

SOME IMPRESSIONS OF A NEW CANADIAN

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THERE are few rôles a man more enjoys to play than that of the candid critic. To be a "chiel amang ye takin' notes", especially if there is any chance of printing them, is always an attractive occupation. It is true that there are not many more effective ways for securing unpopularity; but that fact does not usually deter artists in the ungenial art of bringing indictment against nations from continuing to indict. The unpopularity which ensues is usually thoroughly deserved. There is nothing more ungracious than to enjoy the hospitality of a country and then to put high lights on that country's possible weaknesses; and it is a serious pity that the charge of so doing can often be laid, with justice, against visitors to the Dominion from the Old Country. Those of us who are of Scottish birth like to think that it is more an English than a Scottish failing, but no doubt we tend to be blind to our own faults. At any rate I, who have lived in Canada for less than three years, and am only beginning to be acquainted with its far distances and extraordinarily complex problems, should dislike intensely to join the army of swift and superior generalizers. Except for fleeting visits to Quebec and one trip each to Winnipeg and the Maritime Provinces, my knowledge of Canada is confined to Ontario,—and what can he know of Canada who only Ontario knows? However, it is impossible to live in a new country without forming impressions. This paper is intended to contain a few of those which seem least likely to be dissipated by a wider knowledge.

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A social writer of eminence in the Old Country once remarked that the chief blot on civilization in Britain was its "towniness of towns." The more I see of Canada, the more the importance of that observation hits home upon the mind. Last year I went, without a break, from Toronto to Manchester in Lancashire. There was only time in Montreal to catch the boat, and in Liverpool to catch the Manchester train, and there were no intervening cities in the North Atlantic. Thus for purposes of comparison

it was a direct transposition from a Canadian to an English city. A more complete contrast could scarcely be imagined. Manchester, indeed, is a much larger place than Toronto, and is part of the most densely populated district in the British Empire; but the difference of atmosphere is not to be explained away by a mere difference in numbers. The one is a city of homes; the other is the very soul of the "towniness of towns." Any one who knows Lancashire will never forget the long dreary rows of characterless houses, the entire absence of greenery, and the all pervading pall of smoke. A Manchester boy was once asked what God made first, and without any hesitation he replied, "bricks." It is a revealing expression of the effect of the "towniness of towns" on a human mind. Now, that discontent-breeding characteristic is largely absent from Canada. Doubtless, the sparseness of Canadian population and the relative smallness of Canada's manufacturing areas have something to do with it; but sane town-planning plays its part, as also does the development of the sky-scraper in the business parts of the city. In Toronto, ten thousand people work daily at the corner of King & Yonge streets. In England they would toil in depressing structures, which would stretch out like the tentacles of an octopus over endless acres where trees should grow. All hail to the sky-scraper! May those who made it lofty make it loftier yet. Whatever the cause may be, Canada has the advantage of great communities which do not divorce their dwellers from that Nature of which they are a part. During the recent strike in Britain, the most serious threatenings of disorder in London came from districts lying east of Liverpool Street and south of Waterloo. Need anyone be surprised? I have no doubt that many who live there have never, in all their lives, seen a green field. The great economist, Alfred Marshall, once declared that he doubted whether the third generation of the pure-bred East Londoner existed. The "towniness" of East London quietly killed him off. Man cannot live by Nature alone, but he cannot live without Nature. If he tries, at the best his soul grows bitter; at the worst, he dies. It is a great thing for Canada that she has cities which are partly silvan and towns wherein trees still grow.

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The second great advantage of Canada, which strikes the newcomer, is that work there is far less "compartmental" than in the Old Country. A man can shift more easily from one class of work to another, and is much less debarred, by the work that he does, from a wide range of social comradeships. It sounds

ludicrous to Canadian ears, but it is nevertheless a fact, that a professional man in Edinburgh could hardly think of placing his son in a shop or store. Since the war, the absurd social distinctions between trade and other types of work, or between wholesale and retail trading, have considerably disappeared; but they still remain. That they were, and are, absurd, no man can deny. It was, for instance, socially eminent to be a wholesale tea or tobacco merchant, and to be a distiller or a brewer was the shortest cut to the peerage; but, on the other hand, to sell boots or blankets or butter across a counter could not be thought of unless a man's father had done the same before him. A Canadian teacher, a few years ago, was visiting one of the great English public schools, and in the innocence of her heart asked the head-master whether he taught agricultural subjects. The expression on his face indicated that he suffered pain. "Madam", said he, "this is a school for the sons of gentlemen." The net result of all this was that in the Old Land the range of choice in work was sadly limited. In Edinburgh, unless a man followed in his father's footsteps, as a lawyer or a doctor, almost the only hope for the sons of professional men lay overseas. Thus the anxieties of parents, and of young men seeking a life work, were greatly increased. But in Canada things are different. Nobody seems to care particularly what a man does, provided he does it decently and that it is honest work; and boys, unbound by social conventions, may more easily follow their aptitude. It seems to me to be an almost incalculable gain, and perhaps explains, in part, why there are far fewer anxious faces in this land than at home. Of course, Canada has its own danger of putting a plutocracy in the place of an aristocracy, which would be leaping out of the frying pan into the fire with a vengeance. But it is a great gain to have put all types of work on the same social level, and it is to be hoped that the mental attitude which this implies will never be lost by Canadians.

