CURRENT COMMENT

The Spacious Accident.

No one who visits the West can fail to be struck by the greater sense of freedom, of liberation, of spaciousness, as compared with Ontario conditions. Winnipeg is a metropolitan city, with a dignity and atmosphere more suggestive of London and its imperial note than anything in eastern Canada. By contrast, Toronto is a village, Montreal a mere huddle of buildings and Quebec a picturesque memory. Winnipeg is alive, vital, magnetic. There is room for everything but little-mindedness, petty gossip, narrow personal interests, or partisan politics. Ontario must wake up or the drain upon her will be detrimental to her mental development. The progressive elements of the population are attracted westwards, and not altogether for material reasons. Mental environment is of more importance than the older generations have reckoned, and among the factors that aid in the depletion of Ontario this freedom and breadth of view in the West must be given serious consideration. The education systems of the West are attuning themselves to the atmosphere and spirit in which they are developing, and there is an expansiveness about their view which is exhilarating. In Saskatchewan, for example, the school system is elastic, and the only thing really insisted upon is that every child, for its own good, shall learn to speak the English language. The many people of strange tongues and tribes that flock into the province understand the condition. They are not deprived of their own conventions and traditions, the marrow of their bones, their forms of life, as dear to them as life itself. But they must learn English and they find that a great wide door into another world of literature, history and tradition, as human as their own. The Saskatchewan Government had a survey made of the provincial education system two years ago by a New York expert, something on the lines proposed by the Massey Foundation, which the Ontario Government turned down. Ontario has much more need of a survey than Saskatchewan, but the authorities are not so progressive. The University of Toronto may have some excuse through lack of funds for not taking a more active part in the public life of Ontario or of the civic life of the city. There is an aloofness observable and a lack of sympathy which develops a mutual and widening gulf between the University and the public and has its effect upon the students. It should be a way into the social and community life of the province. More often it becomes a way out. In the West there is evidence that the educational institutions are of and for the people, and they gain in popularity accordingly.

Partisanship Is Dead.

Partisanship appears to be dead in Western Canada. Of course there are partisans, but they do not mix with the people, they do not link up with current opinion, and they do not seem to have much influence. What the people want is to have things accomplished. What the partisans want is to win elections and get into power. This leaves the people cold, and the men who are doing things, who have done things, or who show themselves capable of doing things, are receiving support. This new idea of doing what the people want done does not appeal to the old-time partisan. He feels that he should be appreciated for himself alone, and for the time-honored principles which he represents. He resents the intrusion of some upstart who is not even a politician, but offers to go outside all the rules and do things merely because the people want them done. But this is the new fashion in the new world since the war, and if the partisan is to have a hearing at all, it will be on the basis of what he is going to do for the people, definitely and succinctly stated with guarantees of fulfilment, and not on account of what his party did for the last generation. What the result of this may be in the next elections may perhaps be judged, where no action is taken, from what happened in Ontario last October. In the West the people are not thinking in terms of parties but of plans and purposes, and the man who is known to be capable of carrying out a desired purpose will get support. It is probably the most difficult thing in the world to discover the pet purpose of the people, but the man who does so and is known to be capable of realizing it, will be the man of power.

Good Roads in the West.

Good roads is as live an issue in the West as in the East. It is a more difficult problem in a province like Saskatchewan than it is in Ontario, for the reason that settlers in that prairie province squatted themselves down anywhere that took their fancy and in the most irregular fashion without any relation to a possible future scheme of road-building. They sat down on the virgin soil where it looked good, raised three or four thousand bushels of wheat the same season, and their one thought was to get it to market the shortest way. Tracks ran across the prairie to the nearest point of shipment, and when some other fellow squatted down and ploughed up the trail there were complications. Ontario never passed through this phase which the Saskatchewan Government has had to deal with. The roads that have been cannot be wiped out without providing substitute and satisfactory routes. The only roads that the province can build out of its own resources are clay and gravel roads. There is no stone in the province. Where some was found, there proved not to be enough to pave the quarter section on which it was discovered. This constitutes the problem, the lack of material. Macadam is not attempted. Clay and straw are laid on patches of sand as much as fifteen miles across, and many experiments have been made. A patent drag-log of iron drawn by a tractor has proved serviceable, and as long as the roads are dry fairly satisfactory conditions are obtained. But the Ontario farmer may congratulate himself on the excellence of his roads and the abundance of the road-building material at his disposal.

