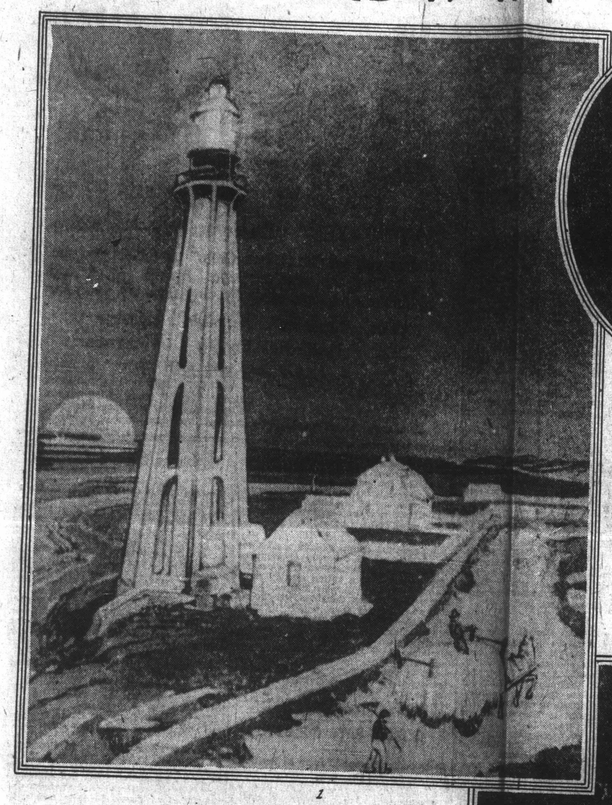
A CANADIAN CARAVAN IN FRANCE

BY ALVAN SANBORN



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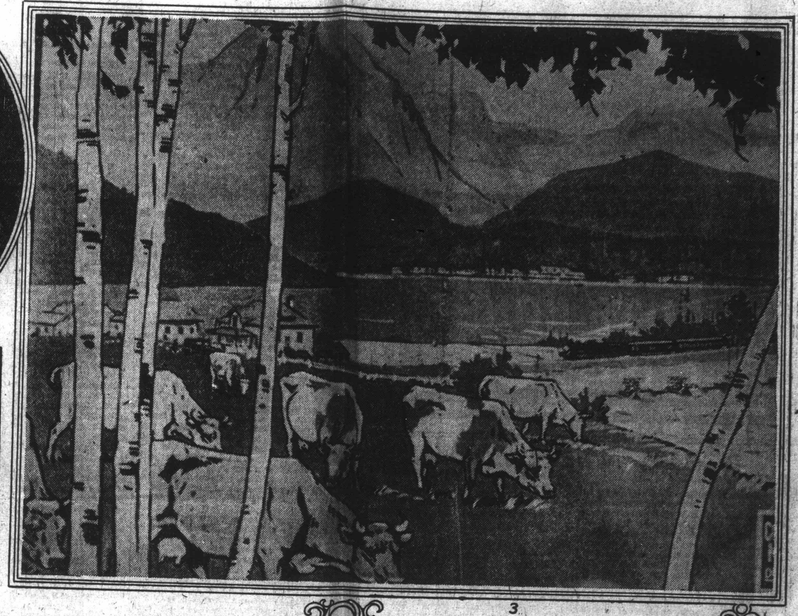

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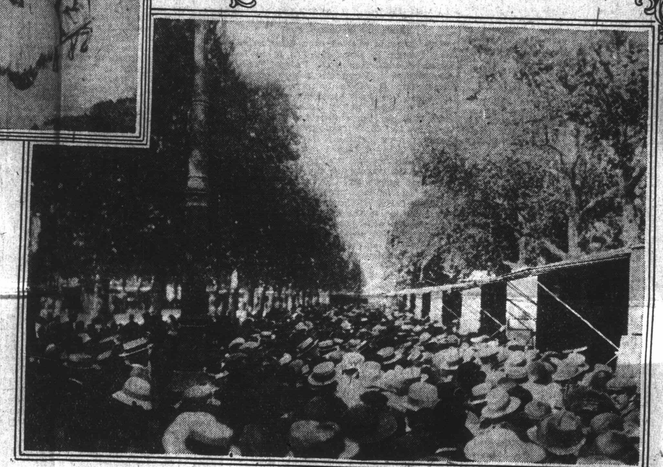

