the style and tone of the overall novel. The characters of Black Rock, though simple, are well-suited to the novel's purposes. The novel is modest but competent, and the main sermon scene does not detract from its calculated effect.

In The Sky Pilot a major plot line is developed from a Gordon sermon. The minister, Arthur Moore, is humble about his preaching ability, but successful due to his talent for storytelling, a fact which thematically connects the writer and the man of God. Connor uses concrete detail to advantage when he shows the Pilot at work. Agression is played down in favour of a refreshing, soft-spoken appeal.

The Man from Glenarry is perhaps Connor's most ambitious work. The two ministers depicted, Alexander Murray and the Professor, represent contrasting approaches to religion. The depiction of their sermons vividly represents a community-wide change of attitude. The sermon scenes are here used as an artistic device to represent the lifestyles of the region. Though both sermons deal with matters which must have been of great theological significance to Connor, he is content to rely on indirection except for the most dramatic passages. Reason is emphasized as much as purity of faith. The scenes are majestic and impressive.

The Prospector is more of a throwback to the first two novels than a development from The Man from Glenarry. Its climactic sermon scene, the technique of which is consistent with similar scenes in other works, signifies a turning point in the career of the protagonist, a minister named Shock MacGregor. The scene's presence in the novel is justified in both social and personal terms, and it is generally well written.

The Arm of Gold is a much later work, dealing with economic problems. Connor's didacticism is more secular and less confidently enthusiastic here than in other novels. The sermon scenes carry indirection to new extremes, including ambiguity as to the correctness of a major sermon's message.⁴ A major concern of one sermon, which develops into a sub-plot, is the storytelling nature of the Bible itself.

The conclusion is that there is an "art" of Ralph Connor. Though obviously didactic, he does demonstrate concern for literary achievement. He does not blindly yield to the temptation offered by sermon scenes to propogate his personal beliefs in an awkward or heavy-handed fashion. Rather, his own storytelling aids in the effective depiction of his general attitudes, doing so through such devices as indirection and colourful description.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

In Canmore, Alberta stands a church in honour of the Reverend Charles William Gordon, a former moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Canada and one of the leading forces behind the formation of the United Church of Canada. As Gordon was a nationally known figure whose acquaintances included Sir Robert Borden and Sir Wilfred Laurier and whose admirers included Theodore Roosevelt, and as Gordon was once the minister of Canmore, the church's existence is not remarkable. What is remarkable, however, is the name of the building, the Ralph Connor Memorial United Church.¹ The seeming incongruity illustrates the duality of an interesting Canadian.

Under the pseudonym of Ralph Connor, the Reverend Gordon became one of Canada's most prolific and popular novelists in the early twentieth century. His novels have a strong moral and religious dimension and rural Canadian settings as distinguishing features. As described by Donald Stephens,

"... his tradition is focussed on the pastoral ethic where in the garden of the west the new dew of morning will bring renewal of the spirit, where life will be better tomorrow because man is strong through his faith in God."²

The popularity Connor attained in the fiction market of his day is almost impossible to imagine. Late in the

nineteenth century a Canadian novel was considered fortunate if it sold a total of five thousand copies. Within a few years of their publication, though, Black Rock (1898), The Sky Pilot (1899), and The Man from Glengarry (1901) had sold more than five million copies around the world, firmly establishing Connor as Canada's most popular novelist for twenty years to come.³ In the words of F.W. Watt,

"Those books were read in Canada and abroad, by Scottish crofters and presidents of the United States, by businessmen, socialist thinkers, cabinet ministers, and ordinary people everywhere. When Connor travelled he was welcomed by high and low as a distinguished author."⁴

If Connor's sudden, startling and overwhelming popular acceptance is a matter of public record, his status as a literary artist is not. The most obvious objection to seeing Connor as an artist is the very moral quality that makes his work distinctive. Charges of didacticism are always relevant to discussions of the novels; and the Ralph Connor Memorial United Church stands in silent tribute to the fact that, whatever Connor's abilities as a pastor and preacher, his primary and lasting influence on ethical and spiritual questions is through his fiction. "Didacticism" may be defined as an emphasis on teaching a lesson in a piece of writing as

distinct from a direct concern with the beauty of that writing or with its functional place as a part of an organic structure. That there is a didactic impulse in most of Connor's work cannot be denied. The fundamental question of the relationship between Gordon the minister and Connor the creative writer is central to any serious appreciation of the novelist's work. If Connor's moral and theological didacticism, understandable as it may be for a minister, is pervasive enough and operates in such a way as to interfere seriously with the aesthetic qualities of his novels, then it is not possible to regard these novels as acts of literary craftsmanship, however enjoyable they may be.

One approach to the issue of art and didacticism in Connor's novels lies in the sermon scenes. Ministers are frequent characters of Connor's novels, and such scenes are fairly common. The following examination of this aspect of Connor's work should prove both interesting and relevant, for it is during the fictional depiction of ministers engaged in a morally didactic process that the writer's own didactic intentions may run the greatest danger of damaging and distorting the other elements of his novels. Sermon scenes are here defined as the sections of novels in which the delivery of a formal address by a professional cleric on a religious, theological, spiritual or moral theme is depicted, either directly or indirectly. Through an examination of sermon

scenes in Connor's novels, it should be possible to draw some conclusions as to the balance or imbalance between didactic and artistic impulses in the fiction. The balance looked for is not one of a simplistic alternating of elements and moods, but a more general sense that the novelist never completely loses sight of artistic goals and concerns, even when expressing his own strongly held beliefs or describing such expressions on the part of his favourably viewed characters. The sermon scenes do, in fact, provide evidence of a greater balance between art and didacticism than is immediately apparent from a summary perusal of the novels.

The examination will focus on five novels, Black Rock,⁵ The Sky Pilot,⁶ The Man from Glengarry,⁷ The Prospector (1904)⁸ and The Arm of Gold (1932),⁹ all containing sermon scenes. The first three are the novels upon which the early sales standards of Connor's fiction were set and upon which his fame and reputation were substantially built. If any emphasis is placed on the question of historical impact, then these novels must be studied at some length. The Prospector is a return to the style and content of Connor's earliest works, and is an example of the writer's consistence in his lesser-known novels. The fifth novel, from the later years of Connor's production, provides a useful element of perspective in

the consideration of the writer's overall tendencies. Each of the novels has one or more individual elements which makes it particularly interesting in the light of the topic. Black Rock, Connor's first novel, has an openly ulterior motive to artistic beauty or perfection of craftsmanship. The Sky Pilot emphasizes the role of storytelling in effective sermon delivery, a theme of great importance in Connor's work and, in the person of the Pilot, provides one of Connor's most engaging preachers. The Man from Glengarry, perhaps Connor's most ambitious work, handles sermon scenes in ways that often differ from the writer's general practice, establishing a connection between the sermon and the society in which its delivery is placed; the novel places its religious themes in a less prominent position than they are usually found in Connor's novels. The Prospector depicts the development of sermonic eloquence in a young preacher who is shown to have little if any natural ability in the area. The novel also emphasizes the importance of good speaking, both in the career of an individual minister and in a broader social context. The Arm of Gold contains a portrait of sermon composition as well as extremes in indirection of style or mode of expression of sermon material. The novels will be covered in separate chapters in order of publication.

In addition to these five novels, three of Gordon's sermons will be examined to add to and illustrate the discussion of their fictive counterparts. For example, there appear to be natural relationships between Youth and Leadership¹⁰ and Black Rock and between Christian Hopell¹¹ and The Man from Glengarry. The short story The Angel and the Star,¹² which Gordon delivered as a sermon at St. Stephen's in Winnipeg one Christmas, will also be cited as a brief example of how Connor handles the twin impulses of art and didacticism in his fiction.

Gordon was well known in his clerical capacity. He campaigned extensively in support of Manitoba prohibition, and in his autobiography he claims to have defeated the legendary orator and politician Arthur Meighen in a debate on the issue. However naturally biased this account may be, there seems to be little reason to doubt Gordon's considerable skill as a public speaker and preacher. He grew up as an admirer of his father, who was also a minister and a magnificent preacher.

Many a time have I watched the faces of people grow rigid and pale under his denunciation of sin and his predictions of judgement to come. His preaching, however, reached its greatest height as he pictured the "Love of the Cross", and often have I seen the tears flowing down the deep-lined cheeks of his old elders

as he waxed eloquent on this theme. He was indeed a great preacher. Not one of all the great preachers I have known could ever thrill my soul as could my father when I was a little lad.¹³

During the First World War, Gordon took part in a nation-wide speaking tour of the United States in order to encourage and support American involvement on the side of the Allies. He was repeatedly asked by audiences to set aside his prepared remarks in favour of spontaneous tales from the front, which he had visited in his capacity as a military chaplain with the Canadian army.¹⁴

Gordon's sermons make great use of the storytelling element, and religious illustration and instruction are usually present in his fiction. The Angel and the Star is both a sermon and a short story rendition of the Nativity. This interesting work serves as a brief model of the close and mutually beneficial relationship between artistic beauty and religious didacticism in Connor's fiction. The story is divided into two sections, subtitled "The Angel" and "The Star", each told from the point of view of one of the main characters, a shepherd and a magus. The shepherd, not a pious cardboard cutout, is a moderately realistic figure filled with doubts and a restless spirit.

"It is written, 'Thou shalt not speak evil of thy rulers', but the Sadducee I believe not. Did not the Angel speak with Abraham our father, and with Jacob at Bethel, and with Moses the man of God at the Bush, and with Gideon, and with the holy Prophets?"

"That is all far away from us today", he replied gloomily.¹⁵

The main theme is not faith, but the divisiveness of racial tension.

What fools they have been! A few foolish astrologers had seen a star in the East and had guessed a King was to be born. What accursed folly was this? But what could you expect of these Gentile dogs and worshippers of idols?¹⁶

The Shepherd hesitated. "Why should I tell thee? Thou art not of Israel".¹⁷

But the age-long Jewish hate and jealous scorn of the Gentile held the Shepherd silent. To speak of Israel's Messiah to this alien and worshipper of stars, to him seemed sacrilege.¹⁸

The wise man from the east eventually breaks down this bigoted resentment. He is conducted to the scene of the Nativity, having won the shepherd's sympathy by telling him his life's story.

The Shepherd was deeply moved at the marvellous and terrible story ... When the tale was done there was a long silence, then the Man of the East spoke. "Good-will to men! a Saviour! Good! But Angels! I know naught of them!

"Nor I of stars".

A light began to break upon the swarthy face of the Man of the East. "Oh", he cried aloud, "But thee an Angel and me a star led to the King. Praised be God!"¹⁹

Angels and stars are thus more than simple heavenly bodies. Their main function is to stand for ethnic groups and differing ways of looking at the universe. The star is a personal symbol and emblem of the man from the east who, in turn, represents the realm of science as surely as he serves a focus for narrow-minded racial preconceptions on the part of the people of Bethlehem. The angel is a sign of religious faith, characteristic of the Jewish people. The message of The Angel and the Star is that the tolerant attitudes of Christianity are capable of breaking down the racial, national and philosophical barriers that stand in the way of brotherhood and human communication in a severely flawed world. With this distinctly social theme, along with such elements as drama, dialogue, emphasis on storytelling and authorial manipulation of structure and point of view, The Angel and the Star is as much short story as sermon - as much literary effort as religious illustration. That Connor is able to see these two elements as entirely compatible and even interchangeable emphasizes his understanding of the close relationship between writer and preacher.

Storytelling is a vitally important element in Connor's sermons and in his fiction. By the incorporation of vivid tales the fictional ministers are able to effect positive change in the attitudes of their congregations. It is by the similar device of entertaining novels that Connor himself is able to explain his beliefs on important issues. This parallel blends a need for some reasonable level of artistic achievement with a desire for useful function in the novel, and at least partially explains the fascinating coincidence of solid popular appeal and clear didacticism so evident in these novels. Connor is a didactic artist, maintaining a reasonable balance between his desires to teach and to delight in his novels. This fact is evident through study of the sermons and sermon scenes in these works.

