

## TOPICS OF THE DAY

PHILOSOPHY OF LEISURE: THE CANADIAN "TORNADO OF SPEED":  
EXAMPLE OF CHICAGO: A POLITICIAN'S INTERFERENCE IN  
EDUCATION: THE POLITICAL SCENE: JUNE.

SEVERAL men and women of judgment have told me that they were profoundly impressed by the recent utterances of Sir Rabindra Nath Tagore in Victoria and Vancouver. The man, in bearing and appearance, is as noble as Michael Angelo's prophets in the Sistine Chapel. But one forgot even that in listening to him. For one thing, the perfection of his English vocabulary and accent brought one sharply away from Oriental associations, and other things suggested; and occasionally a phrase used indicated a startling familiarity with some of the more trivial things in modern European and American life. Though he spoke as a very cultured man, not only steeped in the wisdom of the East, but easily familiar with the wisdom of Greece and later Europe, no word had an exotic tinge. His discourse on "The Philosophy of Leisure" was remarkable. He began in the Greek and scientific vein, (taking for granted, by the way, that his audience was familiar with Aristotelian conceptions), and not for a moment did he lament progress, or preach the static doctrine most of us associate with the East:

Man has broken open the prison walls, and refused to be contented with that which was allotted to him by nature. He has unlocked the hidden resources of nature, and has been able to use them for his own indomitable purpose. This is not really materialism, for it represents the conquest of matter achieved by the human spirit. There are, on the other hand, races of men who have allowed themselves to be stranded like a whale on the seashore, and who remained to the end of their days a prey to the evils that exist on all sides, without overcoming them. This is the real materialism. . . . .

But Truth has another aspect, which has been described in the Sanskrit writings: the Infinite in its aspect of joy. This has its atmosphere in a width of leisure, across which come the invisible messengers of light and life. . . .

Now it is evident that the modern age is riding on a tornado of speed and hurry, jealously competing with its own past. We cannot stop its course; and even if we could, we should not do so. Our only anxiety with regard to it is that we may forget the fact that slow and mature productions of leisure are of immense value to mankind, for these alone give balance to accumulations and rhythm to life itself.

Japan, the speaker went on to say, had captured for herself the mighty spirit of progress which marks the Occident. But the ideals which had really given life to Japanese civilisation had been nourished through long ages in the past:

For the most part, the spirit of progress occupies much more space in our minds than the deeper life process of our being, which requires depths of leisure for its sustenance. In other words, the modern world has not allowed itself to evolve what might be called a religious aspect of life. There is no profound principle of reconciliation, that can fashion out of all these confused and conflicting elements of to-day a living work of art that can compare with the religious ideals of the past. The highest creative ideals of life were developed centuries ago....

Invention and organization are spreading fast to-day, but the creative genius of man is losing its dignity. It is accepting cheap payment from the busy multitude, and is engaged in keeping irreverent minds cheaply amused....

There was a time when man was growing more and more aware of the infinite realm of personality within himself, from which he sought to find the profound meaning of life. He went along his path of deliverance from the narrow bounds of the lower self, seeking wider and wider expansion of sympathy and compassion for all mankind. This was true progress... Man is still living to-day on the wealth of those central ideas which he gained and stored up in ancient days. His ideals are to-day in danger of becoming mere habits of mind. He seems to be living in a palace planned and built in another age, whose rafters he has negligently allowed to crumble, while yet the roof continues to protect him....

To-day the hurry of life leaves man no time to explore the deeper mysteries. His sense of human worth and reality shrinks into utter insignificance in a world whose pride is in its external vastness.

It will be seen that these words were not addressed to a Canadian audience merely. But to one who had travelled across the raw prairies they seemed to have a special application to this country. Has any society so rapidly altered its whole character as ours has done? Men of middle age in Eastern Canada are old enough to remember when there was hardly any "West". Our relatives of two generations ago were among the very pioneers in such cities as Calgary and Vancouver. But in the interval these pioneers and their offspring have been submerged in an alien flood. We still talk of the prairie provinces as Canadian, but they are completely lost to Canada in the old sense of that name. One may walk from end to end of Main Street in Winnipeg and not hear an English word. The ambitious buildings of St. Boniface across the river are the only Canadian thing visible. The steadiest

of our colonizers is Quebec. But even so ardent a Nationalist as Mr. Bourassa has been saying for years that there is not *a* language question, or *a* race question in Canada; there are fifty races and fifty languages. Vancouver and Victoria cause the exclamation: "Here at last is an English city." But gradually Chinese and Japanese are noticed everywhere, and hundreds and hundreds of Sikhs.

