



CANADA AND WOMAN

A Consideration of the Work of the Canadian Woman
and the Industrial Opportunities Afforded Newcomers

By R. E. VERNEDE



BY permission of the publisher, WILLIAM BRIGGS, Toronto, we are reproducing a chapter, "Canada and Woman," from the book, "The Fair Dominion." The author, Mr. R. E. Verne, is an English journalist, who visited Canada during the year and wrote his impressions for the London weekly, "The Bystander." The chapter to which we have referred has much that will interest our readers, especially those of the West.—EDITOR'S NOTE.

FEW books are complete nowadays without a chapter on the woman question. Man can be treated of in between; one would not as yet care to write a book without mentioning man in it. As a subsidiary agent for keeping the world going man is still not without his importance. But woman, as I have said, must have a chapter to herself. And since I unwittingly arrived on the last page at the subject of woman's work in Canada, I will pause—even on the threshold of the mountains—and go further into the matter.

The most noticeable thing about woman in Western Canada is that she has not yet arrived there. If any one wished to get an idea of how the world would arrange itself supposing there were no women in it at all, they would have to go a little further north and west, into some of the British Columbian valleys or into the Yukon country, and look around.

What a simple world it seems. No clothes question, no washing, the simplest cookery, one man one plate (and that plate never washed), one knife for eating with or for skinning a grizzly bear, no carpets or curtains in the houses, no dustings or spring-cleanings, no knick-knacks to knock over or break, no flowers without or within except such as grow wild, no luxuries, in short, either to enjoy or to pay for, and a terrible amount of dirt. That is the physical aspect of the world without women.

The spiritual side of it is less easy to arrive at. These bachelors you see in the backwoods are a silent people, lacking in self-consciousness, and, I daresay, in manners, but law-abiding and amiable and peculiarly handy. All men are handy who have not women to steal that talent from them; and most womenless men are silent too. One knows, of course, that bores may be found among men at times, but never chatter-boxes. There is something to be said for the view that speech arose by women putting questions so often that men were driven, in sheer weariness, to make answers.

Does it seem an unattractive life that these hardy bachelors have perforce to live? Perhaps. But you will not find them bemoaning their lot. That is not the way of bachelors. We know they are to be pitied, but they do not pity themselves. Seriously, the trouble with these men is that they have none of these inducements to consider the future which make a man better than a machine. They take the world as it comes, which is well enough for themselves but not well enough for the world. I doubt if it is well themselves really. true, they have nothing to worry them so long as they are in health. They can make big money when they choose and take holidays when they choose, conscious that when their money is spent they have only to set to again. Their wages are indeed to them little more than trinket-geld—and this means that those splendid workers have no real reward for their work, leave no successors to carry on the traditions of their toil, enrich only the barkeepers and the rogues who live on the folly of honest men.



CLEARLY the most honourable opening for women in Canada is marriage. Only wives are capable of putting down the drink curse, preventing the growth of a particularly odious plutocracy, establishing a permanent instead of a nomad population in the West. Nor might it be a bad thing (but for Anglo-Saxon prejudices) if provincial governments there could start marriage offices, due attention being paid to eugenics. Even in so small a matter as the following, the presence of wives should make all the difference. All down the Columbia valley, I found the cattle ranchers, who were bachelors, drinking tinned milk, while scores of cows ran wild and went dry. When I asked if it wasn't worth while to keep one cow milking, I was always told, "No, we haven't time to bother about it," till I came to the shack of a married Swede, whose wife had time to bother about it. In his shack tinned milk was anathema, as it should be everywhere.

As prejudice would undoubtedly prevent the formation of governmental marriage offices, marriage can only be considered as an indirect opening for women. What are the direct openings? A great deal depends on what part of Canada immigrant women make for. In the East there is no such lack of women as in the West. The sexes are fairly balanced. In the big towns there is the usual demand for domestic servants, but not many more openings for educated Englishwomen than there are in big towns at home. There are a few more, because those cities are going at a faster pace than our English cities, and because all work there is more valuable than in England. Women

skilled in the arts that have to do with personal decoration, such as millinery, dressmaking, etc., could make their way there.

Factory work in Canada is hardly worth going into here, the chief point about it being that wages are of course higher; nor did I notice any unusual professions engaging the attention of women, unless it were the checking of parcels and the playing in hotel orchestras, neither of which requires a man's strength.



FRENCH Canada offers employment to but very few. Western Canadians sniff at the Habitants because they let their women work in the fields, haymaking and hoeing. But the idea of using women as outdoor workers is not so uncivilised as it looks to those unaccustomed to seeing it. Ethnologists are agreed nowadays that the tribes in which women do the field work are not the least but the most civilised, and maintain that the position of women among such tribes is higher than among any others. Women began to work out-of-doors because the primitive peoples believed in a connection between their fertility and that of the earth; and where they do such work, women are always the keepers of the grain store—hold in their hands, that is to say, the food upon which the life of the tribe depends. The most honourable primitive customs are not always the best in modern times, but there can be no doubt of the fertility of the French Canadians.

