

# The Sacred School Houses of the East

*What Might be Done to Make our Temples of Knowledge Useful to Democracy*

By A. M. BELDING

SINCE primitive man fashioned for himself idols of wood and stone, no tribe or people has been entirely without the worshipping spirit.

Those who would describe the Canadian people, at least the inhabitants of Eastern Canada, as a people absorbed in mere commercialism, devoted wholly to the pursuit of wealth and pleasure, holding nothing sacred or beyond the reach of avarice, would reveal but scanty knowledge of the truth. As in ancient Egypt, in the days of her greatest glory, the sacred ibis was embalmed, and as in India the sacred cow had her temples and her worshippers, so in Eastern Canada we have an object, inanimate it may be, but none the less regarded with profound veneration. The sacred school houses of this country save us from the reproach of worldliness, and of cold indifference to the higher things of life.

They are found in every city, town, village and country-side. They vary in architecture and in furnishings; but, however great the difference in cost or appearance, they are by common consent set apart from the selfish activities of a sordid every-day life. A man may use the church and its associations as a stepping-stone for social and material ambition, but the school house, never. It stands apart, a sacred thing. Children may enter within its portals; but children are only children, and their presence, along with such priests and priestesses as may be set apart with vows of poverty to watch over them, can do no harm, nor desecrate the temple.

In the city with which I am most familiar the people have expended nearly three-quarters of a million dollars in the erection and adornment of these sacred edifices. They are a source of civic pride, as well as of popular veneration. They are closed entirely for three months of the year, and are only open to the children and the priests and priestesses for a few hours each day, five days in the week, during the other nine months. When tourists visit the city, there are, of course, no ruined abbeys or temples, or Roman walls, or great art galleries to attract their attention; for this is a young country, where cities spring up in a day, and where the last week's bank clearings or the last month's building permits are the test of relative greatness and distinction. But the tourists are not wholly disconsolate, for here and there among the evidences of mere industrial and commercial progress may be found the sacred school houses, which may be viewed from the outside, and are proudly pointed out as evidences that the worshipping spirit still survives, even in a country and an age of tremendous competition, grasping avarice, great extremes of wealth and poverty, bad housing, poor sanitation, commercial vice, street walking, juvenile delinquency, and the multiplication of the unemployable, the feeble-minded and the otherwise unfit. The tourist sees and marvels, and sends home picture post-cards showing the sacred school houses. These may be found in the bookstore, the drug-store, the Five-and-Ten, the shoe-shine parlour and many other places, for the sacred school house is a source of universal pride.

IN a city of which I have knowledge, some iconoclastic persons, for they exist to-day in Canada as they did in ancient lands in bygone centuries, began to ridicule the popular form of worship, and insist that the sacred school houses should be thrown open as social centres and neighbourhood clubs for the fathers and mothers, the working girls and working boys, and even the older children. They were promptly told that the use of the temple in the evening would vitiate the air for the next day, and injure the health of the priests and priestesses and their flock; that vermin would swarm within the sacred halls; that disease would spread, and epidemics follow each other in dreadful succession; and that, worst of all, sacrilegious vandals would scratch the sacred walls or break the sacred desks, or steal the movable furnishings of the temple. Moreover, it would be necessary to install electric lights, pay an extra keeper of the temple, and increase the temple-tax for priests and priestesses. In the face of such calamities the hierarchy, popularly known as the board of school trustees, who are responsible for purity of worship and the preservation of the old land-marks, could do no less than turn a deaf ear to the false prophets of a new social evangel, and proclaim once more: "Great and holy and inviolable are the sacred school houses of Eastern Canada."

It is a cause of grave concern for all patriotic persons that in this matter of the sacred school house there is a line of cleavage between Eastern and Western Canada. Prof. Kylie has told us of the line of cleavage along tariff lines and some others, which he confidently predicts will gradually disappear; but in matters of worship people are more disposed to be tenacious of their convictions, and Western Canada has no sacred school houses, or is rapidly converting those it has into secular institutions of a practical nature, breathing no odour whatever of sanctity and seclusion. How can the people of Eastern Canada witness this desecration and this abandonment of their cherished ideals without deep

emotion, and a desire to separate themselves entirely from a forward and perverse generation? For there are school houses in the West that are ablaze with light in the evenings, and invaded by an incongruous and not too well washed humanity, eager for secular instruction, mere physical culture, recreation and amusement, having no regard whatever for the worshipful spirit of the East or what it signifies to the nation. A priest of the new cult in Calgary, who ministers in a school house that is not sacred, is said to have declared that he wanted it to be of much importance and value as a community centre as it was as an educational centre for the children; and that the people who paid for it had a right to expect this result. His attitude marks the difference between the Western spirit and the worshipful spirit; and it also reveals another direction in which the insidious Yankee spirit is thrusting itself into the national life of Canada; for there are few, if any, sacred school houses left in the republic. It is true there are few, if any, in the mother country, but that is the price

the people pay for the Socialists and suffragettes and that sort of thing; and Eastern Canada cannot afford to let go her traditions, sacrifice her principles, and abandon her ideals, for the sake of a dead level of conformity with any portion of a world that has cast off its moorings and turned itself adrift. Recent cables from China tell us that President Yuan Shih-Kai is dotting the republic with school houses, to take the place of the ancient temples of the Manchu dynasty. Would President Yuan entertain for one moment the proposal that these new temples should be used as social centres? Perish the thought. There is more reason to believe that he has been told by missionaries of the sacred school houses of Eastern Canada, and will endeavour to direct popular worship in the same direction. If now that system of worship were abandoned in Canada, the influence of our missionaries in China would be sadly lessened, if not wholly destroyed. It is therefore the duty of all members of the cult of the sacred school house to band themselves together, to resist the encroachments of Social Service Congresses and all other vagaries of these decadent days.