McGill's New Departure.

McGill University's offer of the principalship to General Sir Arthur Currie is distinctly a new departure, and lifts McGill out of the rut of eastern university tradition. Sir Arthur is not a university man, nor is he a man of culture in the academic sense. But he knows men, and the business of a university is to turn out men. The best way to turn out men, according to some, is to stuff them full of Latin and Greek, or of mathematics and physics, or of law and history, or of anatomy and biology, or some other combination not necessarily connected with the struggle for existence ahead of the man being stuffed. There is no doubt about Sir Arthur's ability to pick men, to inspire men, to train them and fit them for work in hand, and make victors of them. That is what counts. Do the men who issue from our university training courses prove victors? Some of them do, but what is the percentage? Many are placed in the firing-line of life who would be better back at the base, better for themselves and for those they have to associate with. The university has yet to deal with the problem, not of eliminating the incompetents, but of finding out the possibilities in them of competence, of selecting and grading them and placing them under such training as will develop the best in them, and enable them to fill positions suitable to their qualifications and with credit to themselves and their sponsors. The square pegs in the round holes are the tragedies of life. Universities should know all about holes and all about pegs. Sir Arthur Currie has collected more knowledge of this than most of us, and the governors of McGill made no mistake in offering him the opportunity to apply his knowledge to the young men who seek the classic shades of Sherbrooke street.

A Martyr or a Candidate.

George Bernard Shaw said that he would not go to the United States because all the people there worth while were put in jail. Among these he included Eugene Debs, who has been incarcerated in the Atlanta penitentiary under war legislation. Morris Hilquist, leader of the so-called Conservative Socialists, declared when the Socialist party's national convention nominated Debs as their candidate for president of the United States in New York recently that it indicated the determination of the party "not to recede one inch from its revolutionary campaign." This may be taken as notice that there is no immediate danger of a Socialist president entering the White House for some time to come. Among reasonable people it has always been held that half a loaf is better than no bread. Such a degree of reason does not exist among the revolutionary parties, most of whom indeed do not agree with each other. The spirit of compromise, which is the true spirit of democracy, the spirit of marriage, the spirit of any sort of union that aims to effect anything—this spirit is not to be found among revolutionaries. Most people have socialistic tendencies. Socialism is nothing more than co-operation on a more or less intimate scale, carrying the family principle into social, municipal and national life. But the revolutionary socialist rebels against restraint or obligation of any kind. Hence free love adherents; hence the objection to all forms of organized government; hence the insistence on the right "to resolute," which these ultra extremists all proclaim. As there is no spirit of compromise there never can be any great degree of adhesiveness among such parties. Like some of the loose chemical compounds, no sooner do they get into combination than they explode, and so divided they fall. Mr. Debs is not likely to be elected, but in many ways he is an admirable figure, and his nomination will no doubt solace him in his confinement. It would be a wise as well as a gracious thing for the Washington Government to turn him loose for his campaign. They would be sure to do so in Britain.

Mexico Ebullient.

It is never easy to say who or what is going on in Mexico. What party government is to Anglo-Saxon countries, revolution is to the Mexican. As soon as a party gets into power in a British state the other party starts constitutional agitation. In Mexico when a President is elected the other candidates always resort, it appears, to plot and conspiracy as the only reasonable or effective means of agitation. If caught, and this adds a pleasurable spice of excitement to the Mexican system entirely lacking in British politics, one is shot. They are electing a new president in Mexico by the popular means of revolution and conspiracy. Just who is conspiring it would be difficult to say, but in a general way everybody not immediately associated with President Carranza. The only way to rule Mexico was by force of arms, in the opinion of the late President Diaz, who was in his way the most successful of all the Mexican presidents. There are many interests at work besides the native Mexicans, and these are in fact largely tools in the hands of outsiders. For years Denver has been the centre of Mexican intriguing, the intention or desire being to annex Mexico to the United States. The principle of self-determination is not supposed to operate here, or if it does it is merely to enable the Mexican to self-determine himself under the Stars and Stripes. Mexico has 12,000,000 and vast resources. Much of the country is not desirable residence territory but more of it is attractive and delightful to a degree. The rich table lands south of Mexico City are particularly pleasant, and wherever there is an agreeable elevation the climate is attractive. It is said that former friends of Diaz are responsible for plots in Paris that precipitated the present situation, but no Mexican ever misses taking a hand in a revolution if he can avoid it.