NOTES

- 1 Historical Committee, Ralph Connor Memorial United Church 1891 - 1981, (Canmore: Alberta 75th Anniversary Commission, 1982).
- 2 Donald Stephens, "Introduction" in Writers of the Prairies, Donald Stephens, ed., (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1973), p. 3.
- 3 Gordon Roper et al, "Writers of Fiction, 1880 - 1920" in Carl F. Klinck, ed., Literary History of Canada, vol. 1, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 322.
- 4 F.W. Watt, "Western Myth: The World of Ralph Connor" in Stephens, p. 7
- 5 Ralph Connor, Black Rock, (Toronto: Westminster Co., 1898).
- 6 Connor, The Sky Pilot, (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1899).
- 7 Connor, The Man from Glengarry, (Toronto: Fleming H. Revell, 1901).
- 8 Connor, The Prospector, (Toronto: Fleming H. Revell, 1904).
- 9 Connor, The Arm of Gold, (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1932)
- 10 Charles William Gordon, Youth and Leadership, (Winnipeg: Amalgated Press of Canada, 1907).
- 11 Connor, Christian Hope, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912).
- 12 Connor, The Angel and the Star, (Winnipeg: Amalgated Press of Canada, 1907).
- 13 Gordon, Postscript to Adventure, (New York: Ferrar and Rinehart, 1938), pp. 5-6.
- 14 One example is the Yale speech described in Postscript to Adventure, pp. 304-07.
- 15 The Angel and the Star, p. 13.
- 16 Ibid, p. 42.

NOTES (continued)

- 17 Ibid, p. 52.
- 18 Ibid, p. 54. ,
- 19 Ibid, pp. 59-60.

Chapter Two

BLACK ROCK

The early passion of Gordon's career was missionary work. He was an outspoken proponent of missions in the Canadian West, for he saw the West as a wild, unruly and extreme place crying out for social order, morality and spiritual direction. During this early period in his life, beginning in 1885 with his first mission field work, he was asked to provide a series of "sketches" on frontier life for the Westminister Magazine, a prominent Presbyterian periodical.¹ The sketches became Black Rock, the first of Connor's novels. The publishers proposed a surprisingly large initial printing, and their instincts proved accurate.

Before a year had passed, Jim Macdonald and George Doran's faith in me had been more than justified. Black Rock had gone some hundreds of thousands while with The Sky Pilot, which followed during the succeeding year, and The Man from Glengarry, two years later, the total issue was estimated by my publishers as over five million copies.²

The pseudonym "Connor", devised for this book, emerged from a contraction of "British Canadian North West Mission" or Brit. Can. Nor. West.

Black Rock, as benefiting its origins, is an episodic and leisurely work: It follows the adventures and misadventures of a minister, a drifter named Connor who narrates the tale in first person, and a hardy group of men and women at a small mining and lumbering community in the Selkirk's region. The section of the novel most closely resembling a plot deals with the subject of prohibition. Gordon himself was such a vigorous and visible champion of the cause that disgruntled Manitoba politicians accused him of merely stirring publicity for "his silly novels".³

In Black Rock, the minister and a few of his friends mobilize a league of teetotalers for the purpose of combating the ravages of rampant alcoholism in their community. Scenes of fighting and drinking in the first four chapters depict the problem. After some debate about the practicality of moderation, which is rejected as a solution, the league is formed. When the villains, Michael Slavin and his friends, entice one of its members to break his pledge, the league falls apart. The members of the league obtain revenge by raiding the illegal liquor supply of the Black Rock Hotel. The league is subsequently reconstituted in the wake of a member's death, having become more inspired, more aggressive and better organized than before. After the death of his child from another's drunkenness, Slavin himself eventually repents.

As the novel begins, the fictional Connor arrives at the lumber camp on Christmas Eve in the company of his friend, Leslie Graeme. After the traditional meal and a few rousing songs, the minister asks permission to read from the Bible. He retells the story of Christ's birth, commenting on it to his informal congregation.

Several aspects of the sermon stand out. The first, vividness of depiction, is present through the author's depiction of the scene as a whole. More importantly, it is also an element within the fictional sermon itself. In addressing the men before him, the minister lends life and colour to the Biblical events by his use of gestures and vivid word pictures.

And as he read, a slight motion of the hand or a glance of an eye made us see, as he was seeing, that whole radiant drama. The wonder, the timid joy, the tenderness, the mystery of it all, were borne in upon us with overpowering effect.⁴

The element of vivid description is further emphasized in a second, less important sermon scene later in the novel. The minister convenes a meeting to organize a formal congregation in the community and to lay plans for the first communion service. The subject for the sermon is the story of the prodigal son.

Then, in simplest of words, he told us what the story meant, holding us the while

with eyes, and voice, and gesture. He compelled us to scorn the gay, heartless selfishness of the young fool setting forth so jauntily from the broken home, he moved our pity and our sympathy for the young profligate who, broken and deserted, had still pluck enough to determine to work his way back and who, in utter desperation, at last gave it up; and then he showed us the home-coming -- the rugged, heart-sick tramp, with hesitating steps, stumbling along the dusty road, and then the rush of the old father, his garments fluttering, and his voice heard in broken cries. I see and hear it all now, whenever the words are read.⁵

In the two sermon scenes, the listeners are brought to see the story. Their clarity and immediacy of perception serve to set the atmosphere and prepare the situation for the message to follow.

In the first sermon scene, emotion plays an important role. The episode is sensitively drawn, and the sermon has a strong emotional appeal, though not a deliberate, premeditated appeal. Carried away in the process of making his argument, the minister departs dramatically from his prepared themes, and spontaneously turns his talk in a more emotional direction.

The minister went on. "I didn't mean to tell you this, men, it all came over me with a rush; but it is true, every word, and not a word will I take back".⁶

The direction is one of personal testimony. The minister tells how he himself came to be "saved" in a city

mission after he had allowed the lessons and faith of his youth to slip away.

"But one Christmas Eve", he went on, in a lower, sweeter tone, "there was no one to tell me the story, and I grew to forget it, and went away to college, and learned to think it was only a child's tale and was not for men. Then bad days came to me and worse, I began to lose my grip of myself, of life, of hope, of goodness, till one black Christmas, in the slums of a far-away city, when I had given up all, and the devil's arms were about me, I heard the story again. And as I listened, with a bitter ache in my heart, for I had put it all behind me, I suddenly found myself peeking under the shepherd's arms with a child's wonder at the Baby in the straw. Then it came over me in great waves, that His name was Jesus, because it was He that should save men from their sins".⁷

This quality of personal confession has the major emotional impact on the listeners and the reader, especially as the preacher also confesses that he had not intended to let his address become so intensely personal. The emotion of the scene is understated rather than overplayed. As an example, the moral degradation into which the minister is supposed to have fallen is passed over quickly and vaguely, with no resounding or dramatic litany of sins. The emotion is implicit in the content and the tone of the sermon, gently reinforced by such devices as a single sob from somewhere in the audience and the audible breathing of the men, who present a powerful image of mesmerized, rapt attention.

"I used to be a little afraid of the angels, because a boy told me they were ghosts; but my mother told me better, and I didn't fear them anymore. And the Baby, the dear little Baby -- we all love a baby". There was a quick, dry sob; it was from Nelson. "I used to peek through under to see the little one in the straw, and wonder what things swadling clothes were. Oh, it was all so real and so beautiful!" He paused, and I could hear the men breathing.⁸

Such understatement is impressive in a new writer, especially one with Connor's intellectual and spiritual commitment to the redeeming power of Christianity. Connor has wisely refrained from any scenes of melodramatic and exaggerated conversion at this point in the tale. Instead, the minister quietly asks the men to consider following in his footsteps, and one man gives such an indication.

"Simplicity" seems to be the watchword throughout Black Rock. The setting is rustic. The characters are plain and drawn only as deeply as they need be in order to depict the story and its moral. The plot is unadorned and episodic. The novel as a whole has a clear and basic moral purpose with little ambiguity in the delineation of the major issues such as prohibition. The simplicity is perfectly mirrored in the presentation of the main sermon scene. There is no church building and no organized parish, only a travelling cleric and a group of rough-hewn labourers gathered for a meal on Christmas Eve. The

Biblical text used as the starting point for the talk is neither unknown nor esoteric -- it is the obviously applicable and universally familiar tale of the Nativity. What is said about the text, though profound and deeply moving, is not complicated, radical, or even original. After retelling the essence of the story in his own language, the minister uses his own life to impress upon the men his belief in the ever-present possibility of salvation. No sophisticated style is affected, either by the minister in his sermon or by Connor himself in the presentation of the scene.

A possible objection is that the scene and the novel as a whole are too single-minded and narrowly-focused. Many critics object that the characterization, in particular, is lacking in flexibility and added dimensions in this and other works.

His (Connor's) characters are all types -- the kindly but strict mother who is all altruism, the strong, silent man who has a heart of gold, the ruffian who is really a diamond in the rough -- and they are either completely static or, if they change at all, susceptible to incredibly swift conversions.⁹

His imagination is reproductive rather than creatively constructive ... As a result of this, his characters tend to become types and although fairly individual and distinctive, they are inclined to act mechanically and to operate without sufficient inherent motivation.¹⁰

It is possible to respond to such criticism by referring to the Gordon sermons. Youth and Leadership, a sermon delivered by Gordon at a ceremony involving a graduating class in Winnipeg years after the writing of Black Rock, tells a Biblical story in order to illustrate the choices open to graduating students that will form their careers and their characters.

Tonight I suggest to you that as you stand with your eyes upon the untried world before you, all your vague uncertainties, your doubts, your fears may well crystallize themselves into two main questions which, in the last analysis, are found to be one; first, Wither does my trail end? and second, What sort of person shall I become? In our moments of deepest thinking our questions gather about these two supreme things, Destiny and Character. And should.

It is because these questions are connected in his story that the tragic tale of the Rich Young Ruler was selected for our lesson tonight. No incident in the life of Jesus is so full of pathetic tragedy as is the meeting of that young man with the Master, and none richer in material for solemn thought.¹¹

Near the end of Youth and Leadership, Gordon defines character: "Character is the out-working of Personality and the fixed expression of the dominant passion of the soul".¹² The careful wording and the crafted syntax of the definition emphasize that this is a formal definition, not merely the expression of an idle thought. The emphasis on personality, including the capitalization, corroborates the experience of the reader in encountering

the "hearty, masculine, backthumping do-goodism"¹³ of many of the novel's characters. Whatever else they may be, the characters are always personable, overflowing with lively, vibrant colour and often with eccentricity. The religious element is omnipresent. Character, an "expression of the dominant passion of the soul", is a reflection not of the complete inner self, but of something more modest in scope -- the reflection of a single, dominant passion which establishes the personal and individual stamp of human identity. The element of stasis is also clear. Character is seen not just as a form of expression but, specifically, as a form of "fixed" expression, implying an almost photographic rendering of the subject. A sense of dynamism and change is deliberately omitted. As well, the external deed is held to be important as a character-painting tool. If Connor's characters tend to be physically active, boisterous, colourful, religious, opinionated and passionate models of constancy, to whom change is an awkward and total alteration from one internally consistent state of emotions and beliefs to another, then such attributes should come as no surprise in the light of Connor's own terms of reference. Connor is doing exactly what he has set out to do, based on firmly held beliefs. His characterization is neither haphazard nor accidental, but deliberate. Connor is not attempting, and failing to achieve, a goal far different and more complicated, such as to display the innumerable facets of human nature with

respect to each of the characters or even the major ones, or to draw the fictional psyche in such detail as to approach realistic accuracy. Such attempts would be unnecessary and irrelevant to the modest purpose of portraying the major emotional aspect of each individual soul in the service of his stories.

Black Rock is a deliberately didactic work. In Connor's own words, "Black Rock is an example of that rare thing in writing, a successful novel with a purpose".¹⁴ The purpose is to build sympathy for western missionary work and to affirm the value of religion in life, even in the most rugged circumstances.

My sole purpose was to awaken my church in Eastern Canada to the splendor of the mighty religious adventure being attempted by the missionary pioneers in the Canada beyond the Great Lakes by writing a brief sketch of the things which, as clerk of the biggest presbytery in the world, I had come to know by personal experience.¹⁵

The prominence of Mr. Craig, the minister in this novel, should come as no surprise. The early prominence of the main sermon scene should likewise come as no surprise. Black Rock is a tightly designed and modestly executed piece of fiction, directed to a straightforward and clearly understood end. The end is achieved with a minimum of pretension and a fair degree of eloquence, clear-headed expression and humour. The goals of this novel may be unoriginal and limited, but the focus on

those goals is sincere and complete. Black Rock is a novel in which Connor places a steady if unspectacular hand on the narrative tiller.

Black Rock's main sermon scene has a general moral purpose and a didactic emphasis and insistence on truth characteristic of the novel's plan as a whole. The sermonic technique illustrated in this scene places a great deal of importance on vividness of detail and depiction. The clear visualization of Biblical stories is set up as a necessary prerequisite to their emotional impact and subsequent intellectual effect on the listeners. Emotion itself is another significant element in the scene and, although often (if not always) held in check, it is the source of much dramatic power. It is also natural emotion, not part of any pre-sermon strategy, but a legitimate human feeling welling up inside the heart on the inspiration of the moment and being honestly transferred to the congregation. The substance of the sermon is personal testimony. The tone of the episode is direct, earnest and simple, and the simplicity is extended to the characterization, which is sufficient to carry the story and its moral.

