

REFLECTIONS

By THE EDITOR

A Significant Phrase.

CANADIAN chartered banks have special privileges which sometimes are spoken of as "rights." Sir Edmund Walker, with his usual fairness, does not so speak. In his excellent annual address to his shareholders he uses these words:

"In view of the franchise we enjoy, we recognize the duty and responsibility upon us to aid in the development of the country."

This is in the proper spirit. If our bankers all had that spirit and followed it logically, there would be less tendency to criticize, and less jealousy of the tremendous profits which the chartered banks are making.

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Canada in Books.

EVERY little while, a British journalist comes out to Canada and writes a book about us.

He goes home with the manuscript, publishes it in London, and sends the edition out here to be sold. He has discovered that we like to read about ourselves. Seldom does he understand the country or its people, but that doesn't matter. He knows we are sensitive and vain and he turns it to good account.

Does any one imagine if a Canadian went to Britain and wrote a book telling what he learned during two or three weeks visit there that the British people would rush to buy it? Not a bit of it. They have a mental poise which tells them that the Canadian could have little to say that would be of permanent value.

Canada's idiosyncrasy in this respect is duplicated in the United States. Whenever a prominent visitor arrives, a crowd of reporters gather about him to ask, "What do you think of New York?" or, "How do you like America?" The poor man has probably no opinion at all, and says so, but his pleasant non-committal remarks are elaborated into a column or two of rubbish. So in Canada, when an important traveller reaches Montreal, Toronto or Winnipeg, he is met by reporters asking him, "What do you think of Canada?"

It is about time that this continent got over its new-baby stage. It does not much matter what these visitors think. We should have sufficient confidence in our country not to be affected either by fulsome flattery or captious criticism.

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The Unfortunate Mother.

A LITTLE story which appeared not long ago on the front page of a Winnipeg daily paper made an impression upon my mind. A man walking home one night, passed the "Home of the Friendless Children," one of Winnipeg's numerous charitable institutions. It was a cold, cold night, and they do have cold nights in that city in late December. So, when he heard the pitiful sobbing of a child, he started in to investigate. He found a pretty baby boy wrapped in three sets of clothing and covered with a warm woollen shawl—but deserted. He took it home for the night and next day it was sent to the Children's Home.

But what struck me most was the comment of the people who had to do with the case and with the language of the reporter who compiled the story. The reporter said that it was left there by an "unnatural and heartless mother," and that the police were searching for "the mother who abandoned it so heartlessly. The matron of the Home is reported to have "voiced her indignation of the heartless desertion."

Is a mother, such as this one may be supposed to be, to be accused of "heartlessness?" The babe was well nourished, and warmly clothed. It was placed at the gate of the Home to which such children are sent. Is it not more probable that the mother went home to weep and to pray that her child would be cared for? Was it her fault that she was forced to abandon her child, or the fault of the "heartless" people who would condemn her and sneer at her if she were to keep it and be proud of it?

Here is a big subject, and one well worthy of more attention than it receives. It does seem as if we are too harsh in our criticism of the women who may be so unfortunate as to become mothers under circumstances of which society cannot approve. It does seem that by our lack of sympathy, by our lack

of a fair and just attitude that we are compelling child-desertion and worse. Surely there must be a remedy for such a state of affairs. Our present methods are irrational and destructive. Why should not the matrons of these Homes invite the confidences of these unfortunate girls and thus prevent child-desertion? Why should not society give such a girl a second chance? Even criminals are given that, and these unfortunates are not criminals unless we make them such.

The Bookless Clergyman.

I N the cities, the clergymen usually get enough salaries to enable them to buy books. If they have not the money to purchase them, they may go to the libraries and read them. Hence the city preacher is usually abreast of the times. He is in constant touch with the latest criticism and the newest "views."

On the other hand, the village clergyman has no money to spend on books, and no libraries to patronize. Is it any wonder that he feels cut off from the intellectual life of the world?

Why not travelling libraries for these men, so that they may keep in touch with all that is best in modern thought? They are doing a great unselfish work, these country clergymen. They are helping in every good movement. They are living on beggarly salaries and suffering many privations with noble patience.

Where is the Carnegie who will bring the library to their door and thus brighten their lives?

Administration by Commission.

M ANY people who object to government by commission have no fear of administration by commission. There is an essential difference.

For example, Toronto has civic administration by an elected commission known as a "Board of Control." The government is in the hands of the City Council as it always was. The Board of Control administers, subject to the supervision and approval of the Council.