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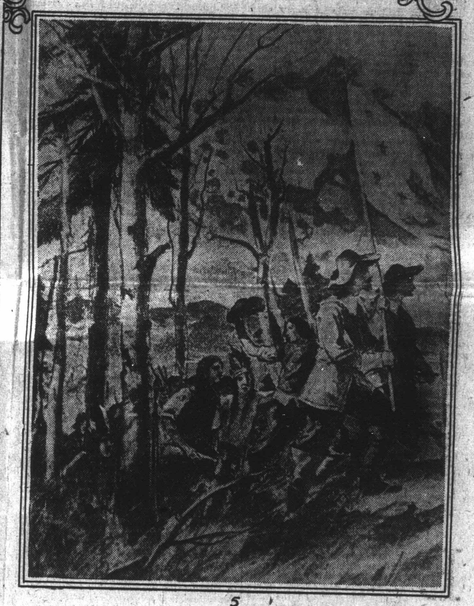

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1—Outward Bound for Europe—the Pointe-au-Pere, on the St. Lawrence, Where the Pilot Leaves the Ship.

2—Senator Beaubien of Montreal, Organizer of the Canadian Exposition, and Ardent Friend of France.

3—A Pastoral Scene in Canada, from one of the Posters Advertising the Beauties of What Might Have Been "New France."

4—The Caravan at Grenoble, Showing the Fronts of the Great Trucks in Place and the Throngs of People Crowding About Them.

5—The Past Glories of France in the New World—Explorers and Their Indian Guides Pressing on to the St. Lawrence. Another Poster.

6—A Tiny Country Church on the Shores of the St. Lawrence, a Poster Advertising the Canadian Pacific Steamers.

Canada Returns the French Compliment of 1921 in Kind—Familiarizing Prospective Customers in Old France with What the New Has to Offer Through Posters, Speeches and Beautifully Illustrated Pamphlets—An Entire Exposition Borne on Motor Trucks, That Wanders From City to City and Attracts Throngs Wherever It Goes

Paris, Jan. 9.

EVER since the phenomenal vogue of Louis Hemon's homely novel of Canadian life, "Maria Chapdelaine," Canada has been very much the fashion in this part of the world.

The latest manifestation of this predilection for things Canadian is the triumph of the Canadian Exposition in the Tuileries Gardens, which (without the slightest street advertising and almost without press announcements) is daily drawing such tremendous crowds that the majority (even after standing patiently in line by the hour, on a wind-swept terrace, at imminent risk of grippe, before passing the turnstile), are unable, by reason of the crush, to catch more than an occasional glimpse of the spectacle they came out to see.

The Tuileries Exposition (whose immediate practical purpose is to familiarize potential customers in Old France with the agricultural and industrial output of New France, with a view to making the exports of the latter to the former approach more closely than they have hitherto the exports of the former to the latter), was formally inaugurated by Prime Minister Poincaré and has been officially visited by the President of the French Republic on invitation of the Canadian Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, and the British ambassador, Lord Crewe, who welcomed him in person. Conversely, its personnel has been received by the Paris Municipal Council (on which occasion the Canadian Minister of Justice, Sir Lomer Gouin, announced that the Canadians, who "had the same thoughts as the French during the war, still think like them") and by the Societe des Gens de Lettres, intent upon strengthening the intellectual ties between the two countries.

These divers Paris ceremonies are at once the consummation and the farewell of an undertaking, which, reversing the usual order, has come to the capital after visiting the provinces and which returns a similar visit of France to Canada.

