

FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE

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WHEN broadcasting on Canadian literary criticism, Frederick Philip Grove said that a writer whose work met no critical response was as one speaking into a void, "uncertain to whose capacity to adjust his utterance." Then in an article in the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, for July, 1938, he reveals his estimation of the Canadian "void" into which his own writings have fallen for many years. Mr. Grove states that his "better books" (this of course is his own ranking of them) remain unknown, while his second best have been successful for wholly irrelevant reasons. Such results have come about, he considers, because his public is "ignorant, cowardly and snobbish . . . and a non-conductor of any sort of intellectual current."

When an author frequently spoken of as "one of the small company of Canadian writers of the first order", and who has given "forty years of endeavour" to interpreting Canadian life in Canadian fiction, has come to such a painful conclusion about his readers, it is high time some one of them would try, as clearly as is possible in a few magazine pages, to indicate why his Canadian public prefer the books of his they do prefer, and to show that there may be some reasons found for their choice other than "ignorance", "cowardice", etc. It is always possible that the subject matter and its interpretation, together with the style of the writing, may have an important part in the forming of the public verdict on any given book. It may turn out that the public recognize a truth and beauty in his better books (according to their ranking of them) which they find lacking in others, quite irrespective of the time and labour the author spent upon them. Or it may be that there is a repetition of material; in which case his public naturally chooses the book giving it with the least wayward bias, or philosophic ponderosity, or accumulation of prosaic facts. In other words, it is time to find out why the public like his things they like, and what they are.

Frederick Philip Grove's first published books, *Over Prairie Trails* (1922) and *The Turn of the Year* (1923), are a fitting overture to all his writings. In them are heard his dominating themes and sentiments. The subject-matter of the first is found in seven intimate drives the author with us, his readers, takes "in

the southern fringe of the great northern timber expanse"—a district which later affords a setting for various parts of his novels. We shall not have accompanied Mr. Grove very far before we discover we are on no expedition to get acquainted with our fellow-men, or to take any cognisance of them. We shall have no genial give and take, passing the time of day with residents or fellow-travellers, no humorous stories or sad tales connected with this one or that one we meet. On the contrary, we find ourselves taken up, as it were, into a travelling hermitage and enjoying a holiday away from our kind.

When on one unfortunate occasion our driver's nerves had become broken, and it was necessary for him to spend the night at a farm by the road, the incident requires only the following space:

"I drove into the yard of the farm where I had seen the light, knocked at the door, and asked for and obtained the night's accommodation for myself and for my horses.

"At six o'clock next morning I was on the road again."

That ends that.

To gain more specific ideas as to what Mr. Grove gives and does not give, let us place beside this little interruption of a night's hospitality, as it drops out of his story, the way it would be taken up into Mr. W. H. Blake's *Brown Waters*, for example. It would have afforded Mr. Blake an opportune peg for a genial anecdote or for a "homey" picture of the inhabitants of that farm on that stormy night, or for some curious local legend or family history revealing the outlook of the people and passing into his possession through this accidental visit; and finally, next morning, when again we were on the road with him, it would have been with backward turning thoughts. In some way or other, the response of these people to the extra work which had been thrown upon them at the close of a long and probably busy day would have given us some clearer insight into what life meant and how it was faced in that particular part of Manitoba.

True, the subject-matter of Mr. Grove's essays jealously excludes human intrusion—unless as a point of harmonious picture interest in the landscape in *The Turn of the Year*—and this particular occasion could not very well have been made an exception. But the point is, this very exclusion of human interest is the characteristic of Mr. Grove's most personal books. Later, when we are reading his novels dealing with life in this

Manitoba settlement, the remembrance of how unconsciously, how obliviously he turned his back on all human intercourse will be a help in explaining some of their limitations.