Again, the Railway Commission for the Dominion administers but does not govern. It is appointed by the Dominion Parliament, which is the governing body. If Parliament wishes it may repeal the act which constituted the Railway Commission and abolish it altogether. It may increase or decrease its powers at will.

There should be no confusion in the public mind on this subject. Occasionally a citizen will be overheard to say, "We have too many commissions." This man does not understand what he is saying. He probably means that the commissions have powers which are too broad. He would sooner see the country and the municipality governed in the old-fashioned way. He is usually a man who also thinks that the people are overgoverned. He does not recognize that society is getting more and more complex and that modern civilization demands new methods of administration.

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Growth of the Commissions.

COMMISSIONS of administrative character are certainly growing in number. The Civil Service Commission was created to regulate the admission of men and women to the civil service and to regulate their promotions. It has done good work in its restricted sphere and no publicist of standing advocates a return to the old state of affairs when nepotism and political pull were rampant at Ottawa.

The National Transcontinental Commission was appointed to supervise the building of the National Transcontinental. It has heretofore consisted of several members, but the Borden Government proposes to reduce it to one member. It has no legislative power; it is purely administrative.

The Ontario Government has three commissions

doing administrative work, but not one has any governing powers. These are the Temiskaming and Northern Ontario Railway Commission, which operates the government railway and colonization in the Temiskaming country. The Ontario Railway Board is supposed to regulate the steam and electric railways of the province in so far as these are subject to the provincial authority. The Hydro-Electric Commission, which is building electric transmission lines all over the province for the general benefit of the municipal power and lighting plants in each city and town in the province.

The Dominion Government also proposes to appoint two new commissions of a permanent character, a tariff commission and a terminal elevator commission. These two will, like the others mentioned, perform administrative services which the rulers of the country believe can best be handled in this way.

It might also be said that the Judges of the country are a series of commissions empowered to administer the law. They have no legislative power. They do not form a part of the governing body. Their work is entirely administrative.

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The Latest in Commissions.

MANITOBA is about to create a commission of the latest and most modern kind—a public service commission. The only one of its kind in Canada is in the Province of Quebec, but it has so far done little to make itself famous. Like the Ontario Railway Board, its powers are so limited as to make it ineffective for the work which it might be supposed to perform.

Premier Roblin has promised a public service commission with powers as wide as that of the New York Public Service Commission, one of the most important bodies in the United States. It will have complete control over all government-owned or privately-owned corporations that give public service. It will supervise all steam and electric railways in the province, all gas and electric light companies, telegraphs, telephones, grain elevators and so on. Ample provision will be made for the enforcement of its orders, Premier Roblin declares, so that there will be no possible evasion of its orders. He declares that the commissioners will have positions that will carry greater responsibility than that of a chief justice of the province.

This at least is Premier Roblin's idea. If it works out as he expects, it will probably be most beneficial.

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Where There is Unfairness.

N O private corporation operating a public service can reasonably object to fair regulation.

That regulation must, however, be made by a competent judicial commission, not by a body of irresponsible demagogues looking for votes. Sometimes, a clique of city aldermen will make an attack on a privately-owned public utility corporation without any accurate knowledge of the facts. For example, in Toronto the chief stock in trade of municipal orators looking for votes has been denunciations of the gas company, the electric light company and the street railway.

The conduct of these companies may not have been all it should be, but certainly the criticism has too often been made by men who could have no extensive knowledge of the facts. A public service commission, such as they have in New York State, and in Wisconsin, would deal with such complaints on their merits and either punish or exonerate the private company.

Again, a public service commission such as Premier Roblin proposed to establish in Manitoba, is to be preferred to a commission empowered to carry on a special work such as the Hydro-Electric Commission in Ontario. The former is founded on the principle of justice to the public and also to the private corporations. The latter was founded for the purpose of competing with private corporations. The Hydro-Electric was created for the purpose of giving opposition to the private companies distributing electricity throughout Ontario. It did not expropriate nor purchase the private companies, but proceeded to parallel their lines. Moreover, it did not encourage the municipalities to buy out their private lighting companies, but rather encouraged competition in local centres as it created competition in the general field of distribution. Notably in London and Toronto, the local lighting companies were subjected to keen competition. Both these cities have now duplicate electric lighting services, which is an undoubted and indefensible economic waste. The Hydro-Electric will be of considerable value to the province undoubtedly, but it had been more valuable had it prevented rather than encouraged duplication.