NOTES

- 1 Postscript to Adventure, pp. 146-49.
- 2 Ibid, p. 150.
- 3 Keith Wilson, Charles William Gordon, (Winnipeg: Peguis, 1981), p. 23
- 4 Black Rock, p. 23.
- 5 Ibid, p. 147.
- 6 Ibid, p. 26.
- 7 Ibid, pp. 24-25.
- 8 Ibid, p. 24.
- 9 Desmond Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada, 2nd ed., (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1967), p. 104.
- 10 J.D. Logan and Donald G. French, Highways of Canadian Literature, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1924), p. 256.
- 11 Youth and Leadership, pp. 4-5.
- 12 Ibid, p. 10.
- 13 Pacey, p. 104.
- 14 Postscript to Adventure, p. 148.
- 15 Ibid, p. 148

Chapter Three

THE SKY PILOT

In The Sky Pilot, Connor's second novel, the first-person narration is again provided by a character named Connor, here a school teacher. The first three chapters depict Swan Creek, a town in the foothills country, where the scenery is spectacular and the inhabitants, such as Broncho Bill and the Duke, are colourful and eccentric. In the fourth chapter, a preacher named Arthur Moore arrives, who is promptly nicknamed "the Sky Pilot" by the Old Timer, a reclusive rancher respected by all. The Pilot wins the respect of the men by playing baseball well, and by calming a delirious man with a rifle and subsequently keeping a bedside vigil at his death. Chapters Nine through Thirteen tell the story of the Old Timer's daughter Gwen, a "desperately real nature girl",¹ who, crippled in a riding accident, comes to accept her situation, largely through the Pilot's rendition of his "canyon flowers" story. Later, during the building of a church, a friendship develops between Gwen and the Lady Charlotte, the daughter of an English nobleman and the wife of a local rancher. The latter comes to comfort the girl and is, ironically, comforted by her. At the end of the novel, the Pilot dies.

The central theme of The Sky Pilot is acceptance, and it is approached from two main perspectives: the acceptance, by a small town's rugged and skeptical inhabitants, of a young man as their pastor and a young girl's acceptance of her tragic paralysis. A basic thread of the story comes from a sermon Gordon delivered to a group of children to explain the role of suffering in a world created by a good God. Gordon refers to this age-old question as "the problem of pain".²

While I was writing The Sky Pilot, it happened that one Sunday morning, I was addressing a congregation of children and young people on the general topic, "The good that pain can do for us", a difficult enough topic to deal with. As I was standing before that gathering of youngsters, there flashed upon my mind a picture of a canyon I knew well in the foothill country and then and there, without preparation, I told them the story of "how the canyon got its flowers".³

His explanation comes in the form of a parable: God had the land suffer a rending by lightning and earthquake in order that certain beautiful flowers native only to canyons could grow there. The theme is improvement through pain. The story of the canyon flowers appears in The Sky Pilot, but not in the form of a fictional sermon by the main character. Rather, it is told to Gwen during a private discussion. The private setting lends a particular meaning to a tale with the appropriate tone for its emotions. Instead of an extended metaphor illustrating an

intellectual concept to a formally gathered and largely anonymous audience, Connor provides the atmosphere of a touching fairytale whose universal application becomes more powerful and evident through the emotionally-charged scene of a highly personal conversation and agony.

The title, The Sky Pilot, suggests that the novel's focus is not so much on the content of the sermon than it is upon the character of its teller and, in fact, it is in delineation of character that The Sky Pilot improves upon Black Rock. The characters of the first novel, though clear and functional, are not memorable. But characters such as the Pilot, Gwen and the Lady Charlotte, simple and unsophisticated as they may be, are drawn with colour and feeling. They may, in fact, be three-dimensional, if not in the sense of many-sided complexity, then at least in the sense of being able to project themselves off the printed page into the mind of the reader. As Roy Daniells puts it, "Connor's intensity of vision makes his stereotypes convincing".⁴ Simplicity, in and of itself, is no vice. The central characters of The Sky Pilot, clearly and boldly outlined, are largely sympathetic in the sincerity and the power (if sometimes an unpolished power) with which they are drawn. It is easy to feel strong affection for a preacher such as the Pilot, who is modest in his demeanour, undaunted in his

failures and innocent in his appearance, along with a good spinner of tales and stealer of bases.

Even before the Pilot arrives in town, his most striking trait is his modesty, particularly with respect to his preaching ability. He gives fair warning to the narrator that his sermon-giving talents are much less than spectacular. The first religious service he conducts in the community is judged a failure, and the success he subsequently achieves is not so much a result of confidence before the attempt in personal abilities or particular talents and strategies as it is one of faith in the correctness of a position and a willingness to press forward.

The major technique used by the Pilot in his sermons is storytelling. Like the minister in Black Rock, the Pilot substantially retells stories from the Bible and comments on them. The most important aspect of his preaching is not the theological or analytical force of his message, but the manner in which he lends a sense of immediacy and reality to the Biblical stories he illustrates. As the shepherd in The Angel and the Star is isolated in time from revelation and is brought around by the story of the magus, similarly the people of Swan Creek are separated by distance and culture from the larger Christian community, and it is against this barrier that the Pilot must struggle by means of his storytelling. In

fact, there is an indication that the Pilot subtly alters his text to suit the material for his listeners.

It was the story of Zaccheus, and story-telling was Moore's strong point. The thing was well done. Vivid portraitures of the outcast, shrewd, converted publican and the supercilious, self-complacent, critical Pharisee were drawn with a few deft touches. A single sentence transferred them to the Foothills and arrayed them in cowboy garb.⁵

That was the first of many such services. The preaching was always of the simplest kind, abstract questions being avoided and the concrete in these wonderful Bible tales, dressed in modern and western garb, set forth.⁶

He rephrases certain portions in contemporary western terms in order to emphasize the direct relevance of Biblical events. The Pilot is an excellent story-teller and, despite his initial protests to the contrary, an excellent preacher. He is an excellent preacher because he is an excellent story-teller. There is a deliberate connection established between the two abilities. The story is a potent rhetorical device for convincing an audience of the validity of an argument. Just as Gordon in speeches favour'd colourful, stirring tales which made his points far more graphically and effectively than an abstract, rational dissertation could have done, story-telling in The Sky Pilot is perhaps the most important element in good, effective and persuasive sermon delivery.

The vividness of depiction in the Pilot's sermons and stories, like Connor's narrative techniques in describing them, is aided in clarity and resultant effectiveness by the judicious use of concrete detail. Connor cuts away, at certain moments, from the sermons to provide a small detail or two about the preacher, the setting, or the audience. After the Pilot's poorly receive initial effort, the second sermon scene is set at the Stopping Place parlour following the Pilot's standout pitching performance in a baseball game. His athletic ability has won the respect of the men, who listen attentively to his remarks in a less hostile and more light-hearted atmosphere than before.

Bill was none too sure of himself, but Hi, with delightful winks, was indicating Bruce as the Pharisee, to the latter's scornful disgust. The preacher must have noticed, for with a very clever turn, the Pharisee was shown to be the kind of man who likes to fit faults upon others. Then Bill, digging his elbows into Hi's ribs, said in an audible whisper:

"Say, pardner, how does it fit now?"⁷

This use of detail allows the reader to visualize the entire atmosphere of these situations. Minor shifts in focus also alter the pace, allowing the reader chances to take momentary breaks from concentrating on the sermons to consider the surroundings. This range of perspective lends a comprehensive feeling to the scene depicted. It is clear that in such scenes, the eye of the artist is as

present as the zeal of the teacher. Connor does not try to depict the entire hall through sweeping, general statements, lacking in precision; instead, he settles on one or two striking or amusing points with respect to only a few individuals. The technique gives a good picture of the situation, in that the reader is able to fill in the blank spots and accept the scene as real with no sacrifice in credibility. A series of general descriptive statements, on the other hand, would seem wooden and artificial, merely narrowing not only despite but largely because of comprehensiveness.

The sermons in The Sky Pilot and Black Rock are neither highstrung nor aggressive. Throughout Connor's novels, preachers are shown to be most effective when speaking slowly, calmly and quietly. There is a particular and consistent mannerism of style on the part of the author which may be used as a cue to meaning. Whenever a point being made by a minister in one of the author's fictional sermons is held by the author to be of particular importance and dramatic effect, the point is underlined by a direct mention of the preacher lowering the tone of his voice before stating his piece. Connor does not endorse fire-breathing rhetoric. He consistently shows clerical characters achieving success and dealing with profound issues all the while speaking in undertones. Soft-spokenness is implicitly endorsed as a general

virtue, of particular importance when anyone attempts to win the spiritual allegiance of a fellow human being. It is not by shouting or emotional browbeating but by the quiet, smooth enunciation of honestly held beliefs and feelings that good men win converts in Connor's fiction. The "high" sermon voice emphasizes the fact of the sermon itself: the existence of the audience as a collective anonymous group and target, and the preacher as a professional and practiced spokesman for his cause, whereas the "low" voice gives an impression of competent intimacy, placing the emphasis squarely where it belongs, on the message itself.

The art of Connor's fictional ministers lies in their ability to lend ease and natural grace to the discussion of subjects far from easy to discuss. The beauty of the sermons is a beauty of spontaneity, even though the structure surrounding the sermons may be deliberate. The artificial is made to seem natural, and the eloquence appears unstudied. These qualities are attributes not only of the statements of Connor's ministers, but of Connor's narrative style. His is a style that works through an innocent, understated vigour, allowing (if not entirely excusing) certain moments of triteness of thought which would be less acceptable if expressed in highly artificial and pretentious craftsmanship of technique. In this way, a Connor sermon scene is a stylistic microcosm

of the novel in which it is found where honesty, clarity, storytelling and plain but effective language are usually present. Paradoxically, then, the sophistication of The Sky Pilot is due to its deliberate lack of sophistication.

The Sky Pilot is based partially on one of the more successful Gordon sermons, which does not appear in sermon form in the novel. There is a clear emphasis on such elements as modesty and simplicity, as well as the vital importance of storytelling. Concrete detail is judiciously used by the author in presenting these scenes. Finally, a decidedly peaceful and almost hesitant soft-spokenness characterizes the Pilot's speaking style, a fact entirely consistent with Connor's other work.

NOTES

- 1 William H. Magee, "Local Colour in Canadian Fiction" in Lorraine McMullen, ed., Twentieth-Century Essays on Confederation Literature, (Ottawa: Tecumseh, 1976), p. 152.
- 2 Postscript to Adventure, p. 152.
- 3 Ibid, p. 151.
- 4 Roy Daniells, "Glengarry Revisited" in Stephens, p. 21.
- 5 The Sky Pilot, p. 73.
- 6 Ibid, p. 75.
- 7 Ibid, pp. 73-74.

Chapter Four

THE MAN FROM GLENGARRY

Ralph Connor's third novel, The Man from Glengarry, describes the growth to maturity of Ranald Macdonald, a young lumberman of the Ottawa Valley. A record of and tribute to the backwoods life, the novel reflects Connor's own childhood observations and experiences in the region. Connor's parents appear as the Murrays. The Man from Glengarry is also a vigorous, slightly unconventional romance set against a background of Canada's growth following Confederation/

The first part of the novel depicts Ranald, a rowdy youth in whom the minister's wife recognizes great potential. Her religious and cultural influence on him is described, along with his relationship with Maimie, a young girl of wealth visiting the area. The hero's developing maturity is shown by his forgiveness of LeNoir, a rival lumberman who has seriously injured Ranald's father, Macdonald Dubh, in a fight. After spending time working in British Columbia and supporting Confederation, Ranald returns to the East to find that his passion for Maimie has cooled. He then falls in love with her best friend Kate, a young lady who, unlike Maimie, had always accepted his working class dress and background. In his professional career, Ranald's controversial business

practices involve honesty in negotiations carried almost to a fault and high wages even in times of economic difficulty.

The novel deals with religion as well, primarily through a pair of influential sermon scenes, which reflect two substantial and important ways of looking at the world. The Reverend Alexander Murray delivers the first sermon, which lasts an hour and a half, and has to be continued the following week. Reported indirectly to the reader, the sermon is essentially a comprehensive dissertation on the doctrine of justification, which is exhaustively detailed and bears the solemn tone it deserves. The attention of the congregation is almost unwavering because of the sternness of its delivery, the esteem in which its deliverer is held, and the social consequences of inattention. The sermon is largely reflective of attitudes in its social context, as well as the nature of the society itself. Sternness and adherence to a logically mapped out and defended doctrine are paramount in this society, a fact which is evident in, for example, the unemotional readiness of the church elders to assume the damnation of a lumberman who dies in a final, fatal act of heroism in attempting to save a drowning man. The pervasive attitude finds expression in the simple roughness of these men, characterized by brutal violence under "plain necessity". As well, the attitude can be seen in the strict rules and the bullying tactics and leadership of the rival work gangs of lumbermen.