Again, we shall not have accompanied Mr. Grove very far until we discover how intensely absorbed he is in the transient natural phenomena taking place in the world about him. He seldom takes a sweeping view out towards the horizon. It is upon what is close beside him, what may be scrutinised with the greatest care and detail, that he likes to exercise his thought. He then searches to discover the truest word in which to pass his experience on to us. His description of hoar-frost-laden woods is an illustration, but too long to quote here in full. It begins:

Oh, the surprising beauty of it! There stood the trees, motionless under that veil of mist, and not their slenderest finger but was clothed in white. And the white it was! A translucent white, receding into itself, with strange backgrounds of white behind it—a modest white, and yet full of pride. An elusive white, and yet firm and substantial. The white of a diamond lying on snow-white velvet, the white of a diamond in diffused light. None of the sparkle and colour play that the most precious of stones assumes under a definite, limited light which proceeds from a definite, limited source. Its colour play was suggested, it is true, but so subdued that you hardly thought of naming or even recognising its component parts. There was no red or yellow or blue or violet, but merely that which might flash into red and yellow and blue and violet, should perchance the sun break forth and monopolise the luminosity of the atmosphere. There was, as it were, a latent opalescence.

And every twig and every bough, every branch and every limb, every trunk and every crack even in the bark was furred with it. It seemed as if the hoar frost still continued to form. It looked heavy, and yet it was nearly without weight. Not a twig was bent down under its load, yet with the halo of frost it measured fully two inches across.

There are many accurate, delicate details recorded here: "It looked heavy, and yet it was nearly without weight. Not a twig was bent down under its load." And yet it is impossible to read such a length of lines without feeling the tendency to overdo which is latent in it. The virtuosity of such a passage, the calculation, the elaboration of such a delicate natural thing jars on one as the rhetorical repetition of the word "white" comes to do. It is the kind of picture which needs only one apt line or word of poetic insight to kindle the imagination of the reader to recreate it for himself. In *The Yoke of Life*, Mr. Grove himself has this sentence:

As the picture which he had seen decomposed itself into its elements, Len felt sorry with that sadness which overcomes us when we see or hear a beautiful marvel rationally explained.

Mr. Grove holds us wholly intent on a very narrow world, for it is only a limited field could come into such a scrutinising ken. Still, all the time we feel there is at the back of his interest a deep realisation of the vast universe which envelops us. We might take, for example, first his remarks on the "exfoliation" of the snow-drifts:

Strange to say, this very exfoliation gave it something of a quite peculiarly desolate aspect. It looked so harsh, so millennial-old, so antediluvian and pre-Adamic! I still remember with peculiar distinctness the slight dizziness that overcame me, the sinking feeling in my heart, the awe and the foreboding that I had challenged a force in nature which might defy all tireless effort and the most fearless heart.

Again, in *The Gloom of Summer*, he has been describing the forest through which the road ran—its denseness, the loftiness of the trees, the tangle of underbrush, the swampy earth—when suddenly he turns aside thus:

Dark, unknown, gloomy, the shade of night seemed to crouch in these woods, ready to leap out on the clearings and the road, as soon as the sun should sink, threatening with incomprehensible potentialities. . . . I could not get rid of the feeling that they (these woods) were not a monument of the intensity of life so much as rather one of everlasting death itself.

Considering the trend of passages like these, the mysterious sense they disseminate that we are wrapped round by immeasurable and impenetrable elements of creation, and then remembering the determined interest in conditions immediately beside us in both time and space to which Mr. Grove holds us, it would seem as if we distinctly heard him command: "Occupy yourself with this, poor, helpless, puny human atom that you are, because it is all that is given you to know."

In his chapter "A Call for Speed" are a few sentences which throw light on this side of his thought. They begin:

Most serious minded men at my age, I believe, become profoundly impressed with the futility of "it all".

Again, in his poem *Science*, he dwells on a slightly different aspect of the same idea. "Within a lightless cave," "a sightless elf", who, however, inherits from remote ancestors a knowledge

of the sun, gropes and dreams and puzzles his exploring way. He succeeds in finding food for his body only, the longing of his breast is unfed. Further search is but torture, for it brings no light. Nothing within his world corresponds to his dream and wish and hope. Finally the poem ends with these lines:

Such is, O God, man's high exalted state,
The dignity with which he was endowed
When he emerged from chaos inchoate,
Erect, celestial-eyed, and astral-browed.
Yet will he, God, go on and build his dream
And in mute censure hold it up to Thee.
Perhaps when he has perished, his frail scheme
Will serve as model to new worlds to be.