HOW CAN WE PLOW IF WE CAN'T HARNESS?

THE BRAINBOX

CONDUCTED BY E. GUNN RAMSAY.

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Mr. Citizen of Canada, are you interested in the subject of good roads?

If you own a motor, you most assuredly will be.

If you are not so fortunate, it may be that your interest is none too strong.

Let us take it, however, that you are one of those good fellows who is sufficiently public-spirited to be interested in the things which make for the welfare and betterment of the community generally.

Motorists, after all, are not the only ones who benefit by good roads.

A few weeks ago, I met a man who surprised me with an idea. He was a member of a big automobile manufacturers' concern. If one had thought anything at all about what this man would be chiefly interested in as regards local improvements, surely the subject of good roads might safely be chosen as a topic.

However, his chief theme of conversation was ab ut an effort that is being made by automobile manufacturers to get a standardized depth of wheel rims. We were driving along a country road, where the frost still held sway. It was a pretty bad road, cut up and crossed again and again by the tracks of many wagons, carts and cars. He pointed down. "This is the kind of thing," he said, "we are aiming against." "Bad roads?" "No, too many impressions. If there was a standard wheel rim, the fellow passing along behind could naturally run in the leader's tracks, but as it is, many a good tire is cut up through passing over or being scraped by the deep ruts made by some of the dozens of makes of wheels which pass along this road."

Here was an effort which appeared to be extraordinarily misdirected. Not a word about the building up, the leveling and hardening of the road bed which would make good space for any and every size of wheel, but an apparent disregard of the fundamentally bad conditions, and what seemed an almost impossible attempt to force every make of vehicle to conform to a certain standard.

The picture of that road seemed to the spectator to be a picture of the highway of life.

It was a pretty road, with lovely fields on some sides, a wood on another, trees, a picturesque bit of landscape here and there, sometimes winding, sometimes straight, leading up-hill, stretching onward, full of variety above and around, but underfoot for the most part going was hard. What a picture of life!

Life, sometimes beautiful, sometimes drab, with here an opportunity and there some work, here a resting place filled with things for each and all to do, but at places here and there the roadway is deeply rutted and full of holes.

On the road down which my friend drove, there would be fair stretches where a careful driver might avoid much wear and tear on his tires, but to the unwary, who knew not the twists and the turns, this road might only be taken at some cost to his car.

Yet it might have been kept in repair and built up to make a fair highway for all.

The man driving at my side appeared to be concerned only for the benefit of a certain class of people, those who owned cars. Perhaps one wrongs him in thinking so. This, however, was the impression left by his conversation.

There are people who travel along the highway of life who take various kinds of machinery along with them, machinery to make money, machinery to push their own ideals and ambitions. They, too, have little thought of the road. They see its ruts and imperfections only as something against which they must protect themselves and save their own possessions from harm. Therefore, to them the things of the other fellow traveling side by side, must be made to fit, shaped to stand or fall in the same groove which will suit their accommodation.

Possibly they have no thought that this is a selfish attitude. The road annoys them when they get to these places where ruts appear. It is a nuisance to have to adjust oneself to an impression of this kind, so the solution which suggests itself is to have the other fellows standardize their methods or machinery, in order that their traveling may be made easier.

There is no thought, apparently, of cleaning up the road, of taking out from the pathway of the boys and the girls the hindrances which keep them from making the best of their lives, of mending up the holes in the road, which discourage the task of many a good workman.

They forget that good roads, good highways help to establish the reputation of a town or community.

Good roads are safe roads.

Canada needs them.

The question of good roads should interest all good citizens.

Canada needs good citizens.

To keep clear and to build up the roadway of life, our life, your life, the life of the worker, of every toiler and every child, should be part of your plan.

Don't try to adjust the man to the road, but help so to build up the roadway, that every man may be able to steer himself along it with the same chance of a safe arrival when he comes to "journey's end."

The Quiet Observer

Taxing the Profiteers.