One Good Turn Deserves Another

In 1921 France, on invitation and at the expense of the dominion, organized and carried out a railway train exposition, which toured Canada for more than two months, exhibiting in the half-hundred most important cities to such good purpose that French exports to Canada have mounted to $14,000,000 annually. By way of reciprocity the French Government invited Canada to send to France, at the expense of France, an analogous itinerant exposition, and Canada gladly accepted the invitation. But it was decided by the organizers that the Canadian "train" in France should be a train of motor trucks instead of a railroad train, the former being better adapted to the topography and transportation conditions of the Old World, and that it should terminate its trip in Paris, instead of beginning it there.

The Canadian Caravan—"Exposition Roulante" the French call it, linking it humorously with the "roulottes" of the "forains," with which, for generations, they have been familiar—comprises some thirty big gray-green, blue bordered motor trucks, decorated with the French and the Canadian colors, each of which is so constructed (after the manner of the ambulatory cages of the traditional circus menagerie) that the simple displacement of the panels of one side suffices to transform it into a miniature exhibition hall. Placed end to end, they constitute a gallery nearly two hundred yards long, or, disposed in a circle, they form an enclosure that can easily be sheltered with a canvas awning. The exhibition trucks proper are supplemented by a number of other trucks utilized for the transportation of lighting equipment, cinematographic apparatus, materials for repairs and a gang of workmen.

The Caravan has visited practically all the important centres of population (Havre, Rouen, Lille, Rheims, Strasbourg, Chambéry, Grenoble, Lyons, Marseilles, Toulouse, Bordeaux, Angers, Angoulême, Limoges, Clermont-Ferrand, Nantes, Rennes, Bourges, Amboise, Orleans, Tours, Le Mans, Chartres) and several small communities. There is a daylight cinema, which has proved a great attraction by reason of its novelty on this side of the water, and two open-air screens for the amusement of the populace at night. Lectures also are provided for the serious minded.

Canada's Century the Twentieth

The keynote of the Paris exposition is struck by a memorable utterance of a former Canadian Prime Minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, "The nineteenth century was the century of the United States, the twentieth century will be the century of Canada," which, reproduced in big letters, is the very first thing to strike the eye of the visitor as he enters the enclosure, and it emphasizes throughout the irreparableness of the loss to France in 1763 of her North American colonies, an event which Voltaire, in his "Precis du Regne de Louis XV," treated with characteristic flippancy as a matter of no importance.

The salient feature, the feature which draws the crowds, is a series of remarkable dioramas so ingeniously lighted that the spectator observes in the space of a few minutes the transition from darkness to dawn, from dawn to broad daylight, from daylight to twilight, and from twilight back to darkness again. The subjects have been selected with a view first of all to conveying a conception of the majestic beauty of the Canadian landscape and of the picturesque persistence of wild life therein, and then of the intensity and scope of Canada's present agricultural and industrial activities and of the immense resources its prairies, forests, mines, furs and fisheries offer to economic initiative.

These dioramas visualize most vividly, furthermore, the chief incidents of Canada's checkered history, particularly the vicissitudes of the explorers, missionaries and traders who opened up her immense territory to civilization (Cartier, Champlain, the Chevalier de la Salle, La Verendrye, de Laval, de Chomédy, Du Lhut, Père Lalemand, Radisson, Joliet, Perrot, Saint-Lusson, Cadillac, Père Marquette).

Clever and Effective Propaganda

The particular import or lesson of each of the dioramas is ingeniously driven home by a conspicuous printed placard.

Thus:

"It took three long days to go from Quebec to Montreal."

"The dazzling Aurora Borealis launches into the blue-black Canadian night streams of fireworks."

"Our forests contain the most precious species."

"The richest soil, cultivated according to the most modern methods, stretches as far as the eye can see."

"The fisheries of Nova Scotia bring in millions every year."

"The silver fox, joy of the woman of fashion, is raised on Prince Edward's Island."

"Lumbering is one of the sources of the wealth of New Brunswick."

"According to the census of 1921, the population of the Province of Quebec is 2,361,200, of whom 51.5 per cent are tillers of the soil, and about 85 per cent of French origin and Catholic religion. Quebec, French soil under the British flag, is the largest of the Canadian provinces."