If these lines speak Mr. Grove true, he looks upon life as something man must be "deluded into living on." Conrad has a phrase which from this point of view describes the armored protection against life Mr. Grove reveals in his work: "The detached curiosity of a subtle mind, and the high tranquillity of a steeled heart."

But this is not the right note to leave sounding as these books of beautiful word pictures are closed. The rich, musical, polished prose tempts one to make many and long quotations. The whole series of evening, sunset, and twilight scenes called *The Harvest* might be quoted to show how we are allowed to see through a very artistic and cultured eye the full gorgeousness of hue and shade in earth and air and cloud. Then, as the climax on this sloping field, passing into the shadows of evening while yet the heavens are full of light, there come two black horses drawing a wagon with a hayrack and a single man. This man, his wagon, his team, etched against that golden west, make a picture Millet himself might have wrought. And Mr. Grove's method of depicting the man has not a little in common with that master's method. He shows him to us doing his work, lifting his sheaves with his fork and building his load with such a rightness of the worker's movements—of a practised good worker's movements—that all weight, all motion in the picture and the posture are most satisfyingly right. This scene ends as follows:

And when he picked up with his fork what he intended to lift, I could only marvel at his strength and skill. Slowly, without hurry, but also without waste of time, he would force the fork with its tremendous load up, with a steady exertion, till he held the handle high overhead; and then he would throw the sheaves off

with the slightest of jerks so that they fell just where he wanted them. . . . His body seemed to shorten and to broaden when he did that; and never did I see a wrong move or a lost motion, never hurry, never delay.

Settlers of the Marsh, a novel, was Mr. Grove's next book. It has the same Manitoba district for its background, and a young Swede immigrant—a native country man—for its hero. Mr. Grove had thus material which he understood perfectly. The opening up of this novel leaves nothing to be desired. There is a rightness about the descriptions and a harmony between them and the undertone of mood and feeling. Mr. Grove introduces his hero, Niels Lindstedt, a strong, well-built, quiet chap, and his guide and friend Lars Nelson, in a natural way. They are pushing along from the end of rail to the farm on the edge of the bush, thirty miles distant, where they are to dig a well. The hard work and its deadening effect, which are to be emphasized in the life before them, are foreshadowed by this long tramp. And there is also foreshadowed that almost passive "stick-to-it-iveness" which will characterise their acceptance of New World conditions and summarise, in their limited view, the complete fulfilling of their own duty in the life of the community around them.

There is no forcing of the description of this walk, no heaping up of hardship. It is direct, and stamped by truth. They set out late in the afternoon, in the teeth of a cold November snow-storm. We enter fully with them into the steady uphill push against the north-west blast. As night fell and the trail drifted in, "the very ground under foot seemed to slide to the south-east." When alone on the road, lost and bewildered by the dark and the storm, "both would have liked to talk, to tell and to listen to stories of danger, of being lost, of hairbreadth escapes, . . . but whenever one of them spoke, the wind snatched the word from his lips and threw it aloft." Such phrases of imaginative nicety add beauty to the truth.

The same naturalness marks an interesting account of their early days. Their thrifty progress, their schemes and dreams are convincingly set forth. There is a quiet, purposeful feeling of well-being and satisfaction with their lot, and what they are going to be able to do, which is characteristic of the serious-minded young working-man who sees his way clear to make and to save money. There is no bright, gay side, however, to these Swedes. There is no humour about them, no knocking of fun and a laugh out of the accidents of the day. There is nothing

but their prosaic plodding and gathering of gear, each year a little ahead of the last, and all most gratifying to young men who have never known the thrill of possession before.

So far this circumscribed study is thoroughly well done, and written in a style exactly suited to it, quiet, simple, precise, and with besides an undertone of understanding sympathy running through it. But the author at length finds he must broaden out his hero's life, if his book is to be anything beyond a commentary on working conditions in a rather poor section of country. This is not easy because Niels, while attractive-looking, energetic, and intelligent, is devoid of that interest which a copious outpouring of the gifts of the spirit or the intellect would give to him. To carry on his life successfully in the same vein, the author would require to be very familiar, one might almost say intuitively and lovingly familiar from childhood, with such prosaic surroundings and passive prosaic lives.