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In realms intellectual, however, a credit balance cannot be so easily struck on the Canadian side. Not that anyone would be justified in belittling the intellectual achievement, and, still more, the intellectual promise of this Dominion! But it may well be questioned if interest in things of the mind is here either so widespread or so deep as in the mother country. It has been interesting for a preacher to observe that while the pulpit work is most acceptable which contains the largest amount of thought, at the same time the preacher must not assume the possession of

too much knowledge on the part of his audience. The explanation is, I suppose, that Canadians, engaged in the most testing kinds of business with our neighbours to the south, have had their wits singularly sharpened thereby, and consequently are able to appreciate distinctions and to follow arguments of precisely the same kind that are ordinarily offered to university audiences. I have myself noticed that the sermons most appreciated by Canadian business men are of the same type as those originally prepared for audiences drawn from the University of Edinburgh. Any man who faces a Canadian audience thinking that it is not composed of the clearest kinds of brains will be painfully disillusioned. Lord Morley somewhere observes that he took pleasure in intellectual intercourse with soldiers, because he found their minds so delightfully direct. The same may be said, I think, of the Canadian men of business; minds which possess clarity and directness are clearly of a high order. On the other hand, one is sometimes a little astonished to discover that information, in literature, or as to the structure of the Bible, or as to the facts of the history of the Church or its doctrines, which would be part and parcel of the mental furniture of the ordinary educated person at home, is apparently new to prosperous and cultivated people of the Dominion. The fact is that many Canadians have too little time, or make too little time, to read. It may not be true of Nova Scotia, but it is certainly true elsewhere, that the average private library on this side of the Atlantic is much less considerable than the average on the other side, and that the amount of time given by the ordinary head of a household to sitting at home reading books that matter is much greater in the Old Land. Lord Haldane tells us that he knows a station-master near Haddington who has read all the *Gifford Lectures* from cover to cover. I can guess that his equivalent would be a little difficult to find in Canada. On this side we find the reading of newspapers instead of books, and of magazines in place of literature; with the result of a lack of equipment for the greater enterprises of the State and particularly of the Church.

Now, one reason for that is the entirely honourable one that men who are engaged in the enterprise of bending the resources of a new land to the uses of civilization have not much time to cultivate the intellectual airs and graces. These will come later. Indeed, they are coming greatly already, as the great universities of Canada attest, with their splendid contributions to the development of civilization, noticeably in medicine and architecture. But an additional cause may perhaps be found in an educational

system which does not seem to give that solid grounding which the Old Country affords. This complaint comes not from supercilious observers, but from Canadians themselves; and if it be well founded, the friends of Canada will agree that there is something that needs to be looked to. It would indeed be a disaster, if, with such magnificent material to work on, our children should not obtain that sound basis on which alone great intellectual fabrics can be reared; and it would be additionally grievous if, in the universities, education became too much of a vocational or utilitarian type. Education should never aim, first, at qualifying students directly for their task, but should aim at producing the kind of minds that would be good at any task when they are put to it. Dean Inge says, somewhere, that no one who has been trained in Greek has any excuse for failing to recognize the truth when he sees it. It is a picturesque way of indicating the permanent mental effects of certain types of study; and Canada will be handicapped unless she keeps these permanent effects steadily in her mind all through her educational system. The Old Country is undoubtedly lop-sided and ill-organized in many educational departments; and yet, through its very lack of organization, it possesses educational instruments which are of priceless value. I do not see how schools like the Manchester Grammar School or George Watson's College in Edinburgh could be fitted into a Canadian system; but I cannot imagine a greater boon to Canada than the establishment of a few educational institutions like them. At any rate, it seems to one observer that educational standardizing can go much too far, and that not a few of the best Canadian minds are spending their time organizing when they ought to be thinking or meditating. This certainly applies to a good deal of Canadian church work. Ministers have far too little time to absorb and to brood. They are sometimes too much like the general managers of successful business concerns. In equipment, Canadian church buildings are far in advance of those in the Old Country; in inventiveness and initiative in respect of young people's work, the home churches have much to learn from the Church in Canada; but even to-day, in the ill-equipped, sleepy, unprogressive churches of the Old Land there is a mental and a meditative atmosphere. Seek ye first the spirit of contemplation, and then let equipment and organization be added unto you. This is to seek a pearl of great price. It may be lack of obedience to this command, or simply the natural impetuosity of youth, which makes observers feel that the Canadian Church is in rather too much of a hurry, and is slightly exposed to the danger of obsession by "stunts." It will always remain true

that he that believeth should not make haste, and that the latest craze, whether in things educational or in anything else, may be a craze and nothing more. At any rate, the fact that the theological education of the Old Land has imparted these two pearls of wisdom to Old Country churchmen is not the least merit which the Old Country possesses.

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There is, however, one mark of Canadian intellectual interest which must fill all newcomers with delight, and that is the promise of the cult of beauty in this land. Canadian literature has, no doubt, still to ripen; but already Canadian art is becoming native and distinctive, while in architecture Canada shows promise of taking a place of real nobility. The land itself, with its unique mingling of winter austerity with the red loveliness of summer, is calculated to produce a race of artists in word and paint and stone who can take their place with the best; and already some of the great Canadian buildings are realizing that promise. The fact that the University of Toronto has put up, as its war memorial, a tower of unsurpassed beauty, which serves no end except that of loveliness, is to my mind one of the most significant of Canadian facts. It was the search for beauty, for its own sake, that made Florence so great in the spacious days preceding and during the Renaissance. Giotto's tower, springing like a lily from the earth, serves no utilitarian purpose whatever; but it has made Florence a praise amongst the cities of the earth. That something of the same spirit should display itself in Canada, is a happy augury for future days. When love of beauty and love of truth shall meet together, and patience shall kiss them both, then Canada will become indeed great amongst the nations of the earth, and the nursing-mother of a people who, being the servants of the Ancient Truth and the Uncreated Loveliness, shall be the servants of God.