



Through A Monocle

THE REAL FREEDOM

ONE of the greatest jokes ever perpetrated on the people of this North American Continent—that is, of Canada and the United States—is the hoax that they are “free” because they are not much bothered by governmental regulations. They are “free” because they can do what they please. In the same sense, a baby is “free” when it is where it can reach a bottle of poison and drink its contents under the impression that it is food. A man may be “free” to walk where he will when there is no railing to prevent him from stepping off a precipice on a dark night; but would he not really be “freer” to walk where fancy might lead if he knew that there was a railing at the edge of the precipice and that there was no danger? Would not the very fear of walking off the unrailing precipice constitute a far greater encroachment on his “freedom” than would a stone wall at that point ten-foot high?

YET that is the very position of our people who imagine that they are “free” because they are not protected from danger. Many a tidal wave of laughter has rolled over this continent from the Rio Grande to Hudson Bay at the patient and police-oppressed Germans who find themselves confronted at every point with a sign on which is painted—“Verboten.” The German cannot “walk on the grass”—he must keep to the path. He cannot do this, that or the other thing. His every-day life is cribbed, cabined and confined by laws and by-laws and police regulations, to which no free British subject or American citizen would submit for a moment. So we chatter; and our joint peoples have well-nigh got the lock-jaw over laughing at this absurd German who speaks English with so funny an accent and always carries sausages in his pocket. Then we go out and buy and eat diseased meat because the butchers are “free” to sell it—pay good-cloth prices for shoddy because the merchants are “free” not to label it—buy brown-paper boot soles because the shoe-men are “free” to cheat us if they can—give our babies dirty and dangerous milk to drink because we have no adequate milk inspection—and, finally, bankrupt ourselves by paying for showy funerals because there are no meddlesome laws to prevent it.

JUST who the laugh is on in the end, may not be clear. There certainly never was perpetrated a more ludicrous and costly bit of bad logic than the theory that a free democracy cannot permit itself to be minutely governed by a centralized executive. That is exactly what a free democracy—and only a free democracy—can afford to do. If there is no free democracy to check and admonish, and remove if necessary, that centralized executive which ventures to minutely govern a people in all its activities, then the executive may become a tyranny—even a selfish tyranny seeking the enrichment of its own members. But when the executive—the Government—is made by the democracy, lives by grace of the democracy, can be removed at will by the democracy, then its activities can never amount to a permanent tyranny. If the people do not like them, on the whole, they can put a stop to them.

MOREOVER, the democracy is exactly the form of government which cannot afford to do without a great deal of this very governmental regulation. The common charge—the only dangerous charge—against democracy to-day, is that it is a failure as a governing system. Its critics say, with a sneer, that democracy may be theoretically ideal; but that it does not give us good government. They allege that “graft,” incompetence, patronage and all similar evils flourish under the shadow of a careless and ignorant democracy; and point in contrast to what they claim are able, efficient and capable autocratic governments. And their ground of attack is shrewdly chosen. There is absolutely nothing else which could, with any chance of success, be said against the democratic form of government. It cannot be charged that the form is anything short of perfect—it can only be charged that it does not “govern.”

SO a democracy should be at special pains to govern well. It should—as I said on a previous occasion—select and pay for the best public services; and it should go beyond that and give the people the benefits of good government at every point where they can at all be supplied. And there are lots of them. Why should I be in doubt, when I go into a butcher shop—say, a small and cheap one—whether the beef I am about to buy, was tubercular? Why should I wonder whether the fish I think of eating,

has been kept too long? Why should I not know that the milk I pour on my breakfast-food is clean? Why should it not be a crime for a glib clerk to tell me that a garment is all-wool when it is part-cotton? Why should I not be protected by the Government from all the petty thieveries which are perpetrated on me under the guise of “trade methods”? These are the things which governments ought to do for us—the things which make up nine-tenths of the life of the average citizen.

WE want a lot more government than we have. Instead of being alarmed when it proposes to enter largely and intimately into the details of our daily life, we should be alarmed when it does not. Government cannot hurt us—cannot become tyrannical—so long as we hold the whip-hand over it through the universal ballot. The moment an officer becomes too officious, or employs his official powers for his own profit, we can kick him out. We can do this now by applying pressure to the Government which appoints him; but, if that be not expeditious and effective enough, we can establish the shorter cut to the same result by enacting “the recall.” What we want is a system of government which will protect us from intricate thefts and shadowy spoliations and indirect outrages as it now protects us from the grosser and more palpable varieties of these crimes. What is the real difference between having your pocket picked of a dollar bill, and having a merchant sell you a fraudulent article which does you out of five dollars? Why should the Government arrest one thief and protect the other?—for it does protect him as you will discover if you attempt to punish him yourself with a straight left-hander on the nose.

THE MONOCLE MAN.

United States' Indebtedness

Montreal, March 17th, 1914

Editor Canadian Courier:

Sir,—As an admirer and regular reader of your magazine, I am jealous of its reputation for veracity and as an educator of Young Canada. Facts relating to our country or any other country should not be misrepresented. Give the people the truth, the results will take care of themselves.