But this familiarity with the lives and thoughts of humdrum, ordinary, "low-brow" folk is what Mr. Grove's birth and training did not give him, and the interests and moods of the grown man could not cultivate. From this point of view he has written a little story, *Drama at the Crossroads*, which throws a helpful light on him and his methods, as indeed do many passages of *Fruits of the Earth*, but it is not so easy to deal with them in brief space. *Drama at the Crossroads* gives an admirable insight into what takes the place of sympathetic understanding for him. It is a description of the various buyers and sellers at a small prairie shop of an Armenian Jew during the Saturday evening that his daughter eloped with a young farmer. The picture, as far as Mr. Grove makes it, is authentic beyond doubt, but the little glimpses given of himself are what interests us here.

In the early stages of the setting, the author has sauntered away some miles from the scene of action, "and squatted on the flank of the ridge looking out into the calm of the wilderness." "I sat for hours". Then, as he turns back, the passing of the Jew on his light wagon piled high with goods leads him to make this reflection:

"Old Kalad, the fat, serious-minded grabber of the pennies of the pioneers that were hidden in the bush, had suddenly something heroic for me—like a conqueror who settles in the wilderness to fight its limits back."

Such was his frame of mind preparatory to getting into understanding fellowship with the prairie folk who would gather that evening.

Once back in the shop, he cannot make himself at home, he cannot drop into easy and familiar relations with any one. At one minute "not wishing to intrude," at another "in order not to disturb", . . . "I went back outside and roamed for hours." During that ramble he heard a laugh from the store, and felt "as if this world which lay spread out before me were not made for that laugh—this world with its moon and its stars, with the sigh of the woods, and the cool breath of the night."

However, "since the mosquitos were troublesome," he went in again and "drifted about listening." It is beyond doubt to such drifting times we owe the well-chosen descriptive phrases with which he often memorably delineates his men and women. Yet it is not a method to bring him understanding. His own words describing Ellen, in *Settlers of the Marsh*, give the result perfectly:

She gave a level, quiet look. . . it did not establish a bond, it held no message, neither of acceptance nor of disapproval. . . it was an undisguised, cool, disinterested scrutiny.

Having this key, we understand what Mr. Grove may see and what he will have to leave out. Against such scrutiny all human beings lock their breasts.

But to return to Niels now, with our added insight from the *Crossroads Drama*. His creator has carried him along his prosaic way as far as he has knowledge of that type—he has depicted his working life. Now to broaden out his study he marries Niels, forges off on another trail, completely changes the tone of his book, alters with it the style of his writing, and the result is that the account of Niels's life ceases to ring true. It becomes incredible.

A film-picture-like succession of scenes tell of Neils's married life. They are written up in their more lurid moments by inverted, artificial captions like this: "On a silken bed, upstairs in the house, there lay a woman, it is true. . . ." This ends with Neils shooting his wife and spending six years in the penitentiary. He returns home then and marries Ellen, which was his fore-ordained fate from the earliest pages of the book. They then go and live the life they would have lived had the melodrama episode never entered—but Mr. Grove leaves that story to our own imagination. The educated, European Mr. Grove, accustomed from childhood to a different world, had a traveller's and an observer's trained eye for certain aspects of the new life about him on the prairies. But for fathoming the inner feelings

of such people he had neither the long and instinctive insight gained by acquaintance with them from childhood to guide him, nor had he the natural interest to direct his observations deep enough in worlds outside his limits.

No doubt an author has a perfect right to demand that anything he wishes may happen in his story. Because an incident is preposterous, is no reason to exclude it. But equally just is the reader's demand that everything has to be credible, given the characters the author has chosen. Everything has to be made possible. And this is what Mr. Grove fails to do in his continuation of *Settlers of the Marsh*, and in his other novels once his own firsthand knowledge and the careful observations he made as an eye-witness come to an end.

