TOPICS OF THE DAY

GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH: N. R. A. : FOURPENCE FOR NINEPENCE: A SCHOLAR AND A GENTLEMAN.

WHEN we are too poor to keep our obligations, it behoves us to celebrate in a big way. Let us "throw" a party, and invite the neighbours. Let us put a brave front to the world and increase our prestige. Above all, let us encourage our creditors to spend more money on us, for the development of our already bankrupt estate, and with a fanfare of our trumpets let us "tell the world" that we are the people.

There are perhaps remaining a few prosaic souls, brought up on the old-fashioned idea that celebrations were intended to set a jaunty cap upon the head of prosperity. There were people once who believed that the fancy dress of gala occasions, or even the good old "Sunday suit," could be dispensed with when the family income was in danger of falling below the family expenditure. Impending bankrupts were not expected to distinguish themselves by a garb of sackcloth and ashes, but there was a time when they used to consider the appropriateness of donning overalls and digging until the clouds rolled by. But we have changed all that. Loss is to be attributed to the psychological effects of poor spirits, and "depression" means the same thing to economic medicine-men as it does to the manufacturers of head-ache powders and pick-me-ups.

In Chicago the school-teachers wait for arrears of pay, and strive as best they can to carry on the most necessary of all social work for other people's children while lacking the means to care properly for their own. The finances of the city struggle slowly to disencumber themselves from the morass of corruption in which they were sunk by years of graft, racketeering and maladministration. If ever a city seemed obliged to husband its resources and retire into a penitential obscurity of poverty and toil, that city is Chicago. But the new psychology demands that we shall not admit losses or mistakes; that the only sure foundation is one of airy optimism; and so upon our unwilling notice reminders are obtruded that the windy city is enjoying another world's fair, and that like its predecessors it is indisputably, in the opinion of its promoters, the best ever.

The circus parade is on, and the whole circus equipment is there. Except that everything is produced, regardless of expense, on a

scale of stupendous grandeur and unparalleled magnificence, you can see it all at Toronto, or at the most convenient Provincial Exhibition, or at the county fair—acrobats and agriculture, mendicants and machinery, souvenirs, samples, and salesmanship. There is a generous admixture of science and education—even the county fair has its exhibits of needlework, penmanship and potatoes from the country schools—but it seems, if we may judge from "publicity" and the accounts of survivors, to be rather for embellishment than for use. The wonders of science that are paraded before the jaded eyes of tourists, honeymooners, and travelling salesmen, if properly assimilated, would amount to several university courses and a Grand Tour of scientific and industrial research. But their proximity to the side-shows on the one hand and the free samples on the other makes one doubt both the altruism of the organizers and the mental attitude of the beholders. The parade of knowledge and ingenuity is stupendous, but it must give pause to the true scientist to observe that his researches are being paraded before the multitude to work up sales appeal for electric refrigerators and advertising signs. The advance of knowledge during the "century of progress" makes scientific achievement unquestionably the distinction which will mark our age for the admiration of future times. But posterity may discount our discoveries in the proportion to which we have debased them for purposes of commercial exploitation.

It is to be hoped that no reader who has persisted thus far will have formed the mistaken idea that the present writer has the bad taste to disapprove of the city of Chicago, quâ city. On the contrary, he has the greatest admiration for her natural and architectural amenities; for her services to music, drama, literature, and the arts in general; even for many aspects of her commercial and industrial enterprise. In the sketchy outline that serves the casual observer in place of a complete picture, the ugly features so heavily lined and shaded are those of caricature, not of likeness. They exist, but are not inherent; and the Chicago of the average resident, as that of the average law-abiding visitor, is a city whose differences from most others are very largely to her credit. The present writer had a reasonable opportunity to look on the gloomy side of the picture, since his only visit to the mid-western metropolis coincided with its most sensational and most advertised crime, and he had himself the privilege of participating—as a member of the losing side—in an old-fashioned and very successful hold-up. But the impression of Chicago that remains is that of a fair city, not yet abandoned to the aliens within her walls, the aliens being those to art and liberal education as much as to nationality; a city in which

to an unjaded appetite the galleries and museums are more thrilling than the night-clubs; a city whose own leading citizens are more competent to judge of superficial obvious demerits, and more sensitive to feel them, than are most who hold her up to scorn.

It is for this reason that its great Exhibition has been given what may appear to be disproportionate notice. Chicago is a symbol of modern commercial development, with much of good that is crowded out of recognition and subjected to exploitation to bolster up the spurious but attractive claims of vulgarity and greed. The times in which we live have more than once suggested comparison with an earlier decadence marked by a taste for bread and circuses. Carlyle's voice in the wilderness, calling on men to gird up their loins and "produce, produce," was never more needful than now. While there are signs of a salutary return to a belief in the dignity of honest labour, it is melancholy to observe the faith that still persists, in the most harmful quarters, in the efficacy of advertising and showmanship to get us out of our difficulties.

