

The Ambitions of a Canadian Mechanic

One of the Essays that Won a Courier Prize

By ARTHUR T. ADAMS

SOME weeks ago the CANADIAN COURIER offered a prize for the best essay on "The Ambitions of a Canadian Mechanic." Of the best essays received, two were of such even value that it has been decided to divide the prize between the writers. One is by Mr. Arthur T. Adams, casket trimmer with James S. Elliott and Son, Prescott; the other by Mr. F. W. Hayden, carpenter, 216 Robert St., Toronto. The views in each are set forth lucidly, though in this case Mr. Adams has the advantage, through quoting other writers' opinions less, using his own more directly. Each is the product of a thinking mind, concerned not only with his own craft or locality, but dealing with general conditions and expressing a broad mental outlook. Each is free from mere prejudice, though in the case of Mr. Hayden's essay there is a vein of acrimony which is entirely absent from Mr. Adams'. For this reason, though the prize is evenly divided, we publish Mr. Adams' essay as the best representative work, holding the other until some future issue when space may be less crowded.

A MECHANIC is a man possessed of a mind quick to conceive and a hand prompt to execute. The skill with which he manipulates his tools and fashions the material he works on, whether it be the softest fabric, the finest wood or the hardest metal, is a constant surprise to the unskilled onlooker.

From the time he becomes a craftsman until he lays down his earthly tools the mechanic is possessed with an ambition to improve; the builder is ambitious to erect a finer structure; the tailor to produce a more perfect garment; the machinist to turn out a better piece of work; no matter what he works upon or what article he constructs his active, intelligent mind is constantly forcing him onward.

If, as in some cases, he is interested only in his own trade or calling, he is constantly gaining skill and knowledge in that particular line, and, doubtless, aims at becoming, some day, a master mechanic or foreman, a shop-owner or contractor. In any case he is sure to be ambitious and to have a definite aim in life. The ideas and the workmanship which result in increased material comfort for mankind in general are usually conceived in the mind of the mechanic.

The attractive home, with its cozy furnishings, the easy-running train, the well-fitting garment, everything even to the shoes you wear and the smooth pavement you walk upon are largely the result of his ambition to produce more perfect work.

Every achievement makes a man ambitious for a greater achievement. Having raised himself above the condition of the labourer who is fitted only to fetch and carry for others or to work with the pick and shovel, the mechanic is not satisfied with the same kind of a home which suits his less ambitious brother; neither is he satisfied with the amount of knowledge possessed by himself.

"Learning a trade" usually prevents even a Canadian mechanic from obtaining more than a public school education, but the knowledge there acquired is constantly being added to in after life; the reading of good periodicals and daily newspapers keeps him informed of what is going on in the world and how his neighbours live. The number of mechanics who play instruments in musical organizations throughout the country bears witness to their artistic instincts and ambition to acquire accomplishments. You rarely find a mechanic who is not proficient in many things beside those appertaining to his trade. As a rule, this sort of man is not content with a too humble condition in life, nor is he content to live in any-kind-of-a-hovel owned by any-kind-of-a-landlord. He desires to possess a home of his own, a separate spot in the land he claims as his own. Comforts and conveniences his humbler brother does not dream of must be his.

Though not himself a social climber, he desires, for his family, all the advantages that a civilized community affords. His sons and his daughters must be well educated and accomplished. No member of the community takes a greater or more intelligent interest in the educational institutions and commercial development of his country.

IT is not the ignorant man, the unskilled labourer, who is constantly demanding greater things and more advanced legislation from the men who make the laws. The great body of skilled mechanics will never be blindly led by any political party. They have intelligence enough to think for themselves, and what they cannot get from one political party

they will ask from another. The Canadian mechanic believes, and takes pride in the belief, that he is the equal, if not the superior, of all other mechanics in the world. This being so, he wishes to make, as far as possible, every manufactured article that is used in his own country, and also to force his wares, with as free an entry as possible, into the markets of the world. In this he requires the assistance of his representative at Ottawa; and this requirement, more than any other, influences the vote of the ambitious mechanic.

Such men as these are the most independent voters, and excepting the commercial and highly-educated classes, the most intelligent voters in the country.

With the more adequate remuneration he now enjoys, the provident mechanic finds himself, after a few years, in possession of a small surplus and is constantly looking about him for a profitable investment or, it may be, a speculative purchase. This leads him to peruse the financial columns and makes him ambitious to acquire adequate knowledge along this line, which was formerly a sealed book to him.

The mechanic of to-day is advancing in knowledge and power more rapidly than any other class of men, and is forcing the rest of the community upward with him. The Canadian mechanic is especially interested in regard to the future of his country, and he realizes that that future depends, to a considerable extent, on the policy adopted by the government with regard to immigration. We are informed that the C. P. R. alone has handled immigrants at the rate of over 1,100 a day during the whole of last month. What kind of people are these who are flocking to our shores? Where do they come from and how are they induced to come?