Now, no one could possibly feel Anglo-Saxon arrogance in the presence of Tagore, nor for a long while after meeting him. One had no temptation to talk of reserving the country for "white men" after such an experience. But everyone knows that there has never been anywhere such a "tornado of speed" as the one ridden by our young society, opening up a new country, and at the same time making a Babel of it. I am told, too, that near the main lines of travel there is no opportunity of judging how foreign the hinterland has become. It is not a question whether an Englishman or a Russian is a better specimen of humanity. It is whether a complete mongrelisation of societies has ever permitted a civilisation to come into being.

Meantime Eastern Canada, except in one or two small areas, has changed as completely, and as rapidly. Nor does it wear any air of permanence to-day. The main streets of our large cities are re-made every twenty-five years. "Town-planners" and economists make very searching criticisms of this. But sometimes I think it has a deeper moral significance than is ever realized. Consider our architecture, or rather the possibility of our ever having any architecture. If a man knows, as certainly as anything can be known of the future, that the church he is asked to build will not be a church twenty-five years hence, but a gasoline station, or some other commercial, ugly thing, how can he put his soul into it? Nay, his brains even? And if a mason or a carpenter knows that the house he builds is built for a few decades at most, will he even put honest work into it? I have heard the director of a large building company defend jerry-building on this very ground.

Soon after listening to Tagore's discourse, I found myself in Chicago! The growth of business and wealth in Chicago was one of the marvels of the later nineteenth century. But, if we may judge from its newspapers and other things, Chicago is ambitious to be thought something else than an upstart city. It wishes to be thought a centre of art, science, music and culture. So far as money can go, Chicago has gone. But to a transient visitor at least, there was not much evidence of progress beyond that point.

Acquaintance with many European museums makes the much-praised Field Museum seem over-lavish of equipment and framework. It is obtrusively apparent that its curator has ample means at his disposal. A little less background to the exhibits would be in better taste. The university also seems spoiled with money. Everywhere steam-shovels are at work, excavating for new buildings. The newspapers say these additions will cost over nine million dollars. A Canadian visitor is asked by former Canadians, now "domiciled" in Chicago, to accept this as evidence of things that matter, and is a little afraid that he will be likened to the fox in the fable if he dissents. I confess that one department of the library did make me envious. But I envy no university nine million dollars' worth of new buildings.

Now, no one will lament that Chicago has so much money to spend on these things. The energy displayed, too, in creating museum, university, and public parks, reminds one of Tagore's phrase about man conquering material resources for spiritual ends. But, on the whole, Chicago is a good example of the impossibility of buying, or establishing quickly, a civilisation. Yet I believe that some of our western cities look to Chicago as a paradise of culture!

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**I** MEET many Canadian university men who view with grave concern interference in the University of Toronto by the Premier of Ontario. Many months ago, in a political speech, the Premier (who is also the Minister of Education in the province) said he intended to carry the university to the country cross-roads. It was a ridiculous metaphor, but it seems to have intoxicated the fancy of its author, and he has said seriously, again and again, that he intends to cut off the first year of university work, and have this work done in the schools, so that the farmer's son can have the same advantages as the city youth. Surely this is reckless talk for a Minister of Education! If it is serious, it argues a capacious ignorance of the whole matter. But if he is making a political foot-ball of education and the provincial university, he should be summarily treated by those who are technically in charge of these matters. The electorate itself can give no mandate for this sort of interference. Indeed, it is a heinous offence in a politician to flatter the electorate in this way. The sooner some decent public opinion asserts itself in this country, and gives our politicians to understand that democracy and republicanism continue to be possible only if some things remain unsaid, and some things remain undone, the better for us all. Aside from the fact that education

is selective—a fact which a Minister of Education should know—it is base treason to democracy itself to suggest to the polyglot and heterogeneous population of Ontario that the province owes a university education to all of them.

It is quite true that much of the work once done by the schools is now done by the universities. For this deterioration in standards and curriculum, many things are to blame. No one deliberately willed that it should be so. It is the product of complex causes, social, economic and political. One of the most potent causes is the concession made throughout to the idea of democracy in education—seen, for example, in the granting of “extra-mural” degrees. The result is that Ontario secondary schools are more and more staffed by teachers who have never been to a university. But one cannot arrest a widespread deterioration in schools by an act of legislature. The mischief will rather be increased.

The first year of university studies will always be the first year. It is a sieve, selecting those men who can adjust themselves to the change from school to college. After that, three years of genuine college work remain. Defer this change and selection one year, and only two years of college work remain. In other words, the plan of the Premier of Ontario would abolish, not the first year of university studies, but the fourth. Any college teacher could tell him this.