A substantially different attitude, that of gentleness, love and forgiveness, is reflected in the second sermon. At a holiday service, the congregation anticipates a sermon on the evils of sin. Their expectation is not fulfilled, for the Reverend Murray has invited a different speaker, referred to only as "the professor", to address the people. The professor's sermon, centering on love as a sign of salvation, meets with an initially mixed reaction.

Peter McRae was evidently keenly disappointed, and his whole bearing expressed stern disapproval. And as the professor proceeded, extolling and illustrating the supreme grace of love, Peter's hard face grew harder and harder than ever, and his eyes began to emit blue sparks of fire; This was no day for preaching of smooth things. The people were there to consider and lament their Original and Actual Sin; and they were expected and required to hear of the judgements of the Lord, and to be summoned to flee from the wrath to come.

Donald Ross sat with his kindly old face in a glow of delight, but with a look of perplexity on it which his furtive glances in Peter's direction did not seem to lessen. The sermon was delighting and touching him but he was not quite sure whether this was a good sign in him or no. He set himself now and then to find fault with the sermon, but the preacher was so humble, so respectful, and above all, so earnest, that Donald Ross could not bring himself to criticize.¹

The second sermon provokes a spiritual change in the entire community.

The sermon scenes of The Man from Glengarry exist not only as specific dramatic devices in the plot but also as manifestations of the society where they are given. The Man from Glengarry studies a single strong character, Ranald, and an entire society he represents. To this society, the weekly sermon is a matter of general concern, touching responsive chords and both reflecting and altering the society's shift in tone and sensibility.

One of the commonest grounds on which Connor's writing is criticized is that of the hurried and mechanical conversion of his characters from evil to good. In contrast to this often cited flaw, Macdonald Dubh's case is refreshing, and a good example of the shift in attitude previously mentioned. The conversion here is not from evil to good but, more importantly, from hatred and resentment to forgiveness within the world view of a good man. Furthermore, the matter is complicated by the fact that Macdonald is provided with an entirely valid reason for hating LeNoir, namely the injury the latter inflicted upon him. Nevertheless, Christian teaching is clear, and the wronged party, however grievously wronged, must forgive his attacker if he himself is to expect forgiveness for his own sins at judgement day. This change in attitude does not come easily for Macdonald; the psychological depth of his physical and moral agony is explored with great detail in the early sections of the novel. The

moment of conversion comes at the climax of the second sermon scene, as the visiting minister's address had captured perfectly the plight and condition of his hearers in general and Macdonald in particular.

To the people of Glengarry, the sermon is an important social event.

Important as were the exercises of reading, praise and prayer, they were only the "opening services", and merely led up to the event of the day, which was the sermon. And it was the event, not only of the day, but the week. It would form the theme of conversation and afford food for discussion in every gathering of people until another came to take its place.²

Sermons are not only momentary pauses for divine reflection amid the usually hectic activities of everyday life, but also the focus of community interest and speculation. For days in advance, the community is concerned and fascinated by the possibilities of what the minister might say. Similarly, the people are concerned with what he has said for several days afterwards. Connor is doing far more than selecting a minor element of the social life of the community for eclectic and unjustified amplification. He is judiciously illustrating a way of life through an important practice of which he himself has direct knowledge and experience.

In the preface to the novel, Connor makes his motive clear.

The solid forests of Glengarry have vanished, and with the forests, the men who conquered them. The manner of life and the type of character to be seen in those days have gone too, and forever. It is part of the purpose of this book to so picture these men and their times that they may not drop quite out of mind. The men are worth remembering. They carried the marks of their blood in their fierce passions, their courage, their loyalty; and of the forests in their patience, their resourcefulness, their self-reliance. But deeper than all, the mark that reached down to their hearts' core was that of their faith, for in them dwelt the fear of God. Their religion may have been narrow, but not narrower than the moulds of their lives. It was the biggest thing in them. It may have taken a somber hue from their gloomy forests, but by reason of a sweet, gracious presence dwelling among them, it grew in grace and sweetness day by day.

In the Canada beyond the Lakes, where men are making empires, the sons of these Glengarry men are found. And there such men are needed. For not wealth, not enterprise, not energy, can build a nation into sure greatness, but men, and only men with the fear of God in their hearts, and with no other. And to make this clear is also a part of the purpose of this book.³

Connor's primary motive for writing The Man from Glengarry is to reflect the style and mannerisms of a once-vibrant local society of his acquaintance; the reflection and artistic reaction to a vigorous and distinctive way⁴ of life. That this is the case may be seen from the fact that it is the idea of portraiture which is explained first, with the religious aspect emphasized primarily as a key to understanding the

characters depicted. The aim of affirming the value of religion, though certainly present, is only a secondary and subordinate goal. The sermon scenes arise from their setting. Connor draws them from his own life, career and religious experiences, but includes them in the novel for the fundamental purpose of serving an end essentially artistic, that of rendering a subject in vivid and life-like detail.

Critics have been most kind to Connor when considering the element of "local colour" in his novels.

In the tradition of the local colourist, Connor portrayed the manner of life and the characters of an earlier age; in this type of writing, he displayed a skill and an artistry that he was unable to sustain through the larger narrative unit of the novel.⁴

... his otherwise undistinguished romances contain many forceful passages. For Ralph Connor could be very effective when he wrote as a local colourist recording life in the early West and in pioneer Ontario.⁵

... concessions are made to ordinary human nature by admitting descriptions of fights, horse-races, and by a certain moderate vein of humour, which reveals itself in imitation of French-Canadian and Scottish dialects, tolerant amusement at religious vagaries, etc. It (Black Rock) succeeds also in a measure in conveying the atmosphere of the prairie and the mountains. The Sky Pilot is built on much the same lines.⁶

Connor is often most effective as a novelist when he consciously or unconsciously blends in with a tradition of

regional artists reflecting experience in their own particular geographic locations and local settings. Considered from this critical perspective, a novel such as The Man from Glengarry is primarily important as a living, breathing glimpse of a narrowly limited setting realistically indicative of actual practices, appearances and conditions of a certain place and time. Connor's writing is often precise, evocative and vibrantly colourful when he is describing the typical activities of the people and county he knew and loved so well. The sermon scenes are clear illustrations of the nature of organized religion in the Glengarry region.

In their sermons, the two ministers emphasize logic, relentlessly and persistently making their points for the gathered listeners with step-by-step progression and analysis. In neither case is the argument spelled out for the reader with great clarity and algebraic precision. Instead, the reasoning of the sermon is largely reflected in the mood and atmosphere of each scene. The deliberate and unfaltering logic of the sermons is substantially established by the simple device of authorial statement, a flaw in the novel. More of the arguments should have been provided in each case for the reader's personal evaluation. Nevertheless, Connor overcomes this difficulty by showing the characters of the preachers in a few deft strokes (neither man strikes the reader as the sort to

engage in silliness or circular argument) and by generally describing the nature of the subject treated, the length and comprehensiveness of the analysis, and the reaction of the audience. In both cases, the cumulative effect of all of these relatively indirect elements is the inescapable feeling that profound truth is being stated. In the case of the second sermon, there is also the implication that a profound transformation will occur because of what is being stated. In both cases, the key to whatever degree of success is enjoyed by the preacher is the impressive display of relentless, penetrating logic. For Connor, the religious experience does not seem divorced from the practice of rigid rationality. Through the skilled use of reason, men are able to understand their place in the universe and the nature of their relationship with God and their fellow man.

In the first sermon, Presbyterian beliefs are defended not by citation of spurious authority or chauvinistic appeal to emotional ties or long-standing tradition, but by a highly organized argument. The preacher provides a lengthy review, concerning important controversies related to the central core of doctrine and explanations of the respective logic and illogic branched by the two sides in every case. The implication is that Presbyterianism is worth following because it is consistent and clearly thought out, not only because the

continued loyalty to this denomination is a matter of faith and revealed truth.

In the second sermon, the subject is more gentle than the strict mapping out of doctrinal territory and the defence against heresy, and yet the fundamental intellectual approach is similar. In any discussion of the need for love in the world, a speaker would be tempted to slide into sentimental emotion and imprecise remarks. Connor's professor avoids these pitfalls. The second sermon leads to the novel's "great revival" episode, which occurs not so much because the importance of love has been shown to the people (they have had such figures as Mrs. Murray to look to for many years) but because it has been proven to them. The natural goodness and affection which have been part of their lives have become intellectually respectable, bursting from the heart and through the mind to become open and vital concerns for society as a whole. The Bible meetings, which are held with capacity attendance, are surprisingly calm and level-headed affairs for a society allegedly in the throes of widespread religious fervour. The positive and powerful emotions associated with religious belief have now been channelled through the intellect. As logic has been the basis of the great revival, so it continues as its indispensable foundation.

The sermon scenes are characterized by an almost total absence of the storytelling element. Both sermons succeed without this element which, in one startling passage, is even dismissed by the narrator as "trifling".

... the need, the ground, the means, the method, the agent, the results, of Justification, were fully set forth and illustrated. There were no anecdotes and no poetry. The subject was much too massive and tremendous to permit any such trifling.⁷

Since The Man from Glengarry, unlike Black Rock and The Sky Pilot, is told in the third person, it is not easy to dismiss as "unreliable" an apparently honest but inconsistent authorial statement. Although story-telling is an indispensable tool of the preacher in other novels, it is denigrated in The Man from Glengarry. The reason, as the preceding quotation suggests, may be the supreme importance of the subjects treated. The subjects of the sermons in other novels, however, are often far from trivial. Connor may have seen The Man from Glengarry as his most serious work, believing the technique unsuited to the overall themes.

The quality of majesty, the idea that a sermon should project a certain aura of grandness or magnificance, exists to a far greater extent in these scenes than in their counterparts in previous Connor novels. Whereas the previous novels emphasized such elements as brevity,

simplicity of argument, modesty and rustic setting, the sermon scenes here involve more physical staging. Both are, for example, delivered in church buildings. The sermons are stately in length, subject matter and delivery. Their professionalism contrasts with the sometimes halting, emotional style of the sermons of the two previous novels. There is nothing akin to the Reverend Murray's thundering righteousness in either Black Rock or The Sky Pilot, and there is little similarity between the Reverend Craig's sobbing cry of "we all love a baby" and the professor's eloquent and intensely logical discourse on "the marks" of eternal salvation. As different in tone, subject and style as the two sermon scenes may be from each other, they share a quality generally absent from the sermon scenes of earlier novels -- an apparently deliberate attempt to seem impressive, important and majestic. In any event, it is clear that the ministers in Connor's third novel have no time for "trifling", as they are involved not only in the enunciation of significant spiritual truths, but in the eloquent and impressive delivery of such themes. Connor handles this minor but interesting change of style with little or no difficulty.

There are at least three ways in which a sermon in a novel may be transmitted to the reader by the author. The simplest is to reprint the fictional sermon verbatim within quotation marks and to attribute the speech to the

minister directly. The sermon may be related indirectly, through the use of a third-person sympathetic point of view and an absence of quotation marks. Of course, a blending of the two approaches is possible, with some of the sermon represented directly and some of it represented indirectly. Connor usually employs the third approach, moving back and forth between direction and indirection in each scene. In The Man from Glengarry, however, Connor leans more heavily upon indirection. The first sermon is represented entirely in this mode. In the second scene, the words of the professor are only directly given at any length under the third category, and even then only partially so.

Since the first sermon lasts an hour and a half and continues the following week, any selection of direct discourse pretending to be a representation would merit exclusion on grounds of sheer length. Some of the professor's sermon is given directly, and the reason for this inclusion is worthy of study. The third section of the sermon is "the application", the part which most directly affects the characters of the novel and which leads to the reunion of Macdonald Dubh with his religion in a spirit of forgiveness or, at least, an honest attempt at forgiveness. The application is also the part of the sermon which most clearly illustrates the social change from Old Testament to New Testament, from "old man" to "new man".

In short, whereas the first and second sermons in their entirety are profound and significant, the third section of the second sermon has the greatest dramatic significance. Connor's decision to represent the sermons of The Man from Glengarry as he has done is an aesthetic, not a didactic decision. As the preface clearly suggests, religious teaching is, at least in this novel, a secondary goal. The main purposes of the first sermon scene are to outline Murray's character and to present a vivid picture of a certain small-town way of life. In this regard, no detailed examination of various doctrinal feuds between Presbyterians and non-Presbyterians is necessary, and so none is provided, despite the obvious temptation for a minister-novelist to explain his own faith at some length. The authorial voice assures the reader that the sermon is long, impressive, stern and logical. In the presentation of the second sermon, it is important that the reader understands the circumstances and motivations leading to the great revival. Thus, the third section of this sermon is given to the reader in a manner that is for the most part direct. The rest of the sermon, however it might have enabled Connor to teach the intricacies of his own deeply-held religious beliefs, is less important. It is, therefore, summarized indirectly. There can be little quarrel with the chosen modes for Connor's sermon scene depiction in this novel, and this enquiry reveals a balance of purpose which is all too easy to overlook.