They have been calculating in Britain how best to levy on the war profiteers and how correct are estimates of the war fortunes as figured by officials and experts varying from a minimum of $20,000,000,000 up to $30,000,000,000. One-third of this is in the hands of those who have made sums of from $15,000 to $25,000 apiece. There are 170,000 of these people. The rest of the war wealth has gone to about two per cent. of the nation. Two-fifths of the entire wealth of Great Britain, according to the Board of Inland Revenue, belongs to 73,500 people, and these same people got one-half of the entire war wealth. There is a growing determination that this war-wealth shall make a proper contribution to the revenue of the nation. Opinions differ about the amount, but as only 173,000 people are to suffer the other forty millions are not likely to have much sympathy, and a sum of at least $5,000,000,000 is expected from this source. The Board of Inland Revenue is quite confident of its ability to handle the situation and to collect from anyone that has anything to disgorge.

The War's Mortality.

There are two factors, and very powerful ones, operating in Britain and elsewhere to bring up the profiteers of the war. These are the millions of returned men who gave their time and risked their lives while the profiteers waxed fat; and the others are the millions of relatives of those who fell at the front and who resent the accumulation of what they regard as blood money on the part of those who for the most part made no sacrifices at all. The recent publication of the final statistics of the war mortality shows that in Britain 34,206 officers and 541,229 rank and file are known to be dead and the missing presumed to be dead through lapse of time are 4,190 officers and 96,867 other ranks. This is a total of 676,492. The Canadian killed were 2,885 officers and 55,514 men. Adding the Australian, the New Zealand, the other Colonial forces, the Royal Naval Division and the Indian native troops, the Empire sustained a loss of 48,450 officers and 819,040 men killed, a total of 865,490. There is nothing that can be placed in money value beside these lives, which were self-selected as the bravest, the most devoted and the most intelligent of the nation. The sacrifice of money is inadequate, but it is at least just that those who made gain out of the sacrifice of that which was dearest to others should make sacrifice to the nation of part of what they appear to value so highly.

Apathy in Elections.

There is no known way yet discovered, or at least put into practice, by which the whole of the citizens can be got to take an interest in elections and processes of election. A new law in Manitoba required the enrollment in Winnipeg of all who would thereby be entitled to vote. This list was to be used not merely for civic, but also for provincial and federal elections. Over 100,000 names were anticipated, but no more than half the people registered. The result of course is that a majority of these, or not very much more than a quarter of the whole population govern the rest. Those who complain about what is done have the remedy in their own hands. If they fail to adopt it their complaints and criticisms cannot be expected to carry much weight. Manitoba is hoping for an improvement in the public interest through the application of the measure recently passed of proportional representation, but if half the people voluntarily disqualify themselves as electors by failing to register, at the best it will be minority rule. It is certain, however, that as soon as proportional representation comes into force there will be a stimulation of public interest, since under that system every vote counts, and it is not, as at present, wasted should it be cast for an unsuccessful candidate. Every vote is used to support the candidate most in need of a vote according to the direction of the voter, when, either by his election or his clear inability to be elected, the man of his first choice no longer needs his vote.

Good Taste Out West.

Any conception of a wild and woolly west which may have been born in the brain of dwellers in the east or of immigrants from the European tribes soon disappears after a visit along the lines of travel in the prairie provinces and a tour of the chief cities. Almost the first thing that strikes one is the remarkably good taste displayed in every direction. Possibly this is due to the greater freedom from conventional ideas and views of things. Usually the conventional tends towards ugliness, because it tends to stifle the free play of the imagination and the simple and natural inclination for beauty which is characteristic of all vital and spontaneous expression. The Parliament buildings at Regina, for example, are a model of fine taste, and the interior decorations have a dignity and richness unmarred by any tawdry or gaudy display which it is difficult to find in the east. In Edmonton art is cultivated at an appreciably high level. A musical festival held in mid-May alternately between Edmonton and Calgary attracts able competitors, the adjudicators consisting of men like Dr. Henry Coward, the eminent conductor of the Sheffield choir, as well as Dr. Vogt, and Mr. Fricker, the former and the present conductor of the Mendelssohn Choir of Toronto. The atmosphere of the West in these respects in as attractive to the young and progressive as the prospects offered for advancement.