How incredible is this situation: This young man Niels has for several years been a hardworking, ambitious, sensitive chap, forming his own ideals of home and spending himself generously to do his part in bringing them about. At the same time he has been cherishing in his heart his own simple, characteristic romance. Again, he has been delineated as an alert, wide-awake young workman, who has good natural ability—he mastered English easily by spending a winter in the neighbouring town. It has been pointed out how much his insight and understanding have been increased by the fact that he has migrated and adapted himself to a new land. Yet this is the man we are to believe married the notorious woman of the settlement, Mrs. Vogel, who had been known to him since his first Sunday there. Even more, she had been his nearest neighbour, only two miles distant, and Bobby the fifteen-year-old, who worked with him and is represented as of quite secondary general intelligence to Niels, understood fully all about her.

There is another serious and fundamental weakness in the romantic side of Mr. Grove's novels. It is this. Mr. Grove himself has, at heart, no interest in it. He tells us in his article *The Novel*:

I abominate the common love story—the story of prenuptial love, almost as violently as I abhor the gramophone, the telephone, or the radio. In life both young men and young maids are peculiarly uninteresting at the time when they see each other as they are not.

For a reader who has read Mr. Grove's novels before reading this essay, coming on this sentence is like the old story of finding the letters *d o g* printed under the drawing of a dog. Again,

in his essay on *Realism in Literature*, he has two more sentences which might be linked to this first:

He (the author) . . . cannot convincingly represent a character or happening which finds no echo in himself, he delimits his work by his own personality. . . . He cannot reproduce except what was potentially in him.

With this feeling on the subject, he produced in *Settlers of the Marsh* the unreal, sensational scenes between Niels and Mrs. Vogel, and the likewise unconvincing, wooden ones between Niels and Ellen. But poor Ellen is a lay figure always. She exists only in her author's eye. Let us take for example that scene where Niels and Ellen have had that lively, happy walk together across the country, around the school, and finally in fear of a thunderstorm take shelter by a straw stack. Ellen, moved by the onset of the storm or the presence of her lover, rushes to the top of the stack to welcome the wind. How does her creator picture her at this moment—a moment supreme in her relationship with Niels? Are we shown her in a way to bring this home to us? Do we see her face and her figure as her lover Niels would be scrutinising them then to try to find out an answer to some of the silent, unspeakable questions which were thronging both his heart and hers? No. We see her instead as the pictorial artist, Mr. Grove, intent upon describing his storm, sees her. She becomes merely a fine point of interest in the centre of his windswept scene:

Up rises the girl in the storm, holding on to her bonnet with both her hands, leaning back into the wind, her skirt crackling and snapping and pulling at her strong limbs.

Thus the artist "delimits his work by his own personality."

If it is his artist's interest which comes between him and this scene between Niels and Ellen in his first novel, in his second, *Our Daily Bread*, it is his "abomination" of the subject which hurries him scornfully through the chapter named *The Leaven of Sex is at Work*. Herein Mr. Grove accumulated all his courting and marrying, evidently on the principle that if a sufficient number of "peculiarly uninteresting young men and maids" were lumped together and despatched wholesale, something "peculiarly interesting" might be the result—at any rate it would get the whole sorry lovesick business over with quickly for the august author. And so it did, but unfortunately it produced for the reader a similar indifferent, lordly contempt

towards the eight puppets which were jerked into four pairs. So little attention did any one of them attract that beyond a query now and then about which side of his old father's *ego* was supposed to contribute to such a one his individual brand of practical, energetic competence, or of mean-souled selfishness, no one ever considered them. They were throughout personifications, sometimes vivid enough, but they were never flesh and blood.

But it is pleasant to turn from Mr. Grove's treatment of "pre-nuptial love" to his delineation of the old man's character in *Our Daily Bread*. It is a sharp turn. A turn from a theme abhorred to one doted upon, and the reader's interest mounts in accordance.