As one goes West, woman becomes more of an indoor creature; and this may be due to the greater chivalry of their men folk. But one has to remember that the great charm of Canadian life, especially on the prairies, is an outdoor charm—working in the exhilarating air—not cooking over a hot stove indoors. One hears of a few cases in which women have taken up farming or vegetable gardening and made a success of it, but no one could honestly say that the fortune awaiting women who take up such work is usually a great one. The work is too hard, especially in the winter time. Chicken-ranching is perhaps easier; but the real demand in the West is for women to do that housework which the men have not time for. At such work capable women can earn from three to five pounds a month with board and lodging; and while they are likely to find it rather harder—certainly not less hard—than similar work at home, it has compensations besides the money to be made by it. For one thing there is none of the odium that attaches to it in the older countries. The cook is as good as her employer, who probably did the cook's work for years before the cook was to be had. It is natural that the work which most ladies have to do for themselves, because neither love nor money can obtain them substitutes, should lose its menial and unpleasant aspect, and the finest ladies in western Canada do it unashamed. Often their guests will help them to wash up, and even prepare the dinner. Personally, I found myself becoming quite expert at cleaning fish for a hostess who thereafter cooked it and dished it up, and yet appeared at table as fresh and elegant and apparently leisured as any lady who keeps a staff of servants in the old country. And I found as I got on that I rather liked cleaning fish.

It stands to reason that the lady help is not wanted. The precise duties demanded of such a lady are always a little misty, but I imagine that they include a little sewing and a little reading, the ability to chat pleasantly, to be good-tempered (and possibly a Protestant), to feed the canary, and, at a pinch, even to clean out its cage. None of these talents are needed in a new country, and I heard of forty women who were on the books of an employment office in Calgary, all wanting to be lady helps and all likely to go on wanting it till Doomsday.



ONE hears a good deal of discussion (not in Canada) of the openings in the colonies for educated women. There is an English committee—the Committee of Colonial Intelligence for Educated Women—which, "recognising the crying need of our colonies for the best type of educated women," undertakes to furnish them with detailed, practical and up-to-date information, before advising them to go out. This committee hopes later on to found settlements in the colonies, where training, suitable to the needs of each colony, can be given, and centres can be formed to which the girls can return in the intervals of employment. There is much sense both in the recognition of the need for educated women in the colonies and in the perception that the most educated woman will be lost there unless she is prepared to be practical. The truth is that that same adaptability which is required of men in Canada is required of women also. They must first suit the country before they can hope to leave their mark on it. Educated women can leave their mark there by their inward, not by their outward, superiority.

Centres to which the girls can go in the first place, and to which they can return in the intervals of employment, are an excellent idea, and one which central

or local government authorities in Canada would do well to support. Of course the Young Women's Christian Association already gives much help in this direction, but it cannot be expected to have branches everywhere. New towns and settlements are planned and put through very quickly in Canada, and wherever they result in creating a demand for women's work, some such centre for girls as near the railway depot as possible should be started. For one thing it would facilitate the engagement of girls, for another it would attract a better class. Probably the best openings of all for women in Canada—educated women, I mean—are in the big cities of the furthest West. In Vancouver and Victoria wealthy people reside who can afford to pay for such luxuries as private school-mistresses and governesses. And the supply of women is not so great there. Women also seem to be more employed there as hotel manageresses and under-manageresses, and as cashiers in hotels and offices. I never heard of women being real estate agents, but in a profession in which the arts of persuasion play a leading part, there seems no reason why they should not shine. Of bachelor girls, living their own lives, I have also never heard in the West. They could hardly have the hearts to do it with so many bachelor men wasting their lives around them.

On the whole, the position of woman in Canada is one of honourable toil lightened by the high consideration in which they are held. They have hardly as yet obtained that dominant super-man eminence which American women are said to occupy. That is, perhaps, because they have not gone in so much for that culture and social fastidiousness by the lack of which in themselves some American husbands are made to feel their inferiority. On the other hand they seem to keep their men folk contented, and remain contented with them. Divorce is, I believe, uncommon in Canada.

The Question of Color

WE were asked recently, says a writer in *The House Beautiful*, by a subscriber, to approve her scheme of decoration for her new house. It was the same old story—hall in buff with white staircase and mahogany balusters, a red dining-room with brown woodwork, a soft green living-room, one pink bedroom, another blue, and so on through all the tints of the rainbow; and then, while we were fairly gasping over the proposed array, she finished with: "I want to keep it very simple and colonial-like, you know."

Gently, but firmly, we insisted that she had too many colors; that her house would have no repose, no unity; that it would look like a patchwork quilt, without the quilt's compensating utility and comfort. Then for her guidance was described a very successful interior where the color scheme was white woodwork and a strong colonial yellow throughout the entire first and second stories. "Yellow," she repeated aghast, "why, I have purposely avoided such a garish color!"

There was little more to say; she went away unconvinced, to order her wall paper. The most she could be prevailed on to give up was the red and brown dining-room, for which she substituted the buff and white of the hallway. Thus our triumph was limited to only one room, but as red and brown dining-rooms are nearly always a serious decorative offence, this one-room victory is not to be despised.

Meanwhile the fact remains that this matter of one color throughout is worth experimenting with. The yellow interior held up as a worthy example is surprisingly successful. Its rooms are not separate units, but produce that feeling of breadth and relationship that a house should have. They are tied together, and the house seems half as large again as it really is. Provided only that the color chosen is a background, and not a foreground, one cannot go far wrong in adhering to it throughout at least one storey of the house. It is well known that the great eighteenth century architects insisted upon designing the furniture as well as the house. In the present-day revival of good taste in furniture, the architect's personal influence on his client is again playing an important part. There is an ever-increasing willingness among the latter to be persuaded that the man who designs the home may be safely entrusted to either design, or at least select, the furniture that goes into it. For the relation between the architecture of any period and its furniture is a close one; and those ignorant of it have, over and over, converted an interior (so far as movable decorations go) into a travesty of the architect's intention. He, therefore, is justified in playing the dictator in this matter. This does not mean to the extent to which a prominent architect played the role when, calling for an axe, he broke irreparably a wretched, over-ornamented chandelier that had been purchased and hung without his approval in a room of his designing; but it does mean that the architect is quite right in representing how unfair it is to him to "queer" the result of his efforts.