

## ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

By PETER McARTHUR

I OFTEN used to wonder where all the useful citizens come from, the uncomplaining, serviceable people who do just what they are expected to do on all possible occasions, who allow themselves to be used by everyone who has an axe to grind and who live and die without showing a trace of individuality or self-assertion. They are certainly not the common people to whom Lincoln referred when he said that God must love them or He wouldn't have made so many of them. Nobody loves these people—they just use them. Business men, politicians, reformers, patent medicine fakirs and all who exploit the public for their own ends have the useful citizens tagged, labelled and pigeon-holed and know just how to use them when they need them. Although they help to swell the mass of the common people they must not be confused with them. The common people sometimes show signs of life and thought. It is from their numbers that the ranks of the anarchists and other interesting classes are recruited. Neither must it be supposed that useful citizens are confined to the working classes or even to those who fill minor positions in life. People of this class who have been particularly useful have been known to be rewarded with high offices and even to be elected to parliament—where they still continue to be useful. But wherever they may be found they never presume to call their souls their own. They are simply being useful to some individual or interest and they live their drab lives without giving any real evidence of being alive. They were of those who were described as being neither cold nor hot and only fit to be spewed out of the mouths of men of character. It is to be hoped that God loves them for they get little out of life.

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AT last I believe I have found out where all these useful citizens come from. They are the logical product of our incomparable educational system. When they are nicely able to toddle our children are turned over to this system, body and soul, and left in its grip until it throws them back on us as "useful citizens." As I examine this system I am seized by much the same kind of admiration as filled the shoe-string peddler who slipped past the doorman of the Standard Oil Company's offices on Broadway. He took the elevator to the top storey and began to ply his trade on the way down. The first door he entered was the last. He was promptly hurled out and followed by a man who kicked him down a flight of stairs. At the bottom of the landing he was met by a man who kicked him down another flight, and so on until he was finally shot through the front door and landed in a heap between the car-tracks. As he pulled himself together he looked up at the grey building, threw up his hands and exclaimed fervently, "Mein Gott, vot a system!" The admiring parent who watches his children being rushed through the examinations of our school system cannot help feeling as enraptured as the shoe-string peddler—and as helpless. He may be able to see that the uniformity of development in the students is due less to the development of all their faculties than to the suppression of their stronger faculties, but what can he do about it? They know enough, mathematics, history,

literature, and what not, to be able to make a decent showing but the multitude of their studies and the necessity of devoting most of their energies to those in which they have the least interest makes it impossible for them to be strong on any point. The finished product of our school system is the "useful citizen," the man whose originality and initiative have been destroyed. All he is capable of doing is taking his place in one of the grooves of modern life and being kicked along it until he is worn out. By no possibility can he drop into one of "the ringing grooves of change." He has been educated to be a useful citizen and there is never any lack of people to use him.

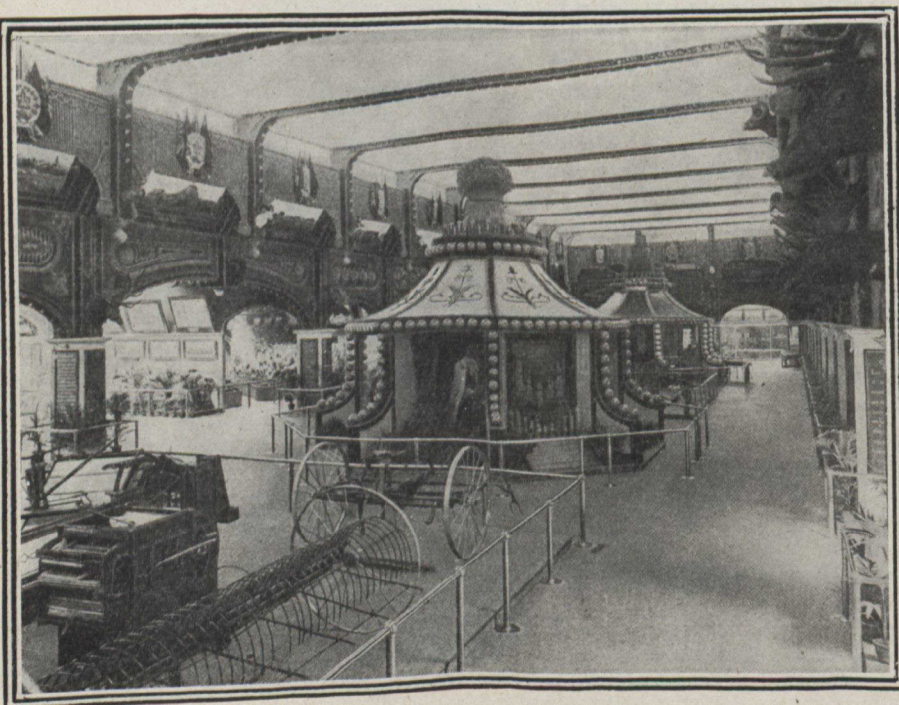
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THERE is no department of human life in which home rule is so imperative as in the schools. When the teacher is without authority to vary from his methods either at the suggestion of parents or through the exercise of his own judgment his usefulness is seriously impaired. It is only when teacher and pupil are free and in sympathy that the best work can be done. Our method of centralisation, however, makes the teacher powerless and the system supreme. Of course, in the larger cities the school boards take advantage of the privilege accorded them by the Government to modify the studies, but in the smaller places and in the country especially the system is all in all. Trustees, teachers, and inspectors are simply parts of the machine for grinding out colourless, innocuous useful citizens. The greatest educationist the world has ever known could do little even if he were Minister of Education because he would have to devote himself to making the system work and if he were a teacher in a public school he could do nothing because the system would not let him. Would it not be possible to have an educational system that would confine itself to encouraging and spurring on the teachers and school boards of the country, instead of one that crushes teachers and pupils alike to a dreary uniformity?