"The hydro-electric plants of Ontario, fed by innumerable cascades and impetuous streams, distribute mechanical energy to a vast territory."

"Manitoba is the granary of the world."

"Western Canada is the most marvelous agricultural zone of the universe, and its admirable herds are the envy of other nations."

"The streams of British Columbia serve to transport the gigantic trees consumed by the paper pulp industry."

"Vancouver is verily the pearl of the Pacific."

Statements which sound stale and commonplace enough to American ears, but which are full of significance to the French (unspeakably naive regarding pretty nearly everything connected with the New World), when fortified, as they are here, by realistic dioramas or illuminated colored photographs.

There is also a carefully chosen exposition of Canadian manufactured products.

Maple Leaf and Fleur De Lis

This immediate visual propaganda is followed up by an intellectual propaganda of longer range in the form of a series of bright-covered, copiously illustrated brochures in French, prepared especially for the caravan, which go beyond the dioramas and photographs, in that they indulge largely in dreams of future greatness. They are adroitly decorated with the maple leaf and the fleur de lis, the Gallic cock and the Canadian beaver, the coats of arms of the French Republic and of the Dominion. They pay exceedingly politic compliments to France, as the founder of Canada, and make a strong appeal to French sentiment, by recalling the role of Canada in the late war. And they are so attractive withal that they are sure to be taken home and read, and even preserved by the visitors to whom they are most lavishly distributed.

"Friendly reader," one of these brochures begins, "try, as you peruse this document, to see in it something more than pictures of trappers and of legendary warriors. It is one of the most glorious pages of your own history these lines bring you, a page you are too prone, perhaps, to forget—you have so many others and so noble!—but which ought to be frequently recalled. For Canada was one of your children. Nine years ago, France saw the sons of Canada rush to her shores and join her sons in defending right against force. French soil guards piously the remains of thousands of Canadians who have mingled their blood with that of her own heroes. Canada now desires to make herself known to France under a new aspect. After having offered, in 1914, the succor of her martial valor, she offers her, in 1923, the cooperation of her industrial genius. The seed sown overseas by the French pioneer has yielded prodigiously, and it is just that the hand that confided it to the soil should share in the harvest. . . . If Canada is today an incomparable country, it is due to the impulses she received from the motherland. It is in a French furrow that our golden wheat has germinated."

Senator Beaubien

The prime creator and the moving spirit of the Canadian Caravan is Senator C. P. Beaubien, of Montreal, who has accompanied it throughout its peregrinations in France and has been the chief interpreter of its mission to the populations it has visited.

"We have rarely been privileged," observes a Frenchman who was with the caravan during the larger part of its journey, "to listen to such well-rounded as well as such direct and convincing eloquence. It would seem that every new site, every new town, inspires Senator Beaubien with a fresh supply of images and dictates to him the necessary words and the essential phrases. It is because he feels what is particularly appealing in each of our regions that he moves his auditors.

It is also, perhaps, because his natural faculties have been coördinated by French discipline, that the harmony of our landscapes and of our cities, the unity of their manifold elements of beauty, the impression in his restrained lyricism, in which the permanence of our soil affirmed."

France as Canadian Market

Wherever Senator Beaubien has passed, he has ingratiated himself into the favor of the leading citizens by the tactful warmth of his appeals for a consideration of the claims of the country he represents. "No corner of the earth," he declared in a speech at Bordeaux, "has ever been known to acquire as rapidly a development as colossal as that of Canada. Eh bien, Messieurs, Canada, which has nine million inhabitants in whom you have nine million friends of whom three millions are relatives, regrets sorely the meagre scope of her trade with you; in fact, our exportations to France are only 1.25%. Why do you Frenchmen neglect your French brothers in Canada, and why do you go to other countries for products you could buy at the same price from us?"