In your issue of March 14th, you have another article entitled “Excess of Exports,” in which your conclusions are almost as erroneous as those in the previous article on the same subject. Permit me, as briefly as possible, to point out some of your errors and omissions. You mention that “Sir George Paish says that the United States owes about 3,440 millions abroad.” You have been careless in quoting him, for he gives that sum as the amount of British capital alone invested in the United States in the year 1910. Why not come up to date? The same authority gives the amount of British capital invested in the United States as 3,770 millions in 1913, and also says that during the past seven years the borrowings of the United States in Great Britain have averaged over 115 million dollars a year, so that according to your own authority the States is still a borrowing nation, and absolutely unable to finance its own undertakings at home, although your conclusion is to the contrary, despite the figures of the authority you have named. Either Sir George Paish or the Editor of The Courier is wrong. Personally, I have more confidence in the figures of Sir George. No intelligent person would claim that Britain is the only country in the world with investments in the United States. While no accurate figures of foreign investments in any country are obtainable, it is not safe to assume that the investments of France, Germany and all the other nations of the world, large and small, are quite as large, if they do not exceed those of Great Britain. If so, then you must at once double the amount of interest mentioned in your article, payable on foreign investments. You will now see that quite an inroad is being made on that 700 millions excess of exports, which by the peculiar reasoning of the machine politician, is looked upon as profit.

The excess of exports over imports from July 1st, 1898, to June 30th, 1913, was 8,021 millions. From July 1st, 1834, to June 30th, 1913, the figures are 10,643 millions, and as this excess is still increasing, there will be considerable difficulty in collecting it, even if it did represent a debt due the United States, which, of course, it does not, as there is nothing to show that there are credits abroad for any such sum. That tremendous sum simply represents a drain on the national wealth to meet foreign obligations.

Most people are aware that the absurd Protective

Tariff of the United States has absolutely driven her mercantile marine off the high seas, so that the sum she pays annually for the transportation of her enormous freight and passenger traffic practically all goes to foreign ship owners. That sum cannot fall short of 150 to 200 million dollars. Strange that you should overlook such an important item, for it certainly takes another big slice off that 700 millions of exports, in fact, the whole 300 millions which you claim was left to be invested at home in Canadian, Brazilian, Mexican and other securities has already vanished in the payment of interest to foreign ship owners, and on foreign investments (other than British), of which you made no mention at all. Surely an item of 200 or 300 millions is worthy of note, and should not be ignored in teaching a class in economics.

Nor have you made any mention of the sums transmitted annually by the immigrants to their kin at home. I saw an item in a New York paper some time ago that the foreigners of that city sent something like five millions home to Europe during Xmas season of 1912. The same process is going on all over the country in every city and town, and every dollar must be paid in exports.

Time and space will not permit the enumeration of many other instances where remittances are continually being made to foreign countries, which are all paid in exports, for nothing comes back in return. Without wearying you further, I think you surely must see that the excess of exports over imports in the United States considered as profit, is purely mythical, for it can be proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that it has all gone to meet foreign obligations. I do not know of a single economist of note, no matter what his political leanings, that takes any other view of it. Reason and common sense would prevent him from believing that a trading ship in the olden days that always carried away more than she brought back was doing a profitable business. Trade is just the same to-day as then, except that we now balance our books by means of bills of exchange instead of by commodities.

I feel that I would be trespassing on your kindness in making an extended reply to the second part of your article, entitled “Why Canada Borrows.” There would be no difficulty in proving that Canada could build and equip a C. P. R. or a G. T. R. or C. N. R. every ten years with the money that is corruptly, carelessly and ignorantly spent by her Federal, Provincial and Municipal Governments. Take one instance; we witnessed the insane and criminal waste of fourteen millions last year to build a lot of useless armories, and have a few thousand of our young men playing soldier, whose time would have been better occupied doing something useful at no expense to the country. Save that sum for seven years, and you could build the Georgian Bay Canal, according to the estimate of the engineers. In twenty years, you could build a transcontinental railroad, and yet this huge sum is being frittered away annually for no practical use or purpose, and posterity will have to foot the bill.

Yours very truly,

MONTREAL.

Montreal's Municipal Muddle

“Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.”

THE pot-pourri compounded by the Macbethian witches was but plain consomme when compared with the political potage which is about to be offered to the electors of Montreal for consumption on April sixth. Just as that fabled Scotch brew contained ingredients, as itemized by Shakespeare, which had been gathered from all quarters, so the present political menage is a genuine “olla podrida,” fashioned from material of every known variety of seekers after political preferment.

In so far as the mayoralty candidates are concerned, although no one is able to foretell with any degree of assurance what a day or an hour may or may not bring forth, the contest seems to have simmered down to a duel between Major George Washington Stephens and the doughty Alderman, Mederic Martin. Yet “nomination day,” which in Montreal extends over this entire week, may yet bring out one or more further candidates for this office. To a considerable extent it depends on whether or not, before it ends, the Journalistic Juggler of St. James (street) can succeed in “damning with faint praise” the candidate of the Citizens' Association. It is manifest that if he is able to do so he will—and thereby will hang several tales.

Of course, already some of this sounds like ancient history. Mederic Martin, as a self-impressed candidate for mayor, has been in the field since the “memory of man runneth not to the contrary.” Of course, also, his nomination papers bear other signatures than his own. But that is a mere incident; he is IT. And notwithstanding the fact that there are some low rumblings of rumour that he will withdraw before election day, it is safe to assert that “all the King's horses and all the King's men” could not pull him out of the race.

On the other hand, after Major Stephens had been called back from Europe for the sole purpose of taking the nomination, and after he had been sagely informed by four sage counsellors learned in the law