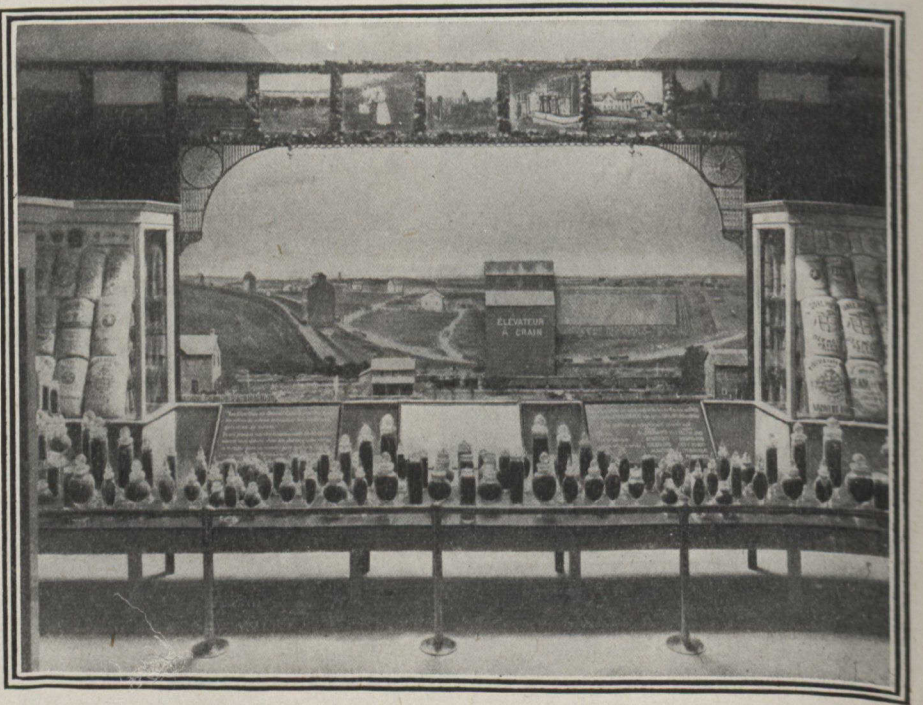
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AS a loyal Canadian and a lover of romance, I try to believe all the stories that come from the West, but there is a limit to my patriotic gullibility. That story about the man who appeared at one of the meetings of the Laurier tour and told Mr. Graham that his father had been led from the darkness of Toryism to the light of Liberalism by one of the Minister's speeches back in Ontario some years ago is a little too much for me. Men have been known to change their political faith but I defy anyone to produce a properly authenticated case of a change that was due to logical arguments or even to surpassing eloquence. They change because someone else got the postmastership or because the member's wife got uppish and snubbed her old neighbours, or other reasons from one dollar up. Once in 1896 I thought I was on the track of a true case of a man changing because of his convictions but on investigation it turned out that the cause was entirely different. I forget the exact details but he either joined the Grit party because Sir Wilfrid kissed his baby or left the Tory party because one of the Tory leaders kissed the child. That sort of thing works both ways, you know, and it all happened so long ago that I forget just how it was. According to this western story Mr. Graham was very much delighted by the incident and well he might be. If it was really true it made him the holder of a new record for political oratory, but I am suspicious that the whole affair was "framed up" by one of the astute managers of the tour. In order to keep Mr. Graham up to his best during the trip they had one of their workers spring the yarn. That may seem overdrawn but they do things just as peculiar as that in politics.

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