It is not easy to overlook extremes in tone in this novel, extremes best illustrated by examining the second sermon scene. In the earlier novels, Connor emphasizes reasonableness in sermon delivery, providing admirable illustrations of calmness and restraint. Points of particular importance, for example, tend to be emphasized by a lowering, not a raising, of the ministers' voices. In The Man from Glengarry, both preachers are polite, ordered, well-spoken and logical. In the second sermon scene, however, a radical change takes place. As soon as the professor has ended his stirring "low tone" remarks, Murray steps forward with an electrifying, apocalyptic vision of the day of judgement, rendered in suitably "high tone" terminology:

"My people", he began, and his magnificent voice pealed forth like a solemn bell, "this is the message of the Lord. Let none dare to refuse to hear. It is a message to your minister, it is a message to you. You are anxious for 'the marks'. Search you for this mark". He paused while the people sat looking at his fixed and breathless silence. Then, suddenly, he broke forth in a loud cry: "Where are your children at this solemn time of privilege? Fathers, where are your sons? Why were they not with you at the Table? Are you men of love? Are you men of love, or by lack of love, are you shutting the door of the Kingdom against your sons with their fightings and their quarrelings?" Then, raising his hands high, he lifted his voice into a kind of wailing chant: "Woe unto you! Woe unto you! Your house is left unto you desolate, and the voice of love is crying over you. Ye would not! Ye would not! Oh, Lamb of God, have mercy on us! O, Christ, with the pierced hands, save us!". Again he paused, looking upward,

while the people waited with uplifted faces. "Behold", he cried, in a soul-thrilling voice, "I see heaven open, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and I hear a voice, 'Turn ye, Turn ye. Why will ye die?' Lord Jesus, they will not turn". Again he paused. "Listen. Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire. Depart ye! Nay, Lord Jesus! Not so! Have mercy upon us!" His voice broke its passionate cry. The effect was overwhelming. The people swayed as trees before a mighty wind, and a voice cried aloud from the congregation: "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

It was Macdonald Dubh. At that loud cry, women began to sob, and some of the people rose from their seats.

"Be still", commanded the minister. "Rend your hearts and not your garments. Let us pray".⁸

The minister has been legitimately pushed beyond the limits of his usual restraint by the force of the moment. Murray is absolutely sincere about his mission as pastor to his flock. The early parts of the novel show that he has always emphasized correctness of conduct and purity of doctrine. If the first sermon is a fair representation of his work, the community has been subjected to an avalanche of sophisticated theological argument. Yet the minister realizes that there is something lacking, some indefinable missing ingredient in the spiritual life of his people. When the parishioners arrive at the church, they expect the usual-strict hellfire-and-damnation preaching. But they hear friendly and relentless persuasion on the subject of the gentle emotions: love, forgiveness and

brotherhood. It is not unreasonable to think that the implication might suddenly and silently dawn on the minister that in following the awesome responsibility of tending his beloved flock, he has seriously neglected an important side of man's nature. He would react by lashing out verbally in extreme emotion and anger, directed internally and externally. The outburst of "high tone" at the conclusion of a generally "low tone" sermon is inserted for purely dramatic purposes, and the sermon itself remains the source of both Macdonald's conversion and the great revival, all of this consistent with Connor's practice in previous novels.

Gordon's sermon Christian Hope provides an interesting parallel to The Man from Glengarry. Here Gordon relies heavily on the central device of a "trifling" anecdote or illustrative example to make his point.

I remember once ... in Ontario, seeing this beautifully illustrated in a lumber raft. The wind had died down, and there was no possibility of moving the big raft except by the cable, and the anchor was taken away out in a little boat and dropped in the lake, and then the raft was pulled up to the anchor.

This is exactly the way in which we avail ourselves of hope; the soul being drawn on towards it, lifted over, lifted through all sorts of storms, waves, and all sorts of difficult passages until, sure enough, the harbour we have been making for is ours, and we are safe. Now, hope acts like that upon the soul.⁹

Since the unifying metaphor of the sermon, the lumber raft, is drawn from the logging industry, and the sermon was written after The Man from Glengarry achieved its international popularity, the illustration may well be an allusion to the bestselling novel and, therefore, a definite indication of a symbiotic relationship existing in Connor's work, where sermons are used to enrich his novels and the novels enrich his sermons. The relationship cannot be proven absolutely, as few of Gordon's sermons were ever published, and there is some question as to the nature of Christian Hope, which is not labelled a sermon, although the sermonic tone, introduction by a Biblical verse and frequent internal references to a speaker/audience format leave little doubt that this work is a sermon. The possibility of such a balanced relationship is intriguing enough to merit at least brief consideration.

The theme of forgiveness overcoming initial sternness which is so central to The Man from Glengarry is reflected in the sermon scenes, as is the idea of the sermon as a social event and a reflection of social conditions such as the great revival. Logic is emphasized in this novel at the expense of storytelling, and a certain majestic aura is also present. A greater balance than initially evident between the artistic and didactic impulses in Connor may be deduced from tone of delivery and mode of representation. The idea of balance in the sense of mutual support is possibly borne out by at least one reading of Christian Hope.

NOTES

- 1 The Man from Glengarry, p. 150.
- 2 Ibid, p. 77.
- 3 Ibid, p. 8.
- 4 Roper et al, p. 323.
- 5 Ibid, p. 324.
- 6 Archibald MacMechan, Headwaters of Canadian Literature, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1924), P. 206.
- 7 The Man from Glengarry, p. 77.
- 8 Ibid, pp. 151-52.
- 9 Christian Hope, p. 14.

Chapter Five

THE PROSPECTOR

The Prospector is in many ways similar to The Sky Pilot. It is even tediously derivative in places. Connor turns away from the Glengarry region of his own childhood, which formed the raw material of his two previous literary efforts, The Man from Glengarry and Glengarry School Days, and returns to this earlier concern with depicting the missionary efforts of his church in Western Canada. Once again, the principal character is a minister with a colourful nickname -- Shock is called the "Prospector" because the more traditional "fishers of men" metaphor of the religious life seems inappropriate to the landlocked location. As in earlier works, alcoholism is pointed out as the single most pressing issue. The minister's efforts to help a young horseman parallel the relationship between Arthur Moore and Gwen in The Sky Pilot. The rustic setting is again present, and the minister must work to obtain the trust of the men and overcome their initial skepticism. Efforts to raise a building are shown. Once again, the minister is physically inappropriate for his role; whereas the Pilot was considered too young and too weak for the rigors of western life, the hero of The Prospector faces the opposite problem, being so tough and rugged in appearance that he has difficulty being taken seriously as a man of the cloth. Finally, quality of

preaching, a matter of importance in this novel, is an issue resolved in a climactic sermon scene.

The story of The Prospector is episodic. Shock MacGregor, a tousle-haired football star from Toronto, feels the call of God to join the missionary effort in the west after hearing an inspiring sermon, which is not presented in the novel. He leaves his aging mother in the care of close friends and travels far to start his work. Dubbed the Prospector by the locals because he "digs up" good men for his faith out of unlikely places much as a miner might recover valuable minerals from the earth, he meets a real seeker of gold. The Old Prospector, who has devoted his whole life to finding the glorious Lost River deposit, befriends the young missionary. After the Old Prospector dies, Shock himself finds the river, only to discover that a natural disaster has buried it forever. The symbolic dimension is reminiscent of the beautiful canyon lost to Gwen in The Sky Pilot as a result of her tragic injury. After spending some time in his religious work, which includes building a manse and helping The Kid (an excellent young horseman who, nonetheless, is but a pale imitation of the much more vibrant and interesting Gwen), Shock hears of his mother's death and return to the east, where his new-found eloquence helps him win the battle for expanded church support of the western missionary cause.

The development of Shock from an amateur preacher to an effective speaker of the word of God is a major theme of this novel. At the beginning of the story, the protagonist is not nearly as skilled at public speaking as are Alexander Murray and the professor in The Man from Glengarry. The desirability of eloquence from the pulpit is demonstrated early in the novel through the nostalgic and romantic reminiscences of Shock's mother. The old woman stirs a desire for eloquence in Shock by telling him stories of the great and legendary preachers whom she heard in her youth in her native Scotland.

"My! Mother, but you are censorious to-night. You can't expect to find men like Candlish, Chalmers, and Macdonald of Ferintosh in every age".

"Ay", said the old lady with an emphatic shake of her head, "and that's a true word. Men like yon are not to be found, and like McCheyne and Burns and the Sabbath morning when I was a lass, that I walked with my shoes and stockings in my hand down the glen to hear these men preach. And yon was the preaching. Yon was the preaching. None of your puny, peeping, fifteen-meenute sairmonettes, but preaching, terrible heart-smiting preaching".¹

Her powerful statements in response to her son's inquiry make them embody the best elements of both preachers in The Man from Glengarry -- both inspirational affection and awe-inspiring righteousness. Whereas the preachers of the previous novel are used by the author to illustrate complementary extremes of approach, those

mentioned at the beginning of this novel are used to set up an internally balanced ideal towards which the protagonist must strive in his own humble efforts. The ideal of preaching with both sternness and affection is best illustrated in the following passage.

She paused a few moments and then sinking back into her chair, she went on, "Ay, terrible preaching, yon, like the storm-blast sweeping the hillsides and rending the firs in the Pass. Yes! Yes! But gentle at times and winning, like the rain falling soft at night, wooing at the blue-bells and the daisies in the glen, or like a mother croonin' over the babe at her breast, till men wept for love and longing after Himself. Ay, lad, lad, yon was the preaching".²

The use of dialect and idiomatic expression in Connor's rendering of her memories makes possible a convincing presentation of her earnest views, a technique which, in turn, leads to reader sympathy for the idea of eloquent and impassioned sermon giving as a powerful form of art in its own right. And Shock's mother herself is a simple and sincere woman, unlikely to exaggerate consciously for rhetorical effect. It is possible, therefore, to accept her claims for the greatness of her favourite preachers, even though these accounts often approach the proportions of folk-tale and legend. A clear standard of sermon quality is thus set before the reader from the outset.

Like the Pilot, the Prospector displays great modesty about his own homiletic capabilities when he arrives in

unfamiliar territory. There is a difference between the two situations, however. Whereas the Pilot's modesty is quickly revealed to ^{be} more of an admirable character trait than a realistic personal evaluation -- in terms of concrete results, if not always in terms of professionalism of procedure -- the Prospector is shown to have some real difficulties with orally proclaiming the word of God. Time is required before these difficulties are overcome.

When Bill saw the Bible, he look relieved, but rather disgusted.

"Oh, I git you now! You're a preacher, eh?"

"Well", said Shock in a tone almost confidential, "I'll tell you I'm not so much of a preacher. I don't think I'm cut out for that, somehow". Here Bill brightened slightly. "I tried last night in town", continued Shock, "and it was pretty bad. I don't know who had the worst of it, the congregation or myself. But it was bad".³

Two implicit comparisons hinder Shock throughout the pursuit of his missionary goals. The first, as mentioned, is the standard of the preachers of the past. Another is the fact that by the time he arrives, a local Anglican priest, Father Mike, has already established a formidable reputation both as a respectable "man's man" and as a kind and just representative of the Almighty. Shock, despite the length of his journey and the remoteness of his destination, is not entering territory completely devoid of clergy or the word of God. He is not able to depend on all Christian men flocking to his sermons out of sheer

desperation for spiritual nourishment of any calibre or denomination, but must win them through his own efforts. The relationship between Father Mike and his people is vividly described.

"Father Mike, a Roman Catholic?"

"No, Anglican. A very decent fellow. Have not seen much of him. His people doubtless regard me as a blooming dissenter, dontcherknow. But he is no such snob. He goes in for all their fun -- hunts, teas, dances, card-parties, and all the rest of it".

"What, gambling?" asked Shock, aghast.

"No, no. I understand he rakes them fore and aft for their gambling and that sort of thing. But they don't mind it much. They swear by him, for he is really a fine fellow. In sickness or in trouble, Father Mike is on the spot. But as to influencing their lives, I fear Father Mike is no great force".⁴

The door is left open to Shock for Father Mike, though popular and respected, has little effect on the way the men conduct their affairs. The comment is made to Shock's face -- not with any kind of depreciating intent, but simply as an axiomatic statement of fact -- that only a man such as Father Mike can be expected to succeed in these conditions of isolation and debauchery.

