

Sermons for the Unsatisfied

By J. S. Woodsworth Secretary of the Canadian Welfare League

I.—The New Era and Its Problems

We live in a new world. As children we were entranced by the rapid changes and developments of the Elizabethan period. It would seem that at that time some new land was being discovered every few days. But the globe is small and the continents were soon exhausted. In our day, however, we are pushing forth into a score of different realms, each apparently inexhaustible. The horizon is being pushed back and vast and bewildering vistas are being opened up on every side. Science, invention, historical research, social investigation—each brings daily to our attention a bewildering array of newly found treasures—The new world is a big place.



J. S. Woodsworth

And yet on the other hand the world has become small. The continents are now crossed, not in so many months, but in so many hours; the oceans have ceased to divide and now offer the best means of communication. Not content with travel on the level, we now traverse with our submarines the hidden depths, and in our airships laugh at the wings of the wind. It was wonderful when over great distances messages could be sent along the wire. Now we

talk to our friends in mid-ocean without visible means of communication.

But in a deeper sense than this, the world has become small. We are beginning to perceive its inner unity and to understand the relation of its various parts. A visitor to London travels by bus along miles of shops and houses. Next day he travels miles in another direction. A third day he takes the underground and emerges at his destination. The following day, guided by the direction of the policeman, he walks to some particular place and then back again carefully by the same route. London is for him a vast, confusing network of streets and railways. He has come to know a few faces, but he has no idea whatever as to directions and distances. He makes further excursions. He studies his map—someone has surveyed the field before him. He takes new routes. Gradually the streets and places of interest arrange themselves into an orderly system. Vast areas remain unexplored, but London is no longer incomprehensible. It is no longer a jumbled collection of show-places—it is a city.

So without the aid of a map—for no one has passed this way ahead of us—we have been gradually exploring this vast, complicated new world of ours. To our surprise we find that religion runs into psychology, that ethics connects up with political economy, that art runs parallel with mathematics. These discoveries are often positively disconcerting. When a man is lost in the woods and suddenly finds himself in his own clearing, he may become completely "turned around," so in face of these new problems, many a man is, as we say, "upset" in his religious ideas, or, as we sometimes put it, he "doesn't quite know where he is at." It is undoubtedly a trying period, but one in which he should rejoice, for surely he is growing; his world is enlarging. Let him not try to crowd himself into his old shell. Let him not stand "trembling on the brink," but rather plunge into the new and larger life.

Gradually, then, we are organizing our new knowledge; the world is for us no longer a chaotic connection of isolated and unrelated phenomena, but an ordered system with related parts of a unifying purpose. Some of the world's mysteries may have vanished, but mysteries, after all, are only those things that have mystified us—left us in a fog—on the other hand, as we learn more of what are termed the laws of nature, we are more and more, as the old hymn has it, "lost in wonder, love and praise." We are out of the fog into God's clear sunlight which floods and glorifies the landscape.

Readjustments are of course necessary in every direction. Old established theories have gone by the board. Everything is, as it were, in the melting-pot. Systems of political economy, codes of ethics, religious creeds, social institutions, national ideals—all are being tried by fire. It is doubtless distressing to watch some cherished belief shrivel up and disappear, but why dread the fire? The gold will come out purified; truth can never perish.

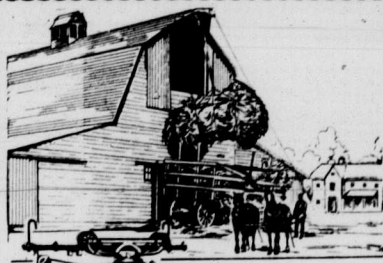
Among the most important developments of the new era is the drawing together of the peoples of the world. Rapid, cheap and safe transportation has carried millions of people far from their homes into foreign or hitherto unknown lands. Thru books and papers we are becoming acquainted with the inhabitants of all countries. The telegraph daily

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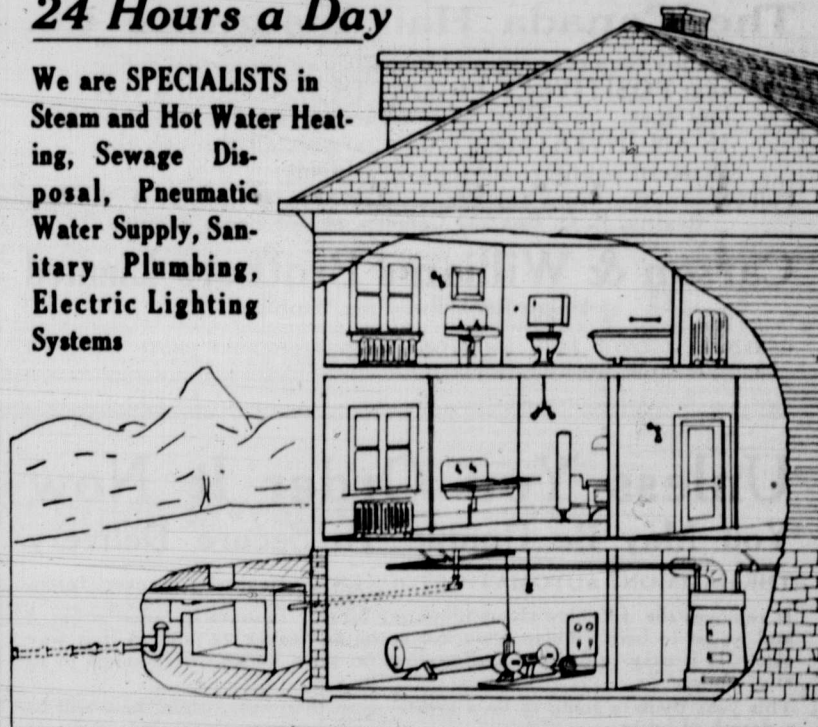


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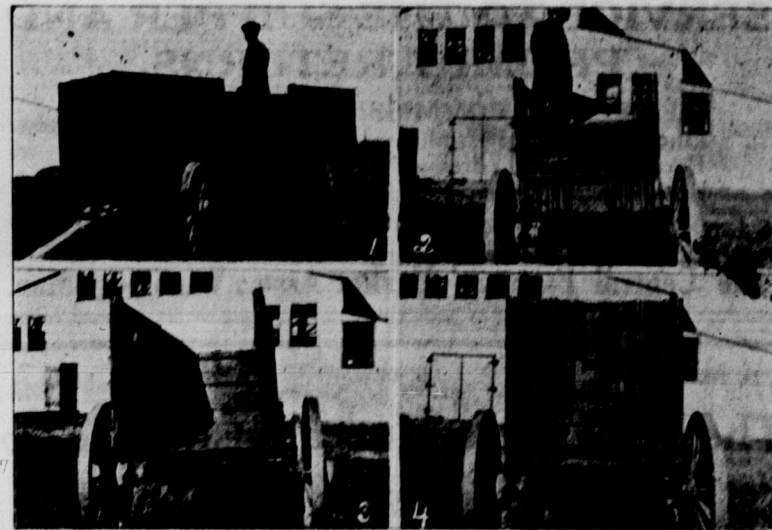
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