These are important questions, and not the least important in the mind of the Canadian workman is the last: "How are they induced to come?" If they are the right kind of people and of the races which assimilate most readily with the Anglo-Saxon, they are welcome. But why should we be at such pains to induce them to come? Why should we advertise in Europe and offer all sorts of inducements to them to come?

We are told that there is abundance of room in Canada for all. It is true we are rich in room and rich in opportunities of all kinds; but because we have riches in abundance is it a reason that we should make haste to squander them? It is not the thickly populated country which is the best to live in.

In spite of immigration, on a very large scale, to North and South America and Australia the population of most of the European countries is increasing fast, and the denser the population the greater the amount of misery and poverty there is in the midst of it. By all means welcome those enterprising people who come, of their own accord, to share in our abundance, but do not go out of the way to coax them here in hordes. "Rome was not built in a day"; if it had been it would probably have endured but a day.

HOW to keep out undesirables, the Hindoo, the Chinese, the Japanese, is a problem which statesmen find hard to solve. But does it not intensify that problem when we exert ourselves to persuade others to come and forbid them. Look at it from the point of view of the Hindoo. We do not want him, yet he is, in his own eyes, as good as the best. He is part of the Empire and therefore "one of the family"; yet we go out of our way to invite strangers and bar him. Would it not be less offensive to the Hindoo if, while we continued to bar him, we refrained from extending such a pressing invitation to the stranger outside the Empire?

Undoubtedly it is to the advantage of the transportation companies to bring in as many immigrants as possible. They are paid for carrying them, for carrying the goods they consume and the commodities they produce. But outside of these influential corporations and a few others, including the short-sighted politician who thinks a rapid increase in population is an indication of true prosperity, the ordinary citizen would prefer to see the highly profitable task of "building up Canada" left to the Canadian himself. They believe him to be quite capable of doing it. A very gradual filling-up of our empty spaces would, in the long run, be best for the country.

Pictures at the Canadian National

ONCE more the Private View, tea in the picture galleries, Saturday afternoon, just as the big annual exhibition is being swept up and finally tifficked into shape for the formal opening on Monday. This is the only international show of pictures in Canada. The pictures this year are more numerous than ever. The crush was worse than ever. Society chattered just as glibly, sipped lemonade and ice cream just as daintily as though there was no picture on the walls more worth while than the gowns and frock coats of a smart set.

From a somewhat wistful pilgrimage through the galleries, avoiding lemonade spills and rude elbowings as much as possible, one learned that on the whole this year's display of the fine arts represented by oils and water-colours and black and white and etchings is better than ever. At least, to say anything else would call for an explanation, which under the circumstances might be difficult.

Anyway, the picture show was the only part of the grand ensemble that was really fit to be seen on Saturday. It was all there; every canvas hung as best it might be, some skied, most of them crowded, many of them in unusual company, but altogether a most interesting assemblage of many good, many fair to middling, and some very poor, if not bad, canvases. That way the show was very much like the people that looked at it.

Every year some critic says,

"WHY don't they bring over half as many British and French and German and American canvases? Why not show us just the good ones? We can make bad paintings enough at home."

But the selecting committee—who in this case happened to be genial Mr. Dibdin, curator of the Liverpool Gallery, for the trans-atlantic pictures, and Mr. E. Wyly Grier, for the American canvases—knew better. So did the hanging committee, who seem to have put up every canvas sent by Messrs. Dibdin and Grier. They know that it's far better to let people choose for themselves which are the best pictures. No two of all the hundreds gathered

on Saturday would agree on which hundred pictures are the best. By the time a hundred thousand and more folk from all over Canada have seen them, every picture in the lot will have been included in the best ten or a dozen. So there you are. Every one to his taste.

Considering the three sections, Canadian, British and German, separately, however, it takes even an amateur a very brief while to conjecture that the American lot are the best and the German considerably the worst. One room is full of German canvases, the first time there has been a German collection at the Fair. The biggest canvas of all is by Engel, a German; an ultra-religious, quite remarkable work. Two years ago "The Buccanneers," by an American artist, was the largest, and ten years ago Benjamin West's huge "Death of Wolfe" was the only foreign canvas hung. For quite half of these German pictures the exhibit might very well have been placarded "Made in Germany." They are, most of them, priced in the catalogue. The inference is that they are for sale. However, the whole lot taken together give one a very comfortable feeling that to see them is quite the cheapest way of going to Germany; and there are several well worth admiration.

The American group is by all odds the best; most direct in style and uniformly high in character. As usual, many of the British pictures are dingy and dull and of uninspired excellence. Orpen's are one of the numerous exceptions. There is now growing quite an Orpen cult in Canada. This year's Orpenage is by far the best yet. One interesting episode is that a Canadian now studying with Orpen has his portrait by Orpen in the collection, Mr. Richard Fudger, whose father bought the canvas.

A coincidence of the Canadian collection is there for the first time in the history of the Fair, two big portraits are exhibited of the same man, Lieut.-Governor Gibson, done by Mr. Wyly Grier and by Mr. Forster. Each has its admirers. The Canadian collection is by far the best yet. In fact the Canadian pictures this year come distinctly ahead of either the British or the German.