WE are on the eve of perhaps the most profound and momentous change that has ever been made in the economic life of this continent. When these words appear, President Roosevelt's scheme for National Recovery will already have provided some indications as to its final effect. While every disinterested observer must await the outcome with sympathetic goodwill, there are signs already that divided interests will produce dissatisfaction and hostility on the one hand, while on the other the too high hopes of the majority may lead to even more serious consequences when the inevitable shortcomings and disappointments become manifest.

Both in the scheme itself and in the atmosphere with which it is surrounded there are elements of good and of bad; and unfortunately it would appear that popular attention and popular enthusiasm are directed towards what is less desirable. Undoubtedly President Roosevelt is extremely well-fitted to institute a campaign for expansion and inflation. It is of no practical consequence to recall that Mr. Hoover could have done all that Mr. Roosevelt is doing, that he was prepared to do most of it, and would have done much of it, if only he had been granted that unlimited autocracy which the sublime absurdities of popular government would award only to a Democratic President. Mr. Roosevelt has the power, he has captured the fancy of his people, and above all he has what Mr. Hoover so conspicuously lacked—a *flair*. Mr. Roosevelt is riding on the crest; but we may remind ourselves that the crest is the more conspicuous because the trough is so deep and so close,

and enquire for our own guidance whether the hopes of the new President's most ardent supporters are not founded rather on their faith in showmanship and sales appeal than on their knowledge of the value of the goods.

We in Canada must perforce take stock of both the immediate and the ultimate results of this gigantic undertaking of the States. We suffer, though to a much smaller extent, from the malady which they are attempting to cure; and moreover, by reason of our proximity and interdependence, the pulse of our economic life is sympathetic to that of our neighbours. Any serious disturbance of their temperature and blood-pressure, unless we are prepared for it, may have serious results upon the health of our body politic and culminate, according to the nature of our response, in apoplexy or anaemia. In addition to a partial dependence based on inferiority in capital and population, the differences in temperament and political background make it necessary for Canada to watch the new prosperity campaign with a critical eye. The sales and publicity expert with a slogan and a button may "sell" expansion to America and carry it safely over; but while Canada has often copied such methods, they seem foreign to the more conservative tradition of a people that has always steered a safe course between extremes of elation and depression. For the very reason that we suffered less—both spiritually and financially—from the recent slump, we should be on our guard against too heavy an indulgence in stimulants. It is of little use to recommend patience, or the long pull, to those whose state seems desperate. But there is a natural fear that quick methods may not produce permanent results. Many of Mr. Roosevelt's schemes, more particularly those in aid of farmers, may establish prosperity for an important and fundamental industry. But we hear of more general interest, more clamour of popular support, for that part of the scheme which produces a quick return for manufacturers—of manufactures in general and not of any manufacture in particular, except that of an interested party who happens to be pressing his own product. To ensure an adequate supply of food at fair prices to the producer is an obvious duty for any statesman, and one that Mr. Roosevelt is handling with singular courage and ability. But to urge the purchase of manufactured goods because the manufacturer needs the money, might prompt a question as to what the goods are good for. Persons still unconvinced that radios and automobiles are necessary to the majority of purchasers have often suspected, on general grounds, that the present chaos is due in large part to the excessive and wasteful production of luxuries. Economists, not so long ago, were warning

us of the danger of over-production, and the warnings have been justified. Now that the effects of over-production are to be cured, it seems strange that the remedy should be an artificial stimulating of production, an organized national campaign to buy till it hurts. Instead of making our present unnecessary motor-car "do" for another year, we must help business by "turning it in" and buying another. If we have hitherto managed to do without a washing-machine or a mechanical refrigerator, we must now buy one. The price is going up, and money is scarce, but credit will be arranged. The ice-man and the laundry will doubtless take their losses patiently; but we are left to wonder at the continued squandering of raw material, particularly of structural materials and fuel, that was so marked a feature of the second decade of this century and that contributed so much to the enormous scrapheap which was its principal legacy to the third. The natural result of mass production is over-production, and the natural result of over-production is lowered prices. A proper control of industry, such as forms the main objective of Mr. Roosevelt's reforms, may serve to keep enormous plants and personnel working at a profit without causing their gain to glut the market or impoverish potential buyers. But there are signs already of impatience; and since renewed mass-production of goods has not produced a rise in prices, there are suggestions that prices should be raised by the old device of resorting to the mass production of money.

