

THE COURIER

Vol. XX.

September 23rd, 1916

No. 17

ONE OF THE ODDEST OF EDITORS

Edmund E. Sheppard Whose Front Page Was His Own Back Yard

WHEN searching round to discover the man that established the freedom of the press in this country we shall never be able to miss a somewhat wizened and picturesque man who lives in a place called Ontario, Cal. Some years ago, Edmund E. Sheppard went to California and the orange groves for his health. When he went there he was about as peculiar a compound of incompatible qualities as one might find outside of jail. He is probably so yet.

But we shall never omit to remember that the founder of Saturday Night did for Canadian newspaperdom of the 80's and 90's in a mild way what Harden has done for the press of Germany. "Shep," as he signed himself on the photo that illustrates this page, had a different sort of newspaper bondage to deal with. Most of it was hide-bondage. And Sheppard, first on the News, afterwards on Saturday Night, was the first man we remember who in any effective way went through our hide-bound, partyized, dogmatized journalism like water through a hose. In establishing himself as the "unbusted" broncho of the newspaper ring, Sheppard did the editors of this country a service they have never forgotten. Even though the bulk of his work was done on a weekly front page he succeeded in proving that when a live editor wants copy he doesn't have to get it by holding a conference with a politician or reading a pack of high-class reviews. Sheppard demonstrated that to turn out the sort of copy that made people look for what he said once a week after all the other leaders had gone over the ground, he needed to horn himself into curious corners that any self-considering editor would be inclined to avoid. He must take up subjects that to other editors would seem at first ridiculous. He must go at threadbare topics with a new kind of motive. All that other editors had said was to Sheppard the very thing he chose not to say. And if that meant to have no particular convictions on some subjects, then convictions he jiggered! The thing was to know that "Shep" had said thus and so on any subject. It might be a gang of newsies shooting craps up a blind alley, some preacher whose gospel seemed to be all wound up in a woollen string, some blase political person in the seats of the mighty who would be the better of somebody's muddy boots, or some fad, fallacy or general obsession that could always stand being poked fun at by a man who knew how to juggle with unusual language and new sets of ideas.

NO doubt Sheppard had as many bigotries and fads of his own as any of the people he attacked on his front page. Which was the main reason why he knew so well how to rip such things up the seams. He took a sort of personal pride in being the repository of everybody's tales of woe and in his sanctum he was a professional maker of opinion who believed that if you want to make people sit up and take notice of an editorial page you must come out with personal journalism. And personal journalism with Sheppard was not merely recording the opinions and doctrines of one signed Don. It was the mongrel personalism of a crowd put through the mill of the editor who, when he chose to be was himself all things to any people and if he took a contrary notion, rode his broncho head-on over all things and people in general.

It is some while now since he was last seen on Toronto streets. He had then a stick which seemed to be the same old stick he always had, much the same Deadwood Dick style of hat, the same long, delectable moustache, same stoop at the shoulders—shuffling and cogitating along Adelaide St., his old

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

stamping ground, the home of Saturday Night.

But no longer an editor. No, Sheppard has lost interest in any front page. Long since are the days when he used to crack the blacksnake whip over political sinners, pious frauds, foolish people, liars, thieves, scoundrels, and bad doctrinaires in high places or low, and when he could find none worth his ink to write about made up some out of his head. This once truculent editor and proprietor is now a Christian Scientist. His latest book—or was there

of the front page of Saturday Night, formerly editor of the Toronto Evening News, and author of the book called Dolly, and of other rustic sketches which no other urban editor ever had the knack to put over in a newspaper.

HE called himself Don. Others called him "Shep." It made no difference who got to know the identity of the man that first used a "nom de plume" on a front page in Toronto or in Canada. Sheppard had no objection to being spotted on the street. He never tried to avoid his friends or to side-track his enemies. He had plenty of both. Nobody ever said he was a very nice fellow or a rattling good citizen or a credit to Canadian journalism. If Sheppard had ever discovered any particular person as the author of any such platitudes concerning himself, he would have gone after him on the front page as some sort of Sis who hadn't enough virility to be called Hopkins.

From certain of his deliverances on the front page of Saturday Night we learned that the editor was born and brought up in the vicinity of St. Thomas, Ont. He was nurtured on the cornfield coon-hunt, the fall fair and the barn-raising. He probably went to a few logging-bees and a number of taffy-pulls. As a youth he was a critical adventurer at country dances, a student of revival meetings and a first aid to the injured at any township nomination in the old town hall. He knew the ecstasy of burying his face from ear to ear in a home-grown watermelon stolen from some farmer's cornfield by moonlight, and the stern joy of the feuds over a line fence.

But the township concession line and the lure of the market road leading to the town of St. Thomas were not enough to hold this dangerous-looking farm-son on the voters' lists in that part of Ontario. His trips to St. Thomas probably gave him a number of premonitory thrills. The old Canada Southern branch of the M. C. R. made St. Thomas a kind of American town. It became a sort of Canadian headquarters for the fastest trains known in that part of Canada. And if there was anything else with any speed in Dorchester Tp., Ned Sheppard had never seen it except a cornfield coon going up a five-foot swamp-elm to escape a midnight dog or somebody's horses racing

on the gravel road with a girl in each buggy screaming louder than the wheels.

It was all pretty slow for a young man with the kind of face Sheppard had and the sort of gait he struck around the concession lines and the snake fences—that Billy-be-damned look that sometimes without much education burst forth into Rabelaisian language. His prose poem to a balky horse must have been a classic. His anathemas at the person who, at a threshing bee, tried to smother him with sheaves when he was cutting bands may have been conjectured from the glare of his orbs in the dust up at the hole in the wheat-mow.

ANYWAY Sheppard was a bred-in-the-bone agrarian who early in life rebelled against the clods and with most of the inveterate bigotries and prejudices of the townships thick in his brain got away to some school in West Va. How he got from there to Texas and afterwards to Mexico is not stated. But any of his colleagues in Elgin county when asked, "Where was Ned Sheppard last time yeh heerd from 'im?" would probably say, "Gosh, he's out o' Texas and down into Mexico. God knows where he'll be next."

For a born farmer with a face and a temperament like Ned Sheppard's to go rebunking among the six-shooting, shaganappi artists of the Lone Star



Edmund E. Sheppard, who on his photograph signs himself "Shep."