It is not that the old man's character is a pleasant one to follow. It is the very reverse. But it is that Mr. Grove has herein a problem he finds worth while, and therefore spreads it out before us with detailed, ambitious thoroughness and seriousness which make it not only impressive but often very human. Occasionally when taking his readers into his confidence, Mr. Grove tells them that he has a scent for tragedy, by which he frequently means for failure. And certainly anyone with a scent for failure would have a topic very much to his liking in *Our Daily Bread*. The protagonist, John Elliot, in the last score years of his life, reaps a sorry harvest after living what he conceived to be a life of serving God through all the previous years.

Mr. Grove's problem, then, is so to work out John Elliot's character that his destiny will be seen to have been bound up in it. He does this largely by showing the interplay of character between John Elliot and his ten children. In this study he is more happy in less ambitious, casual lines than in his larger dialogues and set scenes. Whenever lengthy conversation is indulged in, Mr. Grove's limits in the knowledge of human kind make it painfully unreal. In such pages we forget the characters and live with the author. Mrs. Elliot's talks with John and with Isabel before their approaching marriages illustrate this. But John Elliot's brief utterances and meditations, snapped out here and there, have a human, living ring. For example, he was out of sorts with all his children, and then received news that Henrietta had a baby girl and called her Juanita. One can distinctly hear the peevish old man's, "A girl? Juanita? How was that pronounced?"

We also follow John Elliot, quite naturally, considering his years, through much illness and many deaths. And yet,

there are so many such scenes, with unpleasant sickroom details sprinkled about so generously that the novel, with nothing to counteract and soften the effect, take on a morbid atmosphere. Besides, all this accumulation of disease throws so little additional light on old John. He revealed himself once for all in the face of such trials when he received the news of his youngest son's death. In one brief paragraph his creator bares for us his puny heart:

Arthur had died in action. It affected his father strongly. Not that he mourned greatly; he had hardly known the boy; but the first of his children had died! How long did he himself have to live?

Death itself can call forth no warm, loving, unselfish cry from John Elliot. Nothing but a futile little worrying question as to the number of his own days left.

The futility of it all was that in spite of the seemingly endless series of family meetings and of family shiftings, the old man's eyes were never opened to see what a broad, generous, beautiful, unselfish life his might have been, and that he had missed it by his own pettiness. Had he ever caught a glimpse of this rich might-have-been while fumbling along in his ugly present, then the dreary tale of his days would have had significance. John Elliot would have developed soul. As it is, his unavailing old age and final collapse dull the force of the picture. The reader, like his children, has lost interest in him before his end. He is not great enough, he has too meagre an endowment of heart and spirit and intellect for his fate to move one as tragic. A tragedy demands a noble man defeated by ignoble circumstances, whereas John Elliot was a selfish man betrayed by his own selfishness.

It is not necessary to treat at length the third novel, *The Yoke of Life*. It is largely working over the same ground and garnering a poorer crop. Len, the chief figure, has his setting in a regular Grovian family. His childhood is spent in trembling fear of his father and pitying services to his mother, and emphatically the best chapter in the book—indeed the best chapter in all Mr. Grove's novel writing—is the opening one where this is disclosed. In these first pages, Mr. Grove proves that he has an eye so sharp to observe personal traits that it is wholly lack of interest in matters not central to his own serious concerns which prevents his character drawing always attaining this height.

Len as a worker lives in the same prairie land vacuum in which we met Niels. Did space permit, it would be a fruitful

study to compare many passages in *The Yoke of Life* with similar ones from other books. However, one will have to suffice. Take for example the poker game at the camp, and place it beside the game in the bunk-house at MacKenzie's in *A Search for America*. In the bunk-house there is a feeling of reality about the scene. The atmosphere is tense and silent, and the men are alive. In *The Yoke of Life* there is but stagey and melodramatic conversation and atmosphere. Yet it is in basis the same scene. But one convinces; it is given at first hand, with natural narrative. The other is second hand; it is a composite picture made up of various reminiscences and retouches, and put together in such proportions that the life has been dropped out.

