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Personalities and Problems

I---Major George Washington Stephens

The Man at the Head of the Port of Montreal

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

IF you go to Montreal on an ocean liner, Major George Washington Stephens is officially the man who gives you the freedom of the city. The visitor to the farthest inland great ocean port in the world who has not seen the Major, has failed to see adequately the one biggest thing about Montreal—which is the Port. And the Port of Montreal, if you take it from the Lachine Canal a thousand miles to the sea, stands for a total aggregate investment of about fifty-five million dollars, which is a little more than one-fifth the capitalization of the greatest transportation company in the world, the C. P. R., whose headquarters at Windsor St. and ocean fleet docked at Montreal were determined by the St. Lawrence route.

The Harbour is to Montreal rather what Parliament Hill is to Ottawa. And if you see the port without Major Stephens you have missed one of the most genial commercial personalities that ever advised a government or received a delegation. The name George Washington was copied from his father, the Hon. G. W. Stephens, whose father came to Montreal from Vermont. But if there is a more enthusiastic all-Canadian anywhere than the President of the Harbour Commissioners he is not known to the newspapers.

It was the third week of shipping when I called to see him. That morning he had been busy showing the Duke over what Chief Engineer Cowie has declared the best-equipped harbour in the world. Now he was out again whizzing about in the Commissioners' motor that has replaced the over-docks buggy; getting over the docks and the sheds, upstairs and down, at an average speed of ten miles an hour, while ocean liners unloaded and coaled up, and the ferry from Longueuil let off its crowd of marketers at five cents a head and teams at ten cents. The old-style stone offices at 57 Common St. were quiet. A big door, first floor up, with a green baize door inside it, was the President's.

HERE he came up the stair—there is no elevator. A stout-built, swift-moving man, with conglomerated sunbeams shooting from a pair of great nose-glasses; a braided morning coat, a black cravat and an atmosphere of enthusiasm—he dodged into the big office; the green door went shut. He hustled to his desk, one of three next the windows; a room big enough for a small legislature; high corbeled ceilings, immense plans and maps of the harbour, a big oval table with twelve ducal chairs, one of them a foot higher than the rest—a survival of the days when the Port of Montreal was managed by a motley commission of a dozen men. And from this seigniorial hall the genial President looked out at the moving picture of the ships, as he does every day. He pulled out a box of cigars.

"Now what do you want to see me about?" as he held a match.

"Mainly about Major Stephens and the problem he represents. The man who has a few millions, no need to work for a living, and acts as the Genie of the Port of Montreal because he has a constructive imagination and—"

He gave me a beaming glance.

"And what else?"

"Enthusiasm. I think you have it."

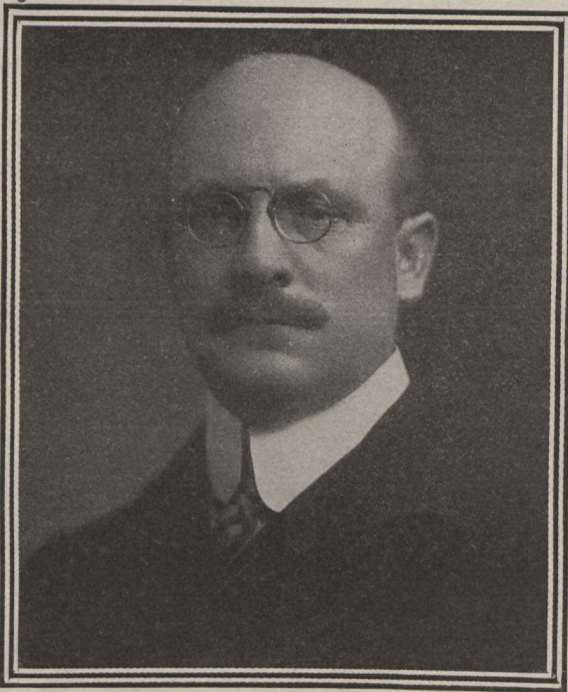
He looked out at the ships and the St. Lawrence.

"Well with a job like this—who wouldn't?"