When the National Recovery Act plan was first announced, "inflation" was stated to be an integral part of it, and was possibly the cause of more discussion than any other feature. Later it seemed to disappear for a while, and interest was focussed upon the schemes for reorganization by which recovery will stand or fall. But at the time of writing Senator Harrison, with strong support from the Southern States, is pressing for definite and immediate inflation based upon nothing more subtle than the depreciation of money by fiat. The effects of a debased currency should be known, if anywhere, in the South. But this inflation, we are assured, will be different, though it is doubtful if Mr. Roosevelt's promised increase in prices was intended to result from anything so simple as Senator Harrison's scheme. Inflation resulting from prosperity is not the same thing as prosperity alleged to result from inflation. If control of industry restores the price level of goods that have become unprofitable to manufacture, then prices generally tend to rise. But manufacturers can not safely cut corners by producing two cans of soup instead of one, to be paid for by four five-cent dimes instead of two worth ten cents apiece. If the price of shoes is

increased from seven dollars a pair to ten dollars, a ten-dollar bill may still buy, say, ten dollars worth of house-rent. But if the price of money is decreased, for the benefit of the shoe manufacturer, so that ten dollars can be made to do the work of seven, it is difficult to see that anyone will gain, and easy to see that the man of fixed income must lose. Manufacturers and wage-earners, whose incomes vary with the value of money, will find that they are just where they were. They will have two dollar-bills with which to do the work of one. But the salaried man, who has probably been "cut" to the limit during the period of low prices and dear money, will find that he has one of the new dollars with which to do the work of two of the old.

Already complaints have been made by the holders of fixed incomes, although even the early critics of inflation had hardly expected them so soon. More serious than the hardship to salaried men and women is that to older people living close to the limit of subsistence on the pensions or such returns as are still available from investment in so-called securities. The fate of these people raises a question greater than that of any temporary restoration of prosperity: what certainty is there for the future, what advantage in acting with providence and prudence to secure an independence in old age? Already the loss from investments has reproduced on a smaller scale the hardships that befell the retired members of the middle-class in Central Europe after the World War. But if the State can announce that as from a given date a pension, annuity, or dividend of a thousand dollars will be worth no more than five hundred, it will be small consolation to learn that wages and profit have doubled, in figures if not in effect.

Mr. Roosevelt is taking care of so many things under cover of his barrage of optimism and good-fellowship that he may possibly be able to solve this problem too. He seems to have conceded that capitalism must be subjected to far-reaching changes, and to have admitted that his control of industry amounts to a combination of state socialism and dictatorship. In his care for *entrepreneurs* who have impoverished others more than themselves through the failure of unrestricted private enterprise, it is to be hoped that he will not unduly penalize those who in a small way have endeavoured to amass through industry and self-denial a competence for themselves. Mr. Roosevelt's fate will depend upon the success with which he can produce an American revolution without being found out. He seems by adroit showmanship to have made a good beginning. It is to be hoped that he will not overlook the claims of those independent citizens who earned a competence by individual and

unselfish enterprise; and that those who profit under the new scheme of things will see beneath the superficial excitements of promise and encouragement to the President's desire for hard work, patience and self-denial as the only sure basis for recovery.

IT is fitting that a Review bearing the name of his beloved "little college" should bear tribute to the memory, the achievements and the enduring influence of Dr. Archibald MacMechan whose forty years of devoted service as Professor of English brought so much honour to Dalhousie. He would have said that the college brought honour to him; and no inducements could tempt him from the life to which he came as a stranger, and which he made so peculiarly his own, the threads of Dalhousie and MacMechan being woven warp and woof together in the fabric of Maritime academic and literary life. Tributes from abler pens, from writers better situated for a critical survey, have already appeared in learned, literary and popular journals from coast to coast of this Dominion. From the present writer anything that is written must be taken as a personal tribute from one who for a short ten years was closely associated with Dr. MacMechan as colleague and as friend. The first words I heard spoken of him from personal knowledge were these: "You are fortunate to make your acquaintance with university life in Canada under Dr. MacMechan. He is a scholar and a gentleman". A first meeting confirmed this impression taken from a brother of the craft, and subsequent experience has provided much to add to it, and nothing to detract.

To begin with, his devotion to Dalhousie and to duty were an inspiration. We might have been starting out together on a new quest, with the older man but a year ahead of his junior and anxious to share the zest of a recent find. At his coming he had discovered the romance of the Maritime Provinces and of its dour but devoted university, and thereafter they were as an open book for all who cared to read. There were many who came to know Dalhousie and Nova Scotia through his writings, as there are others who knew the university only as the place which had been fortunate enough to attract a first-rate investigating scholar to the schooling of undergraduates and the mustering of simple narratives of the sea. Even when the "little college" had grown beyond the affectionate title that his early sentiments had attached to it, the university was known to many a scholar, and to many a gentle reader, as "the place where MacMechan teaches". There are others who have caused the name of Dalhousie to be honoured, but none more than he.

