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Personalities and Problems

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Whose Evolution of the Public Service Idea is a Good Deal Like Tuning a Piano

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

INTO a somewhat crampy but extremely comfortable office at the back of a building in the Eaton block, came the peculiar reiterated tink-tank-tunk of a man in the next room tuning a piano. The office walls were hung with pictures of men playing pianos. But this man outside was performing the tune that takes sometimes hours to play. It was the kind of tune that sounds a good deal like the drip-drip of a water-tap into a bath; now one note and then another; sometimes both together; after a little a key higher up—getting the next octave in concord; bye and bye three notes together; presently when the tuner got weary of his own monotony a few handfuls of crisp arpeggios and swift little runs that seemed like the frills on a tune or an imitation of a Bach prelude.

All the while I sat in the office of Mr. R. S. Gourlay that man outside was tuning the piano. When I left he was tuning it still.

And as I listened to Mr. Gourlay enunciate his views of business and public service, it seemed as though the gradual evolution of a disorderly piano into an instrument capable of doing justice to Beethoven and Chopin was a good deal like the slow working-out of a man's life.

The career of the newly-elected President of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association is a case of gradual, patient and pleasing evolution—just like the piano he makes and his tuners tune. At the age of just sixty Robert S. Gourlay has come to a condition of just about perfect harmony between his business, his public activities, his home life and his social connections. At least to the onlooker it seems so. Though every man knows where the little kinks and discords are in his life that seem so much like good music to the other fellow; just as every singer knows how nervous he may be when to the audience he seems as calm as a cloudless sunrise.

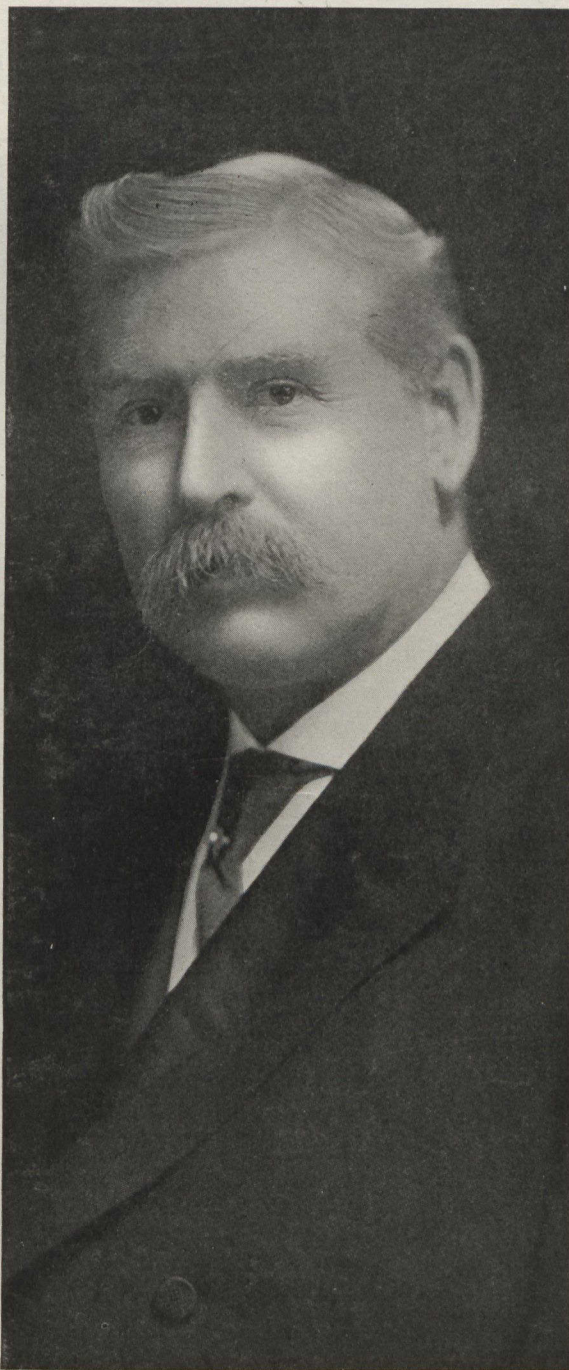
R. S. Gourlay is one of the most successful men in Canada. But he has never seen his way clear to buying an automobile. He is official head of an association representing hundreds of millions in investment and turning out of Canadian factories every year almost a thousand million dollars worth of goods for the markets of Canada. But he lives in a plain, comfortable home without ostentation. He is by no means a wealthy man and perhaps does not expect to be. But he is as happy in his work as the day is long. And the main reason is—that Robert S. Gourlay has learned the art of mixing up personal business with public service. His personal business is making high-grade pianos. His public service programme includes just as many different kinds of activities as he can discharge with a clear head, effectively in the interests of the public to which he reckons he belongs. That's why, though rubbing shoulder every day with men of wealth, he has no hankering to be wealthy; and why he is one of the most contented men in Canada.

