

TAKING THE WAR-CURE FOR EFFICIENCY

WE used to have a disease in this country which acted on business men, house-keepers and even students and "killed" not a few of the very best. The first symptom was a general feeling of uneasiness in the mind of the victim. He felt that things were somehow not going as they should go: that he was not accomplishing as much as he should. This led to the second symptom which, in the case of a business man, was a tendency to buzz and splutter around the office like a dog chasing his tail, or a hen hurrying in out of a sudden shower. The third symptom was usually the writing of a letter to some other stranger, inviting the said stranger to come to the office and tell the manager how to run his business. In the case of the house-keeper and the student equivalent follies took place. The progress of the disease after that needs no describing. Some few victims recovered without going any farther. Most of them went neck or nothing through the whole process of becoming "efficient." The business man engaged the stranger at something like, say, one hundred dollars a day—and expenses, including taxicabs and chicken-a-la-King luncheons. The stranger then went over the office, or factory, or whatever it was, and asked questions which nobody—not even the manager's own wife—would have dared ask about the business. He poked his finger into everybody's pie, got all the sub-managers up in the air, and made a report at the end of, say, the tenth day, showing how the profits were leaking out of that business. The report was sometimes useful, but as often as not it wasn't. The disease ended when the victim himself got sick of timing his own breathing and trying to do his dictation in half an hour instead of two hours, or when the human patience of his best assistants burned out like an over-worked fuse in an electric lighting circuit. At any rate the epidemic passed over about the fall of 1914. The name of the disease was "Efficiency." It made more easy money for nosey wanderers and frazzled the nerves of more business men, stenographers and wives than makes comfortable contemplating. It got into kitchens and railways and hospitals and abattoirs and ice-cream cone salesmanship.

It was the Prussianization of work—trying to make an office goose-step and a clock-work system of salesmanship or frying eggs—and like other kinds of Prussianism, it failed. It failed—and the people of Canada are to-day many times as efficient as they were when the experts were fulminating against one thing and another. When seven men turn out once and a half as much work as eight of them used to turn out, it stands to reason that the seven have become more efficient. When you find that seven million men and women in Canada are doing to-day more work than it took eight million to handle two or three years ago, it means that Canada is becoming more efficient. It is becoming so highly efficient that factory and office managers appear to have no more time for fooling with fads. The efficiency expert has either had to crawl home to the United States or learn book-keeping and stenography in a Canadian business college. With a quarter million men in the army and thousands of fair-weather boosters out of sight till the next boom comes—which we hope it won't—the Dominion of Canada has pounded more brass tacks than it ever aimed at before. Our exports are up not only in value, but in volume. We have increased our efficiency by throwing out the hired thinker and by starting to think for ourselves.

Of course our present state of efficiency isn't comfortable—particularly when it involves helping the wife wash the dinner dishes. Our former glorious inefficiency was much more like a dress rehearsal on the gilt harps of the hereafter. But it works out in interesting ways.

COMING down from Winnipeg once there was a young man on the observation platform talking the gospel of "method" and "economy" to three or four credulous listeners. He drew illustrations for his points from almost any casual sight along the right-of-way as it whirled away behind us.

"Look at that broken door!" he exclaimed, pointing at a loosely-hanging slide-door on the side of a freight-car—the car was one in a west-bound freight lying at a siding to let the express through. "Look at that door! If this was an economical country and an efficient railway that door wouldn't be allowed to hang loose like that. It would be fixed—prooto!"

"Why?" said one of us.

"Because probably a dozen train-men will waste

five minutes each trying to get that door open or closed. Probably—" and so on.

"There!" he exclaimed. "Do you see how the fireman on that freight engine is wasting coal? Look at the black smoke! Isn't that waste! If our firm were hired by this railway it would inaugurate a system to teach firemen how to fire an engine economically and—"

In many cases he was right about Canadian wastefulness. He told how inefficient the average housewife is in the plotting of her work; how badly laid out kitchens are, and what awful tragedies have followed the failure of business concerns to estimate their costs correctly.

It was fascinating.

A perspiring fat man on the back of that train finally gave his card to the expert and asked him to look him up in Toronto as soon as possible. His business, we learned, had to do with a laundry, and no doubt he got it systematized and efficiency-ed. But to-day where is that expert? Office manager in a brewery, I hear, and that brewery office isn't a whit more efficient than the others. Strenuous financial weather has taught Canadians how to be efficient. It has improved the state of Canadian society so that there is no longer as much waste man-power leaking out a hole called "efficiency-expert." The expert is at real work.