"What, a preacher?" cried the rancher. "Not he. They're not made that way".

"I don't know about that, Sinclair", said another rancher. "There's Father Mike, you know".

"That's so", said Sinclair. "But there are hardly two of that kind on the same range".⁵

How much Connor intends Shock to be intimidated and held back by fear of failure in friendly competition with his worthy predecessor in the region is unclear. There is at least an implicit suggestion that Shock's statements of humble gifts are more reflections of a real lack of confidence and low self-esteem in comparison to others than is the Pilot's shy trust in God.

In The Prospector's climactic sermon scene, Connor follows the pattern he established in Black Rock and The Sky Pilot. It is made clear from the beginning of the scene that this is not just any sermon, but one of great significance socially, as Shock's last sermon in his current position, and personally, as a moment of transition in the hero's development into the oral competence required by his vocation. As a further indication of the importance of the scene, the audience is said to be by far the largest of any of the Prospector's services. The inclusion of this sermon in the text of the novel, over and above any message it might coincidentally contain for the general edification of the reader, is understandable. The scene's presence is artistically justified.

A certain degree of spontaneity is underlined as the cause of this sermon's success. Shock is concerned with his own perceived lack of ability and success in the area as he enters to speak, another sign of his continued lack of self-confidence. But as he rises to address the congregation, he puts aside his petty, personal concerns and loses himself in thinking of others, in this way overcoming his inhibitions and achieving eloquence and passion without knowing how or even realizing the extent of his achievement.

Hitherto, the presence of those whom he knew to be indifferent or contemptuously critical had wrought in him a self-consciousness that confused his thought, clogged his emotion, and hampered his speech. This night all was changed ... As Shock stood up and looked into the faces of the men before him and thought of their lives, lonely, tempted, frankly wicked, some of them far down in degradation, he forgot himself, his success, or his failure. What mattered that! How petty seemed now all his considerations for himself! Men were before him who, by reason of sin, were in sore need of help. He believed he had what they needed. How to give it to them, that was the question. With this feeling of sympathy and compassion, deepened and intensified by a poignant sense of failure, Shock stood up to deliver to them his last message. He would speak the truth to-night, and speak it he did, without a tinge of embarrassment or fear.⁶

The success enjoyed by Shock is a result not of any premeditated, elaborate strategy of rhetoric and public speaking, but of spontaneous inspiration and straightforward sincerity. This openness to the influence of the

moment is similar to that of the minister in Black Rock, who tells his listeners of his own childhood faith and youthful sins, despite having had no initial designs of mentioning these matters in his sermon. A change of style results, as Shock speaks from the heart, from words that occur to him on the spot, as opposed to his previously established routine of staying close to papers containing well-planned remarks.

As his words began to flow, he became conscious of a new strength, of a new freedom, and the joy of his new strength and freedom swept him along on a full tide of burning speech. He abandoned his notes, from which he had hitherto feared to be far separated; he left the desk, which had been to him a barricade for defence, and stood up before the people.⁷

More on this aspect of sermon delivery will be covered in the chapter on The Arm of Gold, which follows.

As far as mode of representation is concerned, the sermon scene in The Prospector is mixed. Portions are directly quoted by the narrator, other portions are merely summarized. Once again, as in The Man from Glengarry, the author avoids the obvious temptation to dwell at length on a matter of doctrine in favour of the more dramatic possibilities afforded by a variety of stylistic approaches. And once again, the decision of what to summarize and what to report directly seems to be an aesthetic one. After a general summary of the first part of the sermon, where

Shock tells the Biblical story of Christ curing a leper, a dramatic pause is described, followed by a startling statement reported directly.

"That's what you want, men. You need to be made clean, you need to be made strong". The people stared at him as if he had gone mad, it was so unlike his usual, formal, awkward self. Quietly, but with intense and serious earnestness, he spoke to them of their sins, their drunken orgies, their awful profanity, their disregard of everything religious, their open vices and secret sins.

"Say", said Ike to The Kid, who sat next to him, "they'll be gettin' out their guns sure!"⁸

Restraint is evident, as Connor gives only a brief overview of the specific sins the parishioners have committed. The startling moment represents positive development in the hero's character, and is thus artistically important. The reactions of the parishioners are recorded first in a general way, then with a tight focus on the whispered exchange between two men, in which the possible negative reaction to the sermon is humorously exaggerated. The poor quality of Shock's usual sermon giving is pointed out in contrast to his present forcefulness. In his short section, the broad range of Connor's capabilities is revealed.

The sermon involves emotion, as in Black Rock. At the climax of Shock's remarks, there is a second dramatic pause, followed by a sudden outburst that is presented directly.

"And you cannot help it, men! The pity of it is, you cannot help it! You cannot change your hearts; you love these things, you cannot shake them off, they have grow upon you and have become your fixed habits. Some of you have tried: I know you have had your periods of remorse and you have sought to escape, but you have failed".

He paused a moment, and then continued in a voice humble and remorseful:

"I have failed, too. I thought in my pride and my folly that I could help you, but I have failed. We have failed together, men -- what then is before us?"⁹

A summarized version of this section would be necessarily less effective. The blunt directness of the Prospector's accusations is stylistically mirrored by a directness in point of view. A panoramic statement by the author of the general sense of Shock's remarks would lack immediacy and impact, as contrasted with the focus and emotion characteristic of the passage as it stands.

Despite the emotional focus of the scene, Connor makes it clear that an effective sermon does not depend merely on a rhetorical appeal to the heart. As in The Man from Glengarry, the vital importance of logical reasoning is also pointed out as a counterbalance. Unfortunately, there is also a problem, a regrettable stylistic element, which carries over from that work. The logic of Shock's sermon is essentially revealed by a direct statement from the narrator and by the reactions of the listeners. This

pattern prohibits the reader's own evaluation, an approach that would be much more convincing. It is psychologically tempting to place confidence in a writer who demonstrates that he in turn has placed confidence in the reader's own powers of judgement and reasoning.

The humility of the preacher, though in this novel often descending, intentionally or unintentionally, to the level of mere feelings of inferiority, is in this case quite appealing both to the reader and to the audience of the sermon. It involves an admission of failure, which parallels the accusation of failure made against the listeners with respect to their own lives. The structure of Shock's speech is thus balanced and effective. The accusation lends forcefulness and courage to the content of the sermon, keeping the confession from seeming to be weakness or self-pity. The confession, in turn, keeps the minister's remarks from offending either the pride of the congregation or the sensibilities of the reader. Shock regrets that his mission has not been as successful as he had hoped, and his personal disappointment is well conveyed as a sense of waste permeates the scene.

There is an element of personal confession in the sermon, more restrained and subtle here than in Black Rock, and perhaps even too subtle. Shock refers to his mother, though in sufficiently guarded terms that Connor, as narrator, has to step in and explain the reference.

"Does any man here think his father or mother has forgotten him or does not care what happens to him?"

Shock was thinking of his own dear old mother, separated from him by so many leagues of empty prairie, but so near to him in love and sympathy.

"Does any man think so?" he repeated, "and do you think your Father in Heaven does not care? Oh! Do not think so!" His voice rose in a cry of entreaty. The effect was tremendous.¹⁰

Like the Pilot, Shock has left his aged mother behind to follow his missionary vocation. It is both a strength and a weakness of The Prospector that the minister's mother is here depicted before Shock sets out for the west. She lends much to the novel by her charming dialect, inspiring love and impressive faith, but she also makes more vivid the uncomfortable moral ambiguity of Shock's mission.

Though the characters who criticize Shock for leaving his mother are described as shortsighted and lacking in understanding, some of their criticisms remain valid. In theory, the call of God is superior to the ties of mortal family, but this theory is dangerously undercut by a highly positive and heart-warming portrait of a lonely mother's dignified human love for her only son. Whether this is the interpretation that Connor himself would support is difficult to say. Nevertheless, it must be conceded that Shock's presence in the west is more problematic at a personal level than is that of Arthur Moore in The Sky Pilot, whose distant mother is never

depicted. As only the Pilot is truly aware of his family situation, the reader is compelled to accept his judgement in leaving home. In the case of the Prospector, the reader has enough personal information and familiarity with the previous lifestyle to critique the adoption of another.

The description of the sermon's conclusion is weak. Both the opening and the closing of Shock's remarks are described as being brief, yet the conclusion's summary reveals it to be fairly complicated and necessarily of some considerable length. Though perhaps a minor point, this inconsistency becomes at least mildly disturbing due to its prominent position at the end of such an important passage and the contrast with the degree of artistic skill manifest in the rest of the scene. It is clear that the narrator, in this case, has not bothered to picture Shock's actual words in his mind before writing the arms-length description.

Shortly after delivering this sermon, Shock goes to look for his friend, the doctor, and seeks directions from Father Mike. Although Shock himself seems unaware of the importance of this moment, their brief discussion is a major turning point in his career as a man of the cloth.

Meantime, Shock had gone searching through the hotels for the doctor, whom he had seen slipping out before the closing prayer. But the doctor was

nowhere to be seen, and in despair Shock went to Father Mike. He found that gentleman in a state of enthusiastic excitement. "My dear fellow, my dear fellow", he exclaimed, "that was great!"

"What?" said Shock simply.

"That sermon, man. I would give my hand to preach like that".

"Preach?" said Shock. "I didn't preach. Did you see the doctor?"¹¹

This exchange, brief as it is, carries important information. The entirely unconscious quality of Shock's address is effectively underlined by his quick, unthinking exclamation that he "didn't preach", once again making clear Connor's typical emphasis on spontaneity of delivery and rejection of practised verbal ploys. More importantly, it is clear that his sermon was so well done as to attract not only the respect but even the outright admiration of Father Mike, the standard against which the reader has felt compelled to judge him since very early in the story. It is clear that, at long last, Shock has developed the abilities which his mother so admired and which will be so necessary to him in the rest of his life as a minister and missionary.

After this pivotal sermon, and especially after receiving from home the distressing news that both his mother and a friend named Betty have died, Shock's sermon giving ability is reported to increase still further.

In Shock's preaching, and in his visitation of his people, a new spirit made itself felt. There was no less energy, but there was an added sweetness, and a deeper sympathy. He had entered upon the way of the Cross, and the bruising of his heart distilled all its tenderness in word and deed. His preaching was marked by a new power, a new intensity ...12

The central sermon scene is thus more than just an isolated moment of success. It is the initial breakthrough in the development of a major skill on the part of the protagonist that is essential to the furthering of his career. It is a new beginning for Shock, and a turning point in the novel.

More than this, Shock's new-found eloquence is eventually used by Connor as a device for bringing about change affecting many people beyond Shock's immediate sphere of influence. Like The Man from Glengarry, The Prospector deals with the development of Canada as well as the development of a single fictional person. In this case, the entire health and future of the western missionary effort of a major church are shown to be at stake at various points in the novel. Summoned back east to a major meeting, Shock continues to protest his lack of speaking ability. Finally relenting, he speaks, and it is his own eloquent performance from the podium which is a major factor in saving the field work of his faith, even as Ranald Macdonald's eloquence at the political meeting

in British Columbia plays a strong part in rescuing Canada itself. The success the Prospector achieves in public speaking on this important occasion is a result of his emphasis on storytelling, the very element which has been emphasized in many fictional sermons in Connor's other works, and which is so often evident in the Gordon sermons themselves.

"Well, I suppose if they wish to make an exhibition of my self, I should not refuse, and after all, what matter how I speak? I will fail, I know, but I will do my best".

"Never a fail", cried Brown. "Don't preach at them. Tell them yarns. That's what your chief does. Now you hear me".

This proved to be good advice, for when the chairman introduced Shock as the Prospector from Loon Lake, Shock simply began, as Brown said, to "yarn".

"That is what Perault and Ike called me", were his first words, and from that moment till the close of his speech, he had his audience leaning forward and listening with ears and eyes and heart. He made no attempt at fine speaking, but simply told them of his friends in the West, of the men he had come to love as brothers, and who had come to love him.

As they came down the step of the Park Church, where the meeting was held, Brown could hardly keep pace with Helen as she danced along beside him.

"Oh, wasn't he splendid!" she cried,
"wasn't he splendid!"¹³

Shock tells stories of life on the frontier, and these illustrate his points, even as The Prospector illustrates

Connor's belief that the western missionary effort is worthy of continued and expanded support, both moral and financial. The passage is sweeping and imprecise, despite Connor's support for Shock's position, because detailed reciting of the Prospector's adventures and friendships in the west would be redundant at this late stage in the plot. Instead, the emphasis falls on Shock's use of storytelling, the impression on the audience and the joyful reaction of Helen, Shock's romantic interest in the novel.