Unlike *Our Daily Bread*, a large part of this third novel is concerned with the story of "pre-nuptial love", and again the author's violent abhorrence of his topic brings it to grief. Len as a lover, to borrow the words from his sweetheart's thoughts, is "so ponderous, far-fetched, roundabout," and develops into such a self-centred, selfish cad that it is never possible to accept the idea that he loved Lydia, or indeed to accept him with Lydia at all. So far removed from credible character drawing are Len and Lydia that a reader thinks of them only as some kind of a footnote exercise to illustrate the opinions on proper endings for novels or on realism in literature expressed by Mr. Grove in *It Needs to be Said*. The foundation for their existence has been evolved out of theories, and in no scene does it hold the reader as a page of life and truth.

There is new material to be found, however, in Len the student. Our author has taught boys, and understands how intelligent, sensitive youngsters will rise to a loved teacher's words. In connection with this, the teacher explains to Len his life:

So I became a teacher and worked up in that line. Not because I wanted to make more money, but because I hungered and thirsted after a higher and truer idea of life. That hunger and thirst itself is happiness, Len. We shall never still it. We shall never find truth. But we must strive after it without standing still.

In the undertone here sounds the characteristic message Mr. Grove has for schoolboys old and young. Another expression of it is found in one of the polished musical paragraphs of *Over Prairie Trails*:

I have lived in southern countries, and I have travelled rather far for a single lifetime. Like an epic, stretch my memories into dim and ever receding pasts. I have drunk full and deep from the cup of creation. The Southern Cross is no strange sight to my eyes. I have slept in the desert close to my horse, and I have walked in Lebanon. I have cruised in the seven seas and seen the white marvels of ancient cities reflected in the wave of incredible blueness. But then I was young. When the years began to pile up, I longed to stake off my horizons, to flatten out my views. I wanted the simpler, the more elemental things, things cosmic in their association, nearer to the beginning or end of creation. The parrot that flashed through "nutmeg groves" did not hold out so much allurements as the simple gray-and-slaty junco. The things that are unobtrusive and differentiated by shadings only—grey in grey above all—like our northern woods, like our sparrows, our wolves—they held a more compelling attraction than orgies of colour and screams of sound. So I came home to the north. On days like this, however, I should like once more to fly out and see the tireless wave and the unconquerable rock. But I should like to see them from afar and dimly only—as Moses saw the promised land. Or I should like to point them out to a younger soul, and remark upon the futility and innate vanity of things.

This quotation also affords a very good example of both the most significant and the least significant aspects of his work. It gives an insight into his unusual temperamental nature; it discloses his wide and varied travelling, his cosmopolitan learning, and his elusive aspirations; and it emphasizes his refined artist's eye, and his solitary brooding temper; and yet it reveals with all his learning an empty-handed gleaning of any satisfying philosophy of life.

Considering such extracts, one wonders if Mr. Grove would be a good guide for that "younger soul." Should we not rather leave our children full of the gladness of the world, and not introduce them to its vanities and its sorrows? These will break upon the growing life all too soon. The constant ideal of the glory will be the best antidote in the end to meet the inevitable gloom.

Mr. Grove's next study, *Fruits of the Earth*, seemingly attempts, as did *Our Daily Bread*, to carry on the pedestrian everyday life of a prairie farmer throughout his maturity—the very material, therefore, he shied away from in *Settlers of the Marsh*. As the European-trained Mr. Grove sees this life, it discloses no beauty and no grace, as it would, for instance, to Laura Salverson, steeped from childhood in its sentiment, beauty, and affection. Her page would have both laughter and tears. Nor does this academic man understand the very simple un-

sophisticated rural Manitoba community. But this has been pointed out before.

However, it is not as fiction or a novel Mr. Grove himself intended this book. He considers it as a sort of fictionised economic history of the district. In that light, it would not be very valuable for a research student of the future, who would require a great many more facts and figures to base his own conclusions upon. It thus unfortunately falls between two stools. It is not a novel and it is not history. And moreover it is written in the most pedestrian, unimaginative narrative style of all his books. To use his own adjectives applied to the settlers, his whole chronicle might be called "slow, deliberate, earthbound." So it happens his readers are prone to cry out, like the author himself when overcome by the northern gray: "On days like this, however, I should like once more to fly out and see the tireless wave and the unconquerable rock."