In the old days, before the saw-mills and the saw-dust killed the trout out of the rivers, those pretty little fish were too plentiful to be used economically. Our forefathers wasted them. With scarcity came game laws, for skillful fishing and indeed more careful preparation of the fish for the table. A man who has ten days to write a letter may dawdle over it. A country that lived very largely on borrowings and NEXT year's grain crop naturally dawdled. A tremendous proportion of our Canadian population took up positions midway between the farmer on the one hand and the manufacturer on the other hand—middlemen. A reliable arithmetician once counted over eight hundred real estate agents' telephones in the telephone book in Vancouver—it was a work of perverse curiosity. These lilies of the field, so long guiltless of toil or spinning, and their kindred in other Canadian cities are now mostly working at real production. The real secret of the high cost of living in Canada was the horrible disproportion between producers and consumers; we had steadily increased the number of our city dwellers and just as steadily decreased the number of farmers. This meant inevitable inefficiency. The war has corrected it. A retired farmer who was selling Point Grey lots in Vancouver three years ago, is back on his Ontario farm, watching things for harvest time. There are thousands of cases like his.

And to-day we are using up our men much better—and the women. Five years ago a man with white hair was supposed to retire to the fire-side and thumb over his recollections. The demand was for young men and young men only. We advertised for "pep"



By BRITTON B. COOKE

and "ginger." We were careless about experience. In short, we "wasted" some of the best years of our men and one of the best assets of the business world, Experience.

Now, one of the first signs of our improved state of living is the disappearance of the husky furnace man. That mysterious person whose habitat was side-entrances, cellars and kitchen steps of half the houses of the neighbourhood, melted away shortly after the outbreak of war. Some of them went to war—and won distinction in the trenches. Where the others went I don't know. But last fall a man of sixty applied for the privilege of nursing our furnace—and he was club-footed at that.

"I used to do this work before," he explained, "but the younger fellows drove me to mending chair bottoms. Now that the war's on, I have another chance. . . . Where do I find the shovel? . . ."

There was no reason why the lame man should not have been tending those furnaces all along. The people whose chairs he mended probably mend their own now, or are more careful of them, or give the work to a blind man.

This same ashman's wife came out of her elderly seclusion this spring to help her old man take out a winter's accumulation of ashes from a certain rich man's house. Both over sixty! Why should they have been relegated to chair-mending and rheumatism before, when they felt like working and needed it? Why should not our younger men have been engaged on better work than the tending of furnaces?

Kitchen efficiency? The women's pages of the daily papers overflow with suggestions for economy. There are fewer servants, less funds and higher prices to be contended with. All the patent cupboards and breathless systems of household economy so dear to the efficiency lecturer have given way to the gently forceful direction of sterner times and labour shortage. A certain Toronto man recently confessed with a queer combination of pride and reluctance that he had to miss a lodge meeting because his wife was ill, the maid had left and the dishes were heaped a foot high in the kitchen sink. He had washed them

This, too, means efficiency!

TWO Montreal architects met.

"Busy?" said one.

"— as the d—!"

"So'm I."

Both lied in intent, though not in fact. Neither had really much new work on hand, but both were short-handed. Instead of going to the office at ten and quitting at three to go to the golf club, both these men were running their offices with inadequate assistance and therefore working hard. One had two draughtsmen, a stenographer and a boy. The other had only one draughtsman. Every one of them was more efficient than two years ago.

In another field of industry conditions have improved. Take the mechanic. He is now most likely working on munitions. Not only is he doing, on the whole, more accurate work, but he is working faster. A shell has to be turned "true" to a thousandth part of an inch, and it is in the interests of the employers and the government to see that they are turned out in record time. To secure speed many of the factories in Canada are working on the bonus system. If the total output of a certain factory is, say, ten thousand shells in a week, that may be taken as an average. The men are then paid at a rate based on that output. If, however, they can raise the output to fifteen thousand or double ten thousand they are bonussed a certain per cent. of their wages. In some factories the men get as much as 100 per cent. bonus some weeks. This is not only helping solve the munition problem. It is making the men and managers work with greater efficiency.

Will it last?

Who knows! But it looks as though it might. There will be more men here after the war. But there won't be such oodles of money to be had, lying around for any and every wild-cat venture. There will be plenty of work, no doubt, after the reorganization has been carried out, but there will be plenty of men demanding work and plenty of employers looking to it that they get the maximum of efficiency from their employees. On the other hand, business competition will keep the employer himself efficient, on pain of failure. More than that, efficiency or inefficiency get to be matters of habit. We have the higher efficiency habit at present. It is fair to assume that we may keep it.