Throughout The Prospector, the importance of good sermon delivery is evident. From the outset, it is clear that Connor sees eloquent and impassioned oratory from the lectern as a worthy and noble art. Effective sermon delivery is also seen as necessary for the growth and health of the western missionary effort, a cause which it is certain he personally supported. In this particular story, a young man whose initial talents are clearly more athletic than aesthetic eventually comes to possess the ability to sway large audiences on matters of fundamental religious concern. During this novel's climactic sermon scene, his ability arises spontaneously from sincere emotion related in reasonable and rational terms, without concern for prepared thoughts or formal rhetoric. On the other hand, this scene is effectively and artistically represented in the novel by Connor's own creative practices, which are far from haphazard in their design.

Variety of style is evident, along with a certain degree of restraint and indirection of approach. The purpose of the scene in the plan of the novel as a whole is both clear and legitimate. Though marred in part by one or two slight flaws of expression, the sermon scene of The Prospector is a literary success, even as the fictional sermon itself is an obvious pastoral triumph.

The sermon scene indicates a return in style to the matter and form of similar scenes in Black Rock and The Sky Pilot. This statement is not to suggest that similarities to The Man from Glengarry are entirely absent or insignificant, for they are not. It is fair to say, however, that any attempt to find a clear and simple pattern of linear development in Connor's art over the course of his career is destined to be a troubled one.

NOTES

- 1 The Prospector, p. 69.
- 2 Ibid, p. 70.
- 3 Ibid, p. 114.
- 4 Ibid, pp. 128-29.
- 5 Ibid, p. 156.
- 6 Ibid, pp. 281-82.
- 7 Ibid, p. 282.
- 8 Ibid, p. 282.
- 9 Ibid, p. 283.
- 10 Ibid, p. 285.
- 11 Ibid, p. 285.
- 12 Ibid, p. 329.
- 13 Ibid, pp. 397-98.

Chapter Six
THE ARM OF GOLD

The Arm of Gold reveals evidence both of Connor's increasing artistic sophistication and of somewhat diminishing power. The story is relatively simple. As in The Prospector, a minister is the protagonist. In need of money to pay for his brother's operation, he follows the advice of an American businessman and invests in the stock market. Many of his parishioners follow his example, though without the businessman's knowledge or the modest financial ambitions of the minister himself. The embarrassing result is the minister's great success and his people's financial losses. Even the minister's success loses its meaning by the end of the story, as his brother dies, despite the operation. There are sub-plots worthy of mention, involving the repentance of a stingy church elder, the birth of the town's co-operative movement and the minister's attempts against public opinion to launch a controversial Bible-study class.

In The Arm of Gold Connor has turned his talent for writing on religious subjects to a purely secular purpose, his bitter denunciation of the stock market system in particular and the Western economic system in general. The usual Connor "trappings" are present -- a small town, a minister as a main character, sermon scenes, fighting

and conversion -- but most of them are less important than in other novels. What matters in this novel is the illustration of a central theme: the evils of the stock market. There is nothing necessarily wrong with such a preoccupation, which is easily understandable, given the novel's date of publication of 1932, at the height of the Great Depression caused by the crash of the markets in 1929 on Black Thursday. Connor's treatment is innovative and restrained. The Great Depression is never mentioned directly, and the central image of despair is drawn from a nineteenth-century crisis. Nevertheless, there is still a missing ingredient in this novel. The refreshing enthusiasm and boisterous good humour of earlier novels have been replaced by workmanlike determination. The strong flesh-and-blood morality and the infectious missionary spirit of earlier novels give way to two-dimensional illustrations from an economics lecturer. The didacticism, present or implied in virtually all of Connor's novels, is still evident, though far less entertaining than in his other works.

Still present also is the sermon scene, and The Arm of Gold contains two important sermons. A third, dismissed by the author in a short paragraph, does not merit detailed consideration. The most obvious quality of the two main scenes is the extreme to which a policy of indirection of representation has been taken. The methods

by which this indirection is achieved are original, and reveal some progress in Connor's art in terms of technical sophistication. For the first sermon scene, the minister, Hector MacGregor, has promised his friends "a scorcher", staying up all night to write it. Despite the name, there is no reason to suppose he is in any way related to Shock MacGregor in Connor's fictional universe. Connor often uses characters of Scottish background, and names like MacGregor and Macdonald recur in his novels. Anger at James Cameron, the tight-fisted elder who has refused to lend him money, had led to the choice of subject. In order to depict the first sermon, the first sermon scene gives a lengthy third-person list of the minister's thoughts on the theme of the sermon he is about to deliver, namely, money as the root of all evil. The narrative voice then informs the reader that the sermon has been delivered, its line of argument generally parallel to the ideas just described.

The theme of the sermon was one to which the minister had given much thought. Money hunger had been with him a favourite object of denunciation in War days, and more in post-War days, the days of the greedy grabbing. To this lust, he had attributed most of the industrial, political, economic and social events of the world ... The eternal quest for the rolling dollar was the thing of important worth in life, the sole dynamic of achievement. Even in this professional life, success was measured by the size of the retainer, the amount of the fee. To a man of simple tastes, massed wealth seemed not a necessity, but an embarrassment, a clog upon the foot of noble ambition.

... The madness for money as the sine qua non of "sense delights, of prestige, of power, he came to recognize as the curse of the race. All this was at work in his soul, colouring his thinking, motivating his utterances.¹

The general argument of the minister thus reflected, the scene shifts to a catalogue of the highly positive reactions of the parishioners.

The second sermon is presented in an even more direct fashion -- properly speaking, there is no single "scene" at all. Instead, there is a dialogue where the idea for the sermon occurs to the minister. A lake setting inspires his choice of a specific Bible verse to introduce his subject, the growth of the modern Bible from Hebrew folk tales. The minister then prepares his talk, the narrator providing some indication as to what he is likely to say. The scene shifts to the day of the sermon just after it has been delivered, and reactions are catalogued. Finally, in conversations between parishioners who have attended and a few conveniently curious outsiders, the reader discovers the specific points made.

The extremity of indirection in the two sermon scenes is striking in Connor's deliberate and concerted effort to avoid the appearance of preachiness. In The Arm of Gold, he strives for a retention of his comfortable, customary sermonic voice while keeping an authorial distance from the sermons themselves. The novel attempts to be didactic without any ostensibly didactic moments.

The Arm of Gold's two sermons filter the arguments and opinions of its author to his readership through a main character's voice and minor character's perceptions. By avoiding the dramatic and rhetorical potential of stirring sermons directly represented while affirming the validity of sermons and sermon composition as fit material for fiction, along with the somewhat diffused didacticism of their messages, Connor gives an unfortunate impression of confusion and contradiction in the structure of his novel.

One minor aspect of the sermon giving which The Arm of Gold illustrates is the question of whether it is better to speak to an audience extemporaneously or to read from a prepared text. As he does in The Prospector, Connor here appears to favour the former option. His minister usually follows the latter course without spectacular results. When he adopts a more off-the-cuff style for the first sermon scene, he has a major impact on his audience.

His style of delivery, as a rule, was restrained and didactic, but today he cast aside his notes and launched his soul upon a turgid torrent of passionate and at times poetic oratory ... even with the most successfully armoured souls among them, the effect of the sermon was tremendous. The intellectual power, the clear-cut logic, the lofty idealism, the passion, the burning, penetrating passion of a soul convinced of the truth of its own utterance were overwhelming.²

Connor implicitly absolves the minister of didacticism on the basis of his delivery. Relatively few Gordon sermons have ever been published, despite the fame of the writer and the always-steady backlist market for religious books; Gordon may have avoided prepared texts, and spoken more often from memory or brief notes. In his pro-war effort speaking tour of the United States, he often achieved success by putting aside written speeches and telling stories from memory. Either Gordon was a remarkably gifted and spontaneous orator, or he was used to speaking with little preparation to large audiences on important and emotional questions. In The Arm of Gold, he appears to favour partial notes over a completed text.

For the first time in his novels, Connor includes a strong element of ambiguity about the worth or correctness of an important sermon. In The Sky Pilot, the minister is modest about his oratorical abilities, and there is some question about his ability, if not his effectiveness, as a speaker. The same is true of the minister in The Prospector, who is largely unsuccessful as an orator until very late in the story. But these are questions of style, not substance, and there is never serious doubt as to the author's opinion of either the Pilot's or the Prospector's message. In The Man from Glengarry, Alexander Murray, though addressing only one side of man's nature, employs arguments that are correct and logical.

In The Arm of Gold, however, the first sermon scene is ambiguous in meaning as well as form. The minister has adopted a different style of delivery from his usual practice, yet the style is not presented. The third-person rendering of the substance of the speech contains no obvious elements of irony or under-cutting, only many carefully-wrought, complex and convincing turns of phrase which imply a deliberate attempt to impress the reader.

War's glamour, its pomp and circumstance, at first, had filled his eyes with false lights. His later experiences of war's cruelty, its wastage of wealth and of human life, its sordid debasement of noble idealism, its futility as a method of international peace and stability turned his mind to the explanation of its elemental motivating urge. The discovery that in nations, as in men, the ultimate objective, the fundamental driving force was not, in the last analysis, the noble passion for things of the spirit as truth, freedom, honour and the like, but a lust for power to command things material in life, territory, raw material, trade routes and trade concessions, opportunity to exploit secondary peoples. The high-sounding utterances of statesmen and parliaments about national honour, integrity and freedom, or about international peace and amity, were merely the fanfare of war's trumpets, stimulating the ambitions and passions of trusting and honest souls to the madness of the deluded and devotees of false gods.³

This passage seems to indicate an authorial support for the sentiments voiced, along with an attempt to convince the reader through the use of highly persuasive language. The reaction of the audience to the sermon is positive.

Soon, however, the minister changes his mind, vigorously repudiating the substance of his own sermon, again without any obvious undercutting of his opinions by narrative devices.

I know it's what the boys will call a hell of a sermon. That is what they looked like -- all of them except Jimmie Hannah, and he looked like a Pharisee on his way to the gates of Paradise, watching the other fellows on their way to Hell. But the kick in it was that he evidently thought that I was going with him. He praised my sermon, Miss Mary. Praised it as a 'powerful and appropriate discourse', and then I saw what a sulphurously conceited, self-righteous ass I had made of myself. And when I got among the rest of them and saw them in pursuit of massed money -- poor devils -- and all of them struggling with more or less success to worry a living out of their fishing nets and their hillside farms, and especially when I saw that they were all chiefly anxious about Jock and wanted to tell me so, I tell you, Miss Mary, I wanted to crawl away under the church steps and howl.⁴

The reader is presented with a sermon of powerful and apparently endorsed opinions which is held from him at arm's length by its mode of presentation. The delivery is effective, yet the reader is not permitted to judge it for himself. Minor characters provide a subsequent voice of support, yet the speaker himself repudiates his opinions in the face of this support.

The same fictional voice is here indicating two different and apparently mutually exclusive paths of

interpretation. One way out of the paradox is to assume that the two points of view are only "apparently" exclusive, and to find a method by which they can be effectively reconciled. The minister's views can be seen as a progression, in which certain steps may well be seriously flawed, yet legitimate as stepping stones toward the truth. The problem with the opinions stated in the first sermon is that they are too simplistic and comprehensive. However correct the minister's moral outrage at the inadequacies of the current economic system may be, and however effectively that message may have been conveyed, he realizes that he should not have applied this outrage so universally, seemingly condemning all those who desire money, however real their needs. From his initial perception of injustice and legitimate critical attitude come a greater understanding. The Arm of Gold suggests that the stock market is a necessary and vital tool of economic development, but only when its activities are pursued within certain reasonable limits, outside of which it quickly becomes sinful and even criminal. These limits are related to ideas of "real value" and "fair profit", and Connor suggests that when a man commits suicide over financial losses suffered in speculation outside of these limits, the victor in the capitalistic competition should be considered a murderer. If the ambiguity of the first sermon scene can be reconciled, this ambiguity is still evidence of a certain subtlety of technique.

In the second sermon scene, Connor seems seriously concerned for the first time with the reputation of religion among non-religious people. The minister is inspired to write a sermon on the origins of the Bible out of a sudden realization that most intelligent atheists and agnostics hold organized religion in contempt for its belief in the literal truth of miraculous events. The minister composes a lesson on Biblical scholarship in the form of a sermon, explaining that modern analysts deal in terms of symbol and theme, not irrational literal-mindedness. He will show that the Bible has grown from collections of folk tales, songs and word-of-mouth transmissions over generations, not every word necessarily representing verifiable historical fact. This path necessarily leads to controversy, as the minister will appear to yield to the criticisms of non-believers and to deny the truth and revelation of the Bible in order to placate the fears of scientific preconceptions. Nevertheless, the minister believes that he must write this sermon for the sake of the truth and for the sake of his religion's reputation. The drawback for the novel is that much of its later sections come to read almost as an apology and a plea to be taken seriously. The boundless confidence and religious enthusiasm of the earlier novels are sadly missing, replaced by lengthy explanations and rationalizations of faith.