But again, Mr. Ferguson has more than once spoken of the great cost of university education. If he finds it difficult to provide it in one centre, how on earth will he provide it in hundreds? Take scientific studies, for example, which require complete laboratories even for first year university work. How are these laboratories to be established at “every cross-roads”? In all subjects it is more and more difficult to induce men of intelligence and teaching power to be content with the pittance offered junior university instructors. Only the British reservoir enables our universities to carry on. By some miracle they do carry on, decade after decade. But the number of these instructors would have to be increased, perhaps a hundred times over, as a preliminary to Mr. Ferguson’s scheme; and even Britain offers no such supply. Besides, to be a junior at a great university is one thing; to be a teacher at “the cross-roads” is another.

Recently I read a speech by the same politician, addressed to women in the country. He invited his audience to reflect on the perils of having their boys go to a large city to study, and intimated that when his reform was accomplished, their boys would be able to

carry on these same studies in their own villages. Really our politics are reaching a pretty level!

All this is bad enough, but Mr. Ferguson seems determined to create new records in the way of interference with individual promotions, and individual public utterances on the part of Toronto professors. Cannot Ontario throw up a local Hampden to impeach misdemeanors of this gravity?

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**T**HE set-back to "Liberalism" in Saskatchewan is generally said to have determined Mr. King not to go to the country for a while. Had the Saskatchewan election gone differently, it was believed that this year was a favorable one for a renewal of the mandate. The forces of the C. M. A. were obviously hoping for evil effects of the proposed American tariff, and Mr. King would naturally have liked to forestall them before this mine was sprung. I do not write as one who has "inside information", but from comments I hear on all sides. Yet these comments show how dollars and cents, not ideas, govern our politics.

I spoke above of a university spoiled with money. It cuts me to the quick when I hear seemingly intelligent men and women lamenting that our rich men will not give money to the right things. I know rich men, and men of moderate means, who do give the necessary modicum to support good causes. But it is a vain imagining to suppose that if our Rockefellers endowed schools, newspapers and theatres, all would be well with us. The merest tincture of Christianity should cause one to see that the union of "right things" and sheer "money" is an unholy alliance. By money, of course, we mean simply the worship of the golden calf—the cowardice of the poor, the respectable and conventional, not less than the arrogance of millionaires. How can right things win by allying themselves with wrong things? Napoleon said, to be sure, that God fights on the side of the heavy artillery. But by "God" Napoleon meant partly his own luck, and partly the organized Christianity, or respectability, of his time. Samuel Butler's remark on the handicap the Devil labours under, God having written all the books, was much more penetrating. He meant, I take it, that money cannot contend with ideas.

Does not history bear this out? And several developments among ourselves? It becomes plainer and plainer as one watches experiments in education and in art. These things are not endowed; they struggle against every sort of physical obstacle. It is the idea behind them that makes them powerful. Nothing so powerful

as ideas, thoughts! And, by the way, this perhaps explains the success of fanaticism. The multitude mistake mere zeal for thinking, and are swept away by it. A human instinct tells them that they cannot resist thinking.

But to come back to our politics,—has any of our parliamentarians made for himself the recognized position of Mr. J. S. Woodsworth, Labour member for Winnipeg Centre? Hysteria and persecution, the *sequelae* of war-fever, probably gave him an adventitious advantage, some years ago. Except that, he has had no other advantage but his power of thinking. Year after year he has contemplated our life and development, and pondered them, thought about them. He is cordially disliked in many quarters, and the dislike is reflected in our press. But he has won the respect of the House. I should like to know whether any readers of this *Review*, who are also readers of *Hansard*, think that any other member has instituted debates as excellent as those provoked by Mr. Woodsworth in the past two years.

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IS anything so wonderful as our Canadian June? Triumphant, unfolding loveliness! Is it the length of our bleak winter, and our seemingly bleaker spring—when meadow-larks and song-sparrows are buffeted by wintry storms—is it the suspense of waiting for it that makes June so ravishing? Often in May, trudging through snow, it may be, one thinks of the glad German song:

Der Mai ist gekommen,  
Die Baume schlagen aus,

but the Canadian May is bitter-sweet at best. At least one could not sing "ausschlagen" of it. But June! How shall one praise it? The gay bloom; the freshness and tenderness of green upon green; the bob-o-links purring a song as they sway on last year's chickory stalks, and then rising to flood the meadow with melting, tremulous notes of indescribable variety; the miraculous change in the maple-trees, a week ago gaunt frames, now sinuous billowy clouds of green; the mysterious haze, unlike the mists of any other season; the long, long morning twilight, when robins chirrup encouragingly from the lawn to yellow gaping beaks under the eaves; and the lingering evenings of unperturbed and holy calm! At all hours, and day after day, one feels close kin to all the forms of life. This prevailing mood of Lucretius is the mood of all of us in June.

C. W. S.