JUST because it is getting out of date, old-fashioned and therefore odd, it is here set down—that Robert S. Gourlay, newly-elected President of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, got his first impetus to public service from a Presbyterian Sunday-School. The Sunday-School, the Epworth League and the lodge used to be the training-ground for a lot of very useful men. Methodist class-meetings and revival services have helped to make

many a public speaker. The need for being even a church usher or a member of session has caused a good many men to nibble off a little time from business which might have led them to take a notion for the school board or the city council.

Some say the church is losing its grip on young men.

But if Robert Gourlay had his way there would probably be a lot of men keeping up their interest



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in church work, because it is a contribution to public service. A few days ago Mr. Gourlay was asked by some of his friends to come out as a candidate for the Mayoralty of Toronto. He declined. He had his reasons. They are set forth in another part of this article. In 1911 he was President of the Toronto Board of Trade. Before that he was Vice-President. He is a member of the Toronto Harbour Commission, which is a new concern hitched up to a lot of work for the good of Toronto. He is a Vice-President of the Associated Charities of Toronto and an honorary governor of the General Hospital; a member of the Civic Guild and an ex-President of the Presbyterian Church Extension Union.

In fact Mr. Gourlay's activities outside of his regular business—which is making high-grade pianos—are about as diversified as those of Mr. J. W. Flavell. And he has never got to the point where he considers business one thing and public service another. In fact he began to be a public servant when he combined the two. Being a Scotchman in all but the accident of a birthplace, which was New York, he has always managed to work away without much noise, shrewdly and patiently building himself into his business—which at first was that of cabinet-making. Had he been like a good many other Scotchmen in Canada he might have been a near-millionaire. But when a man sets out to give a large part of his time and talent to public affairs, and at the same time makes a life business of selling and making pianos, the odds are all against his becoming very wealthy.

Mr. Gourlay's first connection with the piano business was as book-keeper for Mason, Risch and Newcombe. He then became a salesman; went on the road; in 1877 became general manager for the firm; in '79 became general manager for the newly organized firm Mason and Risch. Eleven years later the firm Gourlay, Winter and Leeming was organized for dealing in pianos and organs. In 1903 the firm began to make pianos.

THE progress of Mr. Gourlay as a maker of pianos is part of the development of a very remarkable industry in Canada. A few weeks ago, when the Duke was at the Canadian National Exhibition, he was astounded to find that the tremendous display of high-grade pianos he saw there were the product of Canadian factories. And how this industry developed—as set forth in last week's music number of THE CANADIAN COURIER—is a story which Mr. Gourlay takes some pride in telling; because like most other piano-makers in Canada he has kept himself in close touch with the people who use and criticize pianos and want the best.

"You know," he said, as he finished signing a pack of letters and took half an hour before a session of the Harbour Commission, "when you know that Smith your musical friend is going to try out your piano you naturally want to make a piano that will suit Smith. If it's good enough for him and his critical friends it's good enough for the market. And it's because the piano-makers of Canada have kept in close touch with the people who want the best in piano-making, that we have come to the point where Canada produces a higher average grade of piano than any other country in the world. That is quite true. But I remember—"

And with a smile he recalled the days when as a