In the second sermon scene, an interesting picture of the act of sermon writing is provided. The original inspiration for the sermon comes from informal conversation with the intelligent outsiders. The scriptural grounding for the idea is pondered quietly in contemplation of a natural setting, a clearly Romantic image. In his research, the minister discovers that the modest length of a sermon does not easily lend itself to the voluminous detail that an authoritative study of an important theological question requires.

The concern with a sermon's ability to handle length and detail has become a persistent and consistent element in the sermon scenes of Connor's novels. The ministers in Black Rock, The Sky Pilot and The Prospector seldom attempt sophisticated treatments of theological issues, relying more on emotionally-felt truths supported by Biblical stories and personal anecdotes. The discussion of justification in The Man from Glengarry lasts two weeks, and each sermon gives birth to the great revival, which requires nightly meetings to discuss all its implications. In the first sermon scene of The Arm of Gold, the minister is able to outline all of his opinions on an important matter, only to conclude later that they have been too limited and simplistic. In Connor's fiction, ministers are consistently forced either to simplify the issues, to spread out the issues over the course of

multiple sermons, or to resort to extra-sermonic, supplemental forums to expand upon sermonic introductions to subjects. The last path is one taken in the second sermon scene of The Arm of Gold. An entire sub-plot is devoted to showing the minister doggedly organizing Bible study classes to expand upon the ideas of his controversial address. Although the sermon is the most useful and available means for educating people on matters of faith, it is also sadly inadequate for the most serious discussion of the most serious issues. Some longer format is required.

The Arm of Gold's second sermon deals with the nature of Biblical interpretation and the origins of the Bible itself, emphasizing the element of story-telling. The controversial sermon makes uncomfortably clear the evolution of a series of folk stories and traditions into the modern Bible, which taken by Christianity as revealing the fundamental nature and will of God. This emphasis is instantly criticized by many parishioners as borderline heresy, especially by those who feel safe and secure in a belief in the Bible as the single, unified word of God, divinely inspired and absolutely and literally correct. The difficulty is best summed up at a study meeting shortly after the sermon. Several people try to coax their minister into a simple answer to the question of his personal belief in the Bible. The stories in the Bible

are held to be most assuredly "true", but with the concept of truth understood in a particular and distinctly literary way. The Bible, in short, contains truth in much the same way as fiction contains truth, not necessarily in a literal-minded, scientific or purely historical sense, but in revealing the fundamental relationships of the universe in a culturally significant fashion emblematic of the noblest dimension of the human spirit. The sermon is based on the story of creation in Genesis. This story is held to be important because it emphasizes an accepted truth in a way that people can understand -- that the universe has not come into being of its own initiative or by the mindless working out of natural laws, but by the direct and conscious will of a personal deity. The length of time for the creative process and the order in which the various elements came into being could vary widely from the account in Genesis without undermining the story's basic principle. Thus, the Bible's deep, philosophical and emotional "truth" is not compromised, regardless of the falling into place of mere petty facts.

In his autobiography, Gordon tells how, at a university lecture, his own opinions were formed on the subject of the Genesis story.

He (Prof. A.B. Davidson) is not "Saul" today, but on the first chapter of Genesis, the Mosaic authorship of which he dismisses with a single phrase, not scornful. The old "Rabbi" is often incisive in his criticism, but never scornful.

"The author is a poet with a poet's gift of vision and vivid expression ... He has a vision of God, the Author of Life and of all things, engaged in His work of making a universe ... The author, though a poet, is a realist. He says exactly what he means. He pictures God working as a man might work at this day's labor. When he says 'day', he means 'day', not an aeon; when he says 'water', he means 'water', not 'mud. He is writing simply and truthfully, gentlemen, of the things which, as a poet, he sees".

Thus in five minutes, my difficulties as to Mosaic authorship are blown away. What simple and blessed relief to troubled souls who have been torn between loyalty to an impossible theory of plenary inspiration and loyalty to a simple and obvious truth.⁵

Whereas Connor emphasized in earlier novels the importance of storytelling in making Biblical lessons vivid and comprehensible to the mind of modern man, here he takes the process back one step and points out the essential storytelling nature of the lessons themselves.

Indeed, the pains taken by Connor in this regard are too great, with the overall effect of The Arm of Gold hampered as a direct result of the author's pedantic dwelling on an issue not central to the main plot and theme. But if Connor departs from artistic unity for the sake of didacticism, the didacticism is uniquely artistic. Throughout his novels, Connor has been interested in the question of truth. He often mentioned this as the major characteristic of his literary efforts.

The story of the book (Black Rock) is true, and chief of the failures in the making of the book is this, that it is not all truth.⁶

The tales of the lumbermen in The Man from Glengarry are from real life.⁷

All that is set down in Glengarry School Days is true.⁸

The story of the football coach in Ralph Connor's Prospector gives a true picture of a terrific struggle ...⁹

Connor had no difficulty in reconciling the ideas of "making up a story" and "telling the truth" in his own writing, often relying heavily on his own background and personal experiences in order to cement whatever conflicts are inherent in this dichotomy. It is not surprising, therefore, to discover that Connor's Biblical criticism strives to reconcile these differences. His novels often appear much as the Biblical stories which his ministers relate in sermon scenes. They are entertaining and didactic, rowdy and moral, fictional and documentary, fanciful and vivid, romantic and realistic, mere trifling stories and yet fundamentally designed as the bearers of truth. The Bible study sections of The Arm of Gold, perhaps slow-paced and tedious to the modern reader, gain lasting importance from how they explain, not Biblical scholarship, but Ralph Connor.

The Arm of Gold makes a greater use of indirection in sermon scenes than the other Connor novels did. The first

scene is primarily important in the potent ambiguity of the value of its "powerful and appropriate" message. It also has minor significance as an illustration of some of the author's ideas on the art of public speaking. The second sermon scene reveals a profound concern with the reputation of religion, provides a portrait of sermon writing, and emphasizes the storytelling nature of the Bible itself, an emphasis which in turn provides a useful commentary on the nature of Connor's own art.

NOTES

- 1 The Arm of Gold, pp. 103-04.
- 2 Ibid, p. 105.
- 3 Ibid, p. 104.
- 4 Ibid, p. 108.
- 5 Postscript to Adventure, p. 88.
- 6 Black Rock, p. 7.
- 7 Postscript to Adventure, p. 13.
- 8 Ibid, p. 16.
- 9 Ibid, p. 43.

Chapter Seven

CONCLUSION

From the beginning of his career through to its end, Ralph Connor displays a preoccupation with the subject of religion in his popular fiction. This fact is to be expected, given his occupation as a minister. In attempting to evaluate the artistic balance in Connor's work, five novels have been considered, particularly with respect to their sermon scenes. The first two are simple, episodic tales of western missionary work. The third, more sophisticated, deals with the Glengarry region of Connor's own childhood, and places religion in a more subordinate but still significant role. The fourth novel is a throwback to the first two in many ways. All these works date from the early years of Connor's career. By way of contrast, in The Arm of God, the theme is social and the style more indirect, despite the prominence of another minister as the main character. Some conclusions may now be drawn.

There is an "art" of Ralph Connor. He makes a concerted effort to devise the most artistically valuable works his abilities and didactic purposes allow. This position is by no means to suggest that the eternal literary goals of "teach" and "delight" are always held perfectly in balance by the author, as even a cursory glance reveals that they are not. As examples, the conversion of the moneyloving elder in The Arm of Gold is

decidedly forced, and The Prospector, in its enthusiasm for showing the efforts of missionaries in a positive light, substantially copies situations from The Sky Pilot. It would be equally incorrect, though, to suggest that Ralph Connor is purely a moral lecturer with no literary sensibility or artistic control. He often displays restraint, quiet dignity, simple and forceful clarity and, when required, even deliberate ambiguity. He does not fall into the trap of allowing his moral purpose to take over his narrative voice in the sermon scenes, the sections of his novels where this danger is presumably the greatest. He does not trumpet his religious opinions through his minister-protagonists in pages of purely heavy-handed oratory. Rather, indirection is always present in these scenes and, in one novel, it is even taken to uncomfortable extremes. Where ministers' words are reported directly, they are so reported for what appear to be dramatic reasons. Sermon scenes are never included gratuitously to influence the opinions of the reader in ways unrelated to the novels in which they appear. (The Biblical scholarship sermon in The Arm of Gold is a possible exception to this rule.) In almost every example, the existence of the scene can be justified by the themes, situations and characters of the novel. The scenes are always vivid, usually containing colourful and often humorous details about the audience as well as the speaker and his message. As a minister, Connor is clearly

writing about what he knows, and always manages to do so with a forceful and gentle touch.

Connor's novels do exist, to a large extent, as supports and vehicles for his religious beliefs. Black Rock, The Sky Pilot, and The Prospector illustrate the importance of missionary work, The Man from Glengarry illustrates individual success through religious faith and honesty in business and The Arm of Gold comments on economic morality and the nature of the Bible. But Connor uses his religious convictions to enrich, enliven and support his novels. Black Rock, The Sky Pilot, The Prospector or The Man from Glengarry, thoroughly stripped of its sermons scenes and lively and positive moral content, would be a poorer novel. The Arm of Gold has more of a social than a religious purpose, and might more easily withstand drastic surgery. In terms of tone, these scenes and novels continually show a marked preference for calm logic or gentle emotion over excited rhetoric and sectarian sabre-rattling. The result is that one need not be a practising Prebyterian, only a reasonable man, in order to enjoy the novels of Ralph Connor. Sincerity of moral purpose usually co-exists with a frequent, if not universal, subjection of didacticism to artistic ends.

It is clear that no other single aspect of successful preaching in these novels is as important as Connor's

general affirmation that the gift of the story teller and the gift of the preacher are akin. This idea can be seen in the personal testimony of Black Rock, the Biblical recreation of The Sky Pilot, and the pivotal General Assembly speech in The Prospector, along with the example of the magus' tale in The Angel and the Star. The Arm of Gold displays Connor's persistent attempt to make clear the storytelling roots of the Bible, the written basis of his world outlook. Furthermore, this deliberate coupling of effective narrative skills and powerful didacticism helps explain Connor's involvement with the novel form long after the famous Black Rock agreement had been concluded and long after any personal ambition for literary fame had been satisfied by the resounding international success of his first three novels. Connor provides lessons for his readers, realizing that the best way of teaching these lessons is by illustrating them through entertaining and well told stories, complete with noble actions, powerful emotions and even exciting scenes of violence and conflict. In this light, the seeming exception of The Man from Glengarry becomes more understandable. There is no storytelling element in this novel's sermon scenes. The novel itself, however, is a thrilling story of the moral development of an ideal man, the implications of which are clear to any reasonably intelligent reader. The novel's secondary purpose, religious inspiration, becomes more effective because it is

secondary, carried along by the author's primary focus and care of craftsmanship with a well developed story. The telling of stories may be considered "trifling" when composing complex arguments on the doctrine of justification, but the telling of stories is not dismissed for the more general purposes of influencing a readership's attitudes and preparing their minds for the emotional acceptance of the positive, redemptive and reconciling qualities of Christianity.

Connor is a didactic artist, seeking nothing less than the moral and intellectual improvement of his readers. He seems to realize that the best way to deliver his messages to a large and heterogeneous public is illustration through the polished telling of wholesome, entertaining and inspiring stories. Connor's novels, a series of extended sermons on various topics and issues, make potent use of the deliverer's narrative abilities in order to inculcate their views in the reader's emotionally receptive and sympathetic mind.

Connor's art consists of his ability to marry purpose with style, and to spin morally uplifting stories with colour, vigour, humour and some elements of technical sophistication so that the message does not entirely overwhelm its amusing and popular medium. Connor does not always succeed at this daunting task; where he fails, he tends to fail in a rather spectacular fashion. But he was

not trying to write on purely aesthetic grounds. If we grant the existence of a mildly symbiotic relationship, in which the sturdy moralism and religious spirit of these novels aid their intellectual depth and universal significance as well as their sense of direction and emotional appeal even as they, in turn, aid the dissemination of Connor's beliefs, then we may conclude that there is ultimately more balance in Connor's work than is immediately evident. A study of sermons and sermon scenes in five novels by Ralph Connor reveals the peaceful and often mutually beneficial co-existence of art and didacticism, to a greater extent than is sometimes assumed.

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