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"How many lectures will my son have to take before he can earn three dollars a day?"

Public Problems and the Professor

Dealing With Macadam Roads and Academic Minds

By ROBERT C. READE

FOR some reason or other Canadian professors don't take much active interest in public affairs. At least so Mr. Robert C. Reade says in a very vigorous and scintillating article. The writer is himself a university man; for some time lecturer in ancient history and classics at the University of Toronto; and was one of the first Canadian Rhodes scholars sent to Oxford. He states his opinions about Oxford influence in Canadian universities. He admits that we have at least two professors in Canadian politics now, though he says nothing of other academic minds that used to take a strong interest in public affairs, such as the late Principal Grant, of Queen's; Prof. Adam Shortt, now of the Civil Service Commission, and the late Goldwin Smith, whose interest in public affairs was purely intellectual. In slating the Canadian professor Mr. Reade has no intention either of ignoring the remarkable successes achieved by American professors in dealing with public problems, from James Russell Lowell, United States Ambassador to Great Britain, to Professor Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States. In fact the vigorous public career of President Wilson seems as an added reason why such an article as "Public Problems and the Professor" should be written in Canada.

MACADAM roads and academic minds may at first sight seem to be incongruously coupled, but taken together they form upper and lower lenses which will bring into clearer focus an important modern problem. The one phrase typifies the highways of business and government; the other the highways—sometimes the byways also—of leisure and thought. The modern problem varying in nomenclature from sociology or municipology to socialism or syndicalism, and so forth, is one of reducing the corpulent complexity of society to the simplicity of a system. Expansion makes reorganization continually necessary.

That marvel of well regulated harmony, the academic mind, if it be not a myth, may reasonably be looked to for order. It is an unharnessed

Niagara which conceivably may supply the power which will provide a solution. The United States have set it turning a presidential turbine. We in Canada are also investigating its possibilities. Municipal muddling, social turmoil, industrial unrest, the cost of living, all the evils of the world of macadam roads fling the ghost of a gigantic interrogation mark into college cloisters where, in calm and disembodied soliloquies the academic mind paces up and down—when it does not sit. Society, in short, in its Missouri vernacular, asks the professor for proof that he is putting macadam into the social system.

This was the real query in Mr. Gordon Waldron's recent criticism of Toronto University. He claimed to be attacking the use of soft Imperial soap stone. He disliked the employment in sturdy Canadian universities of spineless and crumbling Oxford building material. Any one who has seen how the very milk teeth of Time bite crevices into the yielding surface of Oxford's modern structures will agree with him architecturally, if not academically. He would prefer Scotch granite or American cement or even some native perennial brass—anything rather than most un-macadam Oxonian tiling. By this, Mr. Waldron no doubt meant that he would like to see Toronto University produce men who could turn their academic minds to civic improvements, men whose ideal could be discounted in present day social service, men who remembered Plato's practical advice to philosophers to take off their coats and get into municipal politics or perform jury service at Ottawa rather than let the country go to the dogs in the hands of riff-raff and nincompoops.

It may be said to be the political and social ideal of modern democracy that the men who know things should be the men who do things. The fortuitous energy of men who merely "do things" is a hit or miss method of attaining social perfection. There is hardly a city on this continent which does not bear in its slums, its backyards, its foul water fronts, or in ugly blotches on its civic escutcheon the almost ineffaceable traces of a blind rage for "doing" without a plan or an estimate or an

eye for beauty or permanent utility. The men who know things, as a class, have stood aloof, pre-occupied with money-making or the pursuit of culture, while demagogues have caused civic bankruptcy or police corruption, while public utilities have been wasted and legislatures turned into mere ante-rooms to corporation lobbies. Even where dishonesty was lacking, inefficiency has proved just as effective a destructive agency. We in Canada may need no Kipling to warn us against the "flanneled fools at the wicket," but we are in need of some words of reproof to the "energetic" men who want to put on the roof before they have dug the cellar.

The natural cure for misdirected energy is, of course, mind; of which universities are understood, perhaps too hastily, to have a monopoly. That being so, the cure for the maladjustments of our social organism should come from universities or some other habitat of mind. The men who know must be also the men who do. There is nothing, however, to prevent a mind from being lazy, and the secret of education is to give it a motive and a stimulus to activity. Our professors should be able to inspire young Canadians with a public spirit and an intelligent and effective will to action in the public interests even without monetary reward. The opportunities of a new country tend to create selfish individualism. It is the function of a university, as a centre of communal culture, to create a sixth sense of corporate responsibility, a social conscience; as a place of intellectual apprenticeship, to impart the knowledge of what precisely it is that the individual ought to do to benefit his social environment, his city, his country.

It would probably be difficult to find any large number of graduates who take up public life, or who embark in philanthropy or intelligent and disinterested social well doing as a direct result of their university course. Some one, no doubt, will refer triumphantly to the settlement work of Toronto University or to the two professors in politics, George Foster and Mackenzie King, or to the present movement toward undergraduate Conservative and Liberal clubs, genuine Ontario clubs minus the mahogany and the mosaic. Such things are germinal influences chance blown into university seed plots. They do not belong chemically to the academic soil. They are not dynamically related to the "academic mind" or to the professors who manipulate its machinery. It is the actual circumstances of municipal or national life with their suggestions and experiments and stimulus which make an alumnus desert the college frat or the president's annual address for a Bureau of Municipal Research, or a Guild of Civic Art.

THE professor is an Archimedes lever which could move the world with a place to stand. Dreamy idealists with no actual point of leverage in practical affairs will never teach that practical social ethics which alone can humanize our agricultural communities and put efficiency into municipal politics and national administration. It may be true of Toronto and other Canadian universities, as Mr. Waldron has pointed out, or probably would be willing to point out if it were suggested to him, that the too extensive replacing of sanguine and visionary Canadians by frigid and practical Oxonians has created amongst our undergraduates an indifference to Canadian problems.

Perhaps the chief function of a university is to preserve. It is a reservoir, not a gushing fountain in a thirsty land. It has as a result the defects of its qualities. It not only preserves, it embalms. It holds the past so long that its waters become brackish. The fault of universities is ultra conservatism, and academic conservatism is nothing more than the creed of Mr. Wordly Wiseman set up in letters of gold on the altars of idealism. The