Ardent Champion of Ruhr Occupation

Already, before leaving Canada, Senator Beaubien had espoused enthusiastically the cause of France in the Ruhr, notably in a speech before the Canadian Club of Montreal, and in practically all his French barnstorming he has proclaimed the postbellum action of France in accord with law and justice. For instance, he terminated the Bordeaux speech just cited above with this unequivocal bit of approval: "When, sure of your right, you decided to occupy a part of the soil of the Germany which has caused you so much suffering, you had all your Canadian brothers with you. You are going to reap soon the harvest of an undertaking you have carried on laboriously, courageously and worthily. It is your due. From the bottom of our hearts we rejoice with you."

The Canadian Caravan has been accorded everywhere a right royal welcome. Everywhere, it has been profusely dined and wined by Municipal Councils, Chambers of Commerce and Improvement Societies. It is affirmed that fully 2,000,000 people visited it before its arrival in the capital, and the number of its visitors here bids fair to be limited only by the length of its stay and the population of greater Paris.

To just what extent the visit of the Canadian Caravan to France has achieved its avowed immediate purpose of booming Canadian trade it is too early, of course, to determine; but it is not too early to assert that it has gone a long way toward developing mutual comprehension and affection, toward creating a current of cordiality. It has familiarized all France, even the children (most of all perhaps, the children with whom rests the future) with the immensity of the territory of Canada, the abundance and variety of its resources and the romantic story of its difficult beginnings. And the members of the Canadian mission have seen France at much closer range than tourists are wont to see it and have learned thereby the solidity and the wholesomeness of French provincial life.

"As we have gone from place to place we have been able" explains one of them "to get better acquainted with your country and to fortify by contact, alike with the peasants and the city-dwellers, our sentiments of affection for the home of our ancestors. Your ancient cities, with their historical monuments, their churches and the customs of their inhabitants have revealed to us the force of the tradition with which we ourselves were nourished. Your fields and the workers in them have made us see far better than any number of lectures and discourses the admirable vitality of your race, which the war tested severely but did not enfeeble. We have heard the beating of the heart of France along the national highways, under the crust of the earth, in the woods, in the vineyards, by the spires of the village churches and the belfries of the city halls. We have learned to know and to appreciate France and we shall be ready, once back home, to act as apostles of the French cause."

A Permanent Canadian Exhibition?

By way of continuing the Exposition of the Tuileries and of giving permanent form to the mutual understanding and cooperation of which it is the present visible symbol, a "Canadian Palace" is soon to be erected in the heart of Paris, on the site of the recently closed Grand Café and of the famous Jockey Club which is about to migrate westward. It will contain a general exhibition of the products of Canada as a whole and a special exhibition of each of the provinces thereof. In the very same basement where, erstwhile, a rudimentary cinematograph offered tentatively and timidly, under the auspices of the Lumière brothers, the first moving pictures to be seen in France, a highly perfected cinematograph, devoted exclusively to reproducing Canadian life, will be installed. There will be reception rooms, lecture halls and banquet halls, destined more particularly for Canadian or France-Canadian functions. The Canadian Palace will likewise be the centre of a highly organized immigration service, designed to facilitate the journey between Europe and Canada, in which all the countries of Europe will be represented, for Canada—with a view to attaining as quickly as possible a population proportionate to the extent and richness of her territory—is at present as eager to receive accessions to her population as the United States is not to receive them, and is ready to guarantee all categories of immigrant workers with lucrative and permanent employment.

The building will also be utilized for the offices of the Commissariat Général of Canada in France.

"The erection of a Canadian Palace in Paris" explains Arnold Arnovici, under whose immediate direction the ambitious scheme is being realized "proceeds from a desire to pay joint homage to the great France universally admired and to the France over yonder, Canada, a large part of whose population recalls with pride its French origin. And it is to be hoped that this Palace will be worthy, not only of the country it will evoke in your midst, (a country almost as big as all Europe and whose shores are washed by the Atlantic and by the Pacific) but also of the glorious Patrie, to which the whole world claims to belong, because its generous historical traditions have earned it the gratitude of all the genuinely civilized peoples."