He was as happy as a boy at a coon-hunt. His work was so brimful of cumulative optimism that

it looked to the other man like play. But every day of seven months in the year between ice slumping out and ice packing in, an average of more than a million dollars' worth of cargo moves in and out of the Port of Montreal. Season of 1911 somewhere about 500 ocean liners docked there with an aggregate tonnage of just about two million tons; about 400 lower St. Lawrence and coast ships, aggregating the best of three-quarters of a million tonnage; and inland vessels approximating 15,000, with tonnage of more than five millions. One season in that port represents easily the grand average of two hundred million dollars' worth of goods in and out; lacking sixteen millions of quarter the entire import and export trade of the Dominion of Canada for 1911-12.

"On a basis of investment compared to traffic, we are by long odds the first port in America," said the Major. "This harbour, not counting the St. Lawrence route, has cost to date about fifteen mil-



Major Stephens looked like this when he became President of the Harbour Commissioners in 1907.

lion dollars. New York harbour has cost hundreds of millions. She is our main competitor."

By the blink of his spectacles you knew he was dreaming of the Erie Canal, of the enlarged Welland, of the Georgian Bay Canal, of the completed Grand Trunk Pacific converging on Montreal for more than half its trackage, of both the other trans-continental, of the everlasting increase in the wheat areas of the West, of which somehow in the Harbour Commissioner's office, at desk No. 1 by the window, there seems to be a knack of getting the focus of the picture.

"And on a basis of population we beat them all," he added, flinging himself back in his chair. "That's something. On a basis of investment, population and tonnage this port happens to be growing at a

bigger rate than any other in the world. I guess that's the most inspiring factor in the problem."

It was evidently not Montreal from the mountain to the river; but Montreal focussing Canada from the Rockies to St. John, of which he was thinking; on which he had been pondering now these many years, travelling and taking notes, investigating problems of shipping when other men were engaged in production; concerned in enlarging the main spout when the combined efforts of hundreds of millions in capital and investment are absorbed in shunting population in and trailing wheat and other things out.

"By Jove!" he observed suddenly, with a glance at the creaking boom of a crane yanking things out of a steamer hold, "that liner from Amsterdam there had a million dollars' worth of gin in her when she warped in to the dock."

And he remembered that it was now only about two weeks since the big shuffle of the ships started up again after the long, nailed-down winter of ice. The daily average of more than a million dollars in and out was just beginning to crawl to the early-summer crescendo when the upper lake grain bottoms would come drifting down with the hold-over of last year's wheat. With a map of the Port under his thumb he was seeing it all; to the Major an old story now, but everlastingly new in development. And he was using his imagination; because arithmetic was too cold; enthusiasm that makes the driest statistics dance with colour and life.

THE Major was born in Montreal in 1866; son of Hon. G. W. Stephens, who made a pile of money out of lumber and became a member of the Quebec Cabinet; born wealthy and never needed to work, but as he said emphatically:

"Now is there anything more miserable than a rich man out of a job? I suppose if I hadn't this Port to look after I'd find something else to do. But of all businesses in the world give me this."

Mackenzie and Mann building railroads and Hammerstein creating new opera houses never could be more interested. Incidentally the President gets seven thousand a year for the work. But that's only a fraction of the interest on his own personal wealth; and the work he does on the Port of Montreal if put into any one of the consolidations of which Major Stephens is one of the head forces would mean tremendously more income.

But he doesn't need the income. Somehow when you hear other men talk about the evolution of G. W. Stephens you realize that he never needed it. When he graduated from McGill he might have begun to settle down to a life of ease, travel and culture. But he didn't. Some time in his early career he took a notion to journalism, and for a while he was a reporter on the Montreal Herald. He would have made a first-class journalist. He went to Heidelberg for post-graduate work. Fluent in French, there he learned to speak German almost as well as he does English; and the Major is one of the most polished of after-dinner and stump speakers. Leaving Heidelberg he took a year at the University of Geneva. Somewhere in his travels the young millionaire from college bumped into one of the Steidtmans, forwarders of Hamburg, who said to him:

"I'm looking for a man that wants a job."

"Well I guess that's me," said the millionaire.

He talked shipping. He went to Hamburg; into