## The Smudge of Black Smoke

*How it Feels to Watch Navigation Opening on the Great Lakes*

By JEROME V. EBERTS

"THE Opening of Navigation"—what a magic significance the words have to anyone living in a port on the Great Lakes, although to the householder living a hundred miles or more from the water-front, they mean nothing, or nearly nothing. He reads about the great annual event under scare head-lines in the daily newspapers and the most it brings to his mind is a vision of the good time he had while on his last holiday, when he enjoyed a cruise of perhaps a hundred, perhaps a thousand miles over the great fresh-water seas. He does not realize, unless he be an old sailor himself, or has spent a part of his life in a lake port town, with what eagerness and anticipation the long-looked-for, and prayed-for opening of navigation is watched for by the dwellers in a lake port.

Everyone is guessing—some the day, the hour, and even the minute, when the first steamer will paint the horizon with her black smudge of smoke, and nose her way through the drift ice to cast her cables upon the wharf. The tobacco shop windows are decorated with big signs reading that a prize of substantial quality will be given to the first one guessing the time of arrival of the first steamer of the year. The old "sea-dogs," with the warped legs, who have reached the stage of a sailor's life when they sit around the reading-room of some comfortable, weather-beaten, old lake port hotel and suck pipes and swap yarns, are making bets of sundry amounts and articles on the wonderful event. The front windows of their particular lodging houses are kept bright and clean by many wipes of coat sleeves and the brass on their glasses is bright from much handling.

One morning the long-expected happens—the news spreads like a general fire alarm. "A ship is coming in the harbour." Every one drops what work he is doing and makes a wild rush for the water-front. It's true—the horizon is black with smoke and the hull of the ship is becoming larger every minute. Some of the younger onlookers use their activity to climb to the roofs of buildings, and even the oldest looks around for a convenient packing-box to elevate himself above his fellows. A hundred names are given the ship, and the speculation is strong until some one with a stronger sight than the others deciphers the letters on her bow and yells it out to the crowd. In a few minutes the name is apparent to every one, and the form of the captain is seen standing on the bridge. To hear it is impossible. The little tug boats scurry around like rats through the broken ice, and squeal, and screech and blow, until at last the lines are cast over the vessel's sides, her screw is still, and she lies silent and still at her dock. The first boat of the year. Navigation is opened.

Still the people do not go away. The big ceremony is yet to come off, and presently the mayor and two or three aldermen and a few members of the board of trade walk majestically upon the dock and march up to the steamer's side. Here they are met by the captain, who, understanding what is to be done, blushes as much as a wind-reddened captain's face can blush, and tries to look anywhere but into the eyes of the merry people surrounding him. At last it is over; the mayor's speech has been made, the captain presented with the customary silk hat, the people have quieted their cheering, the tugs have stopped their howling, and the first steamer of the year lies quietly at rest.

To be correct, she lies quietly at rest only until the new gang of stevedores can be assembled. When

this happens the big iron doors are slid back from her sides; the fussy little hoisting engines on her deck are rigged and the work of disgorging her cargo is commenced.

It gives one something to wonder at—the thousands of men who have been obtained in a few days' notice to work the ships on the lakes and unload them. A careful investigation would show that they are drawn from practically the four corners of the earth. A man from far-away Bulgaria is found rubbing shoulders with a blue-nosed Nova Scotian—both of them many hundreds of miles from home. Steady work is given to hundreds of unemployed, many of whom were fed and kept by our cities during the winter months. In the freight sheds of any of the larger lake ports almost every nationality may be found.

Navigation on our lakes and rivers is equalled only by the railways in its beneficial qualities to the Dominion. If the opening of navigation is delayed a week, or even a day, or an hour, it is felt practically at every point in Canada. A consignment of merchandise shipped from Montreal by the lake and rail route to a point in the Canadian North-West, is loaded upon a steamer which steams successively through the St. Lawrence River, Lake Ontario, the Welland Canal, Lake Erie, Detroit River, Lake St. Clair, St. Clair River, Lake Huron, and then finds herself held up at Sault Ste. Marie, together with a fleet of other steamers, each loaded with a cargo similar to her own. The ice in the Soo River and in Mud Lake has not yet gone out. Nothing can be done but wait, and that is the programme followed with as good a grace as possible.

Meanwhile, Western consignees are chafing under the delay and steadily losing sales and money by the non-arrival of their goods. The telegraph wires are burned in an effort to impress upon the agent of the steamship line by which the goods were shipped, the need of haste. The agent, at either Fort William or Port Arthur, puts his trust in God, and he, too, waits with as good a grace as possible.

Bye-and-bye word comes that the Soo ice has gone out and the blockaded steamers have continued their voyage to the Canadian head of the lakes. Perhaps when they arrive off Thunder Bay, at the foot of which Fort William and Port Arthur are situated, the bay ice still presents a barrier. Another wait is necessitated until the ice-breaking tugs clear a new channel through the floes.

DURING all this time the Western storekeeper is crying for his merchandise and steadily losing sales. The Montreal shippers are standing in line to lose their customers' business on account of the long delay. The customer must take his wrath out on somebody, and it usually is the shipper. The shipper, in turn, goes for the steamship line by which he shipped the goods. Everyone is a loser except the ship's crew and the supply dealers.

The same conditions prevail on grain shipments from the terminal elevators of the three great trans-continental railways at the head of the lakes. When the prospects of the opening of navigation are substantially confirmed, grain from the North-West begins to come down to the water-front, and as the spring break-up draws nearer, it comes faster. The many steamers which have wintered in the two ports of Fort William and Port Arthur are loaded with several million bushels of grain, and are ready the moment a clear passage is declared open to lift their

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