Plank For Utility Party.

Hon. Mr. Dunning has been telling the people of Saskatchewan about the prospects of coal in that province. He was not too positive, but sufficiently definite to suggest the existence of coal 200 miles north of Regina. Ontario people can appreciate what it means to have coal no further away than that from the central portions of the province, with the certainty that the supply did not depend on the good-will of a neighbor or the caprices of that neighborhood's labor forces. Fuel becomes more and more of a problem and the central provinces and Ontario must make the provision of fuel a serious issue and the supply a certainty under all circumstances. No political party has taken up the question in dead earnest yet, but if ever there should be organized in the future a political utility party, fuel will be one of its first and most important planks.

Grain and the Water Ways.

Opposition has developed in the west to the proposed great waterways scheme by which it is expected to make ocean ports of all the big harbors on the great lakes and to open up the interior of the continent in a way otherwise impossible. Most of the opposition comes from supporters of the Hudson Bay Railway, but it does not appear that there are any serious grounds for objection on this account. It will take ten years at least for the waterways scheme to be carried to completion, while the Hudson Bay Railway, requiring only the one-sixtieth part of the cost to complete, would be in operation long before the waterways project was finished, or indeed, well begun. The deepening of the St. Lawrence is bound to come, and the sooner it comes the more rapid will be the development of the Canadian nation. The huge water power developments that would accompany the waterways scheme are of the utmost importance to an unfuelled Ontario, and the extra and cheaper outlet for the vast and increasing grain product of the west will not merely not adversely affect the railways, but by contributing to the general prosperity of the prairie provinces inaugurate new and lucrative business in other and more lucrative lines than the carrying of grain. It must not be forgotten that Canada's wheat has to compete with wheat carried to the markets of the world almost exclusively in marine bottoms. Canada wheat carried by rail cannot profitably compete with such cheap transportation.

Spontaneous Combustion.

A good deal of attention has been excited elsewhere than in Ontario over the report presented by the provincial deputy fire marshal, C. H. Cowan, on the typical case of spontaneous combustion in a hay mow in Scarboro township last January. It is well to recall the facts, now that the haying season is once more approaching, and while so many otherwise practical men are sceptical of the possibility of such a thing. The fire was discovered while clover was being threshed, and when an attempt was made to investigate one man nearly lost his life by almost falling into the roaring furnace into which the interior of the haymow had been converted. In a few minutes the whole barn was a mass of flame and a loss of $11,000 resulted, including some small livestock. The hay had been put in July in full block, and was only two days in the field after cutting; was hauled in at once after cocking, taken off with a hayfork and not well levelled. A water tank alongside the barn had been allowed to overflow into the hay when it was tight against the side, and though plenty of ventilators were provided they were kept tightly closed. Hay must be allowed to sweat in field or barn, and if it is not left long enough in cock it should be liberally salted in the mow. Ventilation must not be overlooked.

Tragedies of Social Ideals.

Reckless speculation, the making haste to be rich, extravagance of every description, the determination of women to rival their wealthy friends, the growing desire for luxuries, and the mania for keeping up appearances are all characteristic of the times. The results are inevitable. They that sow to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption. As the pace becomes hotter in these feverish days after the war the victims become more numerous. A striking case is that of Horace T. Walton, 22 years old, given a good character by Y. M. C. A. officials, who, as a former mail clerk and familiar with mail car procedure, planned a robbery of $75,000, and in the subsequent pursuit killed a policeman, and was himself killed in the subsequent shooting fray. It is impossible to allocate the blame in Walton's case to any one influence. The gospel of getting on, the crime of poverty, the example of the millionaires, the multiplied schools and systems teaching "success" by hook or by crook, all contribute to develop the cupidity more or less present in most young men. And what "amateur detective" or "movie" drama may not have nourished and stimulated the folly of trying to get away with $75,000? Anybody who has $75,000 will say truly that the only satisfaction he has had from it was in making it. It is the use, not the possession, of wealth that is to be valued, and those who show themselves capable of using it get all they require. The case of William Graham Browne, occurring on the same day as Walton's, emphasizes the point. He had "swiped" $50,000 from a bank and blew out his brains in Montreal when apprehended. Our social ideals are wrong or these tragedies would not arise from them.