But the book which has been kept for the last, *A Search for America*, is one that has a dramatic, lifelike variety which does not pall. It is a unique *Pilgrim's Progress*, partly autobiographical, partly allegoric, showing how the author's outlook upon life became changed by the encounters he had with all sorts and conditions of men in the United States and Canada.

A brief epitome will make clear how this came about. As he was sailing up the St. Lawrence on his arrival, his ambition was "to found a home and an atmosphere for myself." "*Cicero's otium cum dignitate* was what I desired." But in the experience developed by one job after another and many days jobless, by menial service and shattered hopes and eye-opening by shocks, by earnings and lendings and losses, by the knowledge which came from helping hands and cheating hands, from kindly interest and from contempt, from sickness and pain, from tramping and watching and solitary communings under the stars, and particularly by "sedulous enquiry" day after day as to how the matter stood, there is gained for Frederick Philip Grove a priceless tuition in the ties linking a man to his fellows. Henceforth his demands for life for himself were supplemented by feelings of necessity for sympathy and responsibility towards his fellowmen. And dutifully did he try not to slur over this lesson. But it was a hard saying for the born student, for the fastidious classic scholar, for the aloof solitary tramp who writes explicitly and implicitly on every page, "I love nature more than man."

The result was that there were from now on two Mr. Groves, and they are never wholly reconciled to each other. There is first the self-disciplined Mr. Grove, the teacher, the champion, the counsellor, and the guide of his less able fellow-immigrants. So earnest has he been about this that for some thirty years it has been one of the chief factors determining his habitation and avocation.

And secondly there is the European-trained Mr. Grove—the cultured, widely-read student, the sensitive artist, sufficient unto himself, yet eager in himself to create in literature what he confidently feels he can do and what, when done, will be of value to his fellowmen. He is an accurate and delicate observer within the limits of his academic interests, and a pondering philosopher, who, however, often contents himself, in this field, with inexplicit words which he would cast aside impatiently as most inadequate were he in his rôle of observer trying to catch some transient phase of a fog or mist or other natural phenomenon. This man wishes to be solitary and laborious. He would follow cheerfully Emerson's command: "Go cherish your soul; expel companions; set your habits to a life of solitude." And likewise would he believe the promise:

Then will the faculties rise fair and full within, like forest trees and wild flowers; you will have results which when you meet your fellowmen you can communicate, and they will gladly receive.

And, moreover, this Mr. Grove has not left behind him in Europe the scholarly ambitions of his youth. He is quite fully prepared to aim as high as Emerson demanded:

The public can get public experience, but they wish the scholar to replace to them these private, sincere, divine experiences of which they have been defrauded by dwelling in the street. It is the noble, manlike, just thought which is the superiority demanded of you, and not crowds but solitude confers this elevation.

"It is the noble, manlike, just thought which is the superiority demanded of you." In the patient, thorough finish of his workmanship, in the fastidious rightness and accuracy of his words, phrases, and descriptions, in the sensitive recording and discriminating of the delicately shaded moods of a solitary man, Mr. Grove has given us an example and set a standard of superiority which even to himself—his own best critic and his own best guide—must give great artistic satisfaction.

Again, if we consider his intentions, his aims, the kind of work he strives to do and the significance of his chosen subject

matter, the words "noble" and "manlike" may indeed be applied. Truth is the aim and interest of his art. But each of us sees truth through the haze of his own temperament. And for Mr. Grove, ever baffled by the two sides of his own being, the finest content he can put into his writing is that all experience is full of the sighing of the prisoner of the soul who finds no respite in perpetually seeking for the never found. There is none but his own seeking. As the teacher said to Len, "That hunger and thirst itself is happiness. We shall never still it."

His Canadian readers appreciate Mr. Grove's merits very highly, as witness the unquestioned position they assign him in their literary world. But one thing is clear. His books have limitations, and have been ranked according to them. Hap-hazard as these preferences may seem to the author computing the time and labour which went to the making of his various works, yet they are based on inherent characteristics. *A Search for America*, *Over Prairie Trails*, and *The Turn of the Year*, together with certain chapters from his novels, compose the favourite list. His Canadian public will always welcome, read, cherish, even buy—and perchance beg, borrow and lend—such books as these.