Two personal recollections may be offered as examples. At Harvard College, in whose English Department he had two old pupils as professors and many on the list of successful higher graduates,—his was a name to conjure with. Professor Bliss Perry, most beloved instructor of youth, in recommending texts at the opening of his last course of lectures on Carlyle had this to say: "When I began to teach this course, the only good edition of *Sartor Resartus* was that of Dr. MacMechan. Many others have appeared since, but after forty years his is still the best." About the same time Professor Kittredge, grand and terrifying old man of Harvard scholarship, was reducing a score or so of prospective doctors to a manageable dozen for a seminar. All of them were primed with qualifications, most with the master's degree and many with competent research or some years of teaching behind them. Among the applications submitted, which Mr. Kittredge was riffling over with somewhat disconcerting comments, was one from a young B. A. whose sole qualification was "Written course in Shakespeare at Dalhousie". The great man looked up: "Was this course given by Mr. MacMechan?" "Yes sir." "Admitted". The summary decision on the basis of a general sophomore class may have been hardly fair to some of the rejected applicants. But they learned to treat the names of MacMechan and Dalhousie with respect.

He had always a proper sense of his place and responsibilities, and observed the niceties of academic and social deportment in a way that made him a type of the perpetually vanishing gentleman "of the old school." Yet he was the most friendly and companionable of men. Students who stood in awe of him in the class-room learned to know him as a friend in the home at which he kept open house, or on the water, or in brisk walks through the woods at which the disciple was often hard put to it to keep up with his older companion, so youthful in spirit and physique. He had no patience with mere commonplace vulgarity, and could not feel at home with people of petty or mercenary interests. But he had a true culture that placed him on terms of easy equal friendship with men whose work was dignified by hard struggle with the elements on land or sea. Much has been said of his adoption of the soil of Nova Scotia as his own, and of his landsman's acquired love for the sea which he cultivated so assiduously and with so much benefit to others. It has been suggested that his nautical lore and interests were at times somewhat academic; but such an idea would be at once dispelled in anyone who should meet him absorbed in nautical argument with the ship-builders and master-mariners who might best judge of such a question. To accompany him on his rambles was to see

another side of a man to whom every honourable aspect of life was interesting.

By his colleagues he was received with respect, for the teacher and scholar mixed with kindly affection for the man. No one was more hospitable, in every sense of the word, to the persons and the studies of newcomers. Though the curriculum had vastly extended since his first coming, he seemed to keep in touch with each new development and to learn something from almost every new professor, as well as to give something in return. Though cast in a truly academic mould, he was completely free of the petty vices and vanities that are too frequently found in the company of the learned. Of the gossip of the campus he was entirely innocent, and would neither hear nor speak the lightest word to the detriment of any of his colleagues. Though he had the wayward fancy of a poet and a delightful inconsequent carelessness of worldly gain, he was in the practice of his scholarly labours as diligent and methodical as any man of business. His desk was always clear, and his papers in perfect order. To a colleague in another field who asked the secret of his amazing capacity for work, he answered with one of his favourite quotations: "He kept pegging away, in his ridiculous way." When he died, his journalistic "stints" were completed for five weeks ahead, and he had four books, in as many fields, that were occupying his well-earned retirement from official responsibility.

His riches were in his books, his friends, and above all in his home. It is typical of him that his worldly estate was small, and that his principal legacy was his library, to the college. He dispensed a hospitality as dignified as it was charming. Trivial worries seemed to fall from the welcomed guest as he crossed the threshold and joined the merry company in which the talk went round under the genial but unobtrustive guidance of the host, over the fullest range permitted to good company and to good taste. His was a radiant and courageous spirit, and he would be pleased to think that we recall him in the words of his favourite lines from the kindly muse of Praed:

> His talk was like a stream which runs
> With rapid change from rocks to roses;
> It slipped from politics to puns;
> It passed from Mahomet to Moses;
> Beginning with the laws which keep
> The planets in their radiant courses,
> And ending with some precept deep
> For dressing eels or shoeing horses.

His culture was broad; his tolerance great. But he was not of the easy complaisance that allows some modern scholars to be all

things to all men; when his approval or his sympathies did not move him to be of the company, he held himself aloof. But as was said of him by one from whose interests his own were widely separated, there are few men to-day who set themselves an ideal and a way of life and stand faithfully by it.

Dr. MacMechan has gone to his reward, full of honours though not so full of years as his perennial youth had led us to hope. He seemed always the youngest of us, and we looked rather forward to his projected achievements than back upon the accomplished work that crowned a fruitful career. Though we feel poorer at his passing, we have been enriched by his presence; his place cannot be filled, but his memory will remain. Others will mourn him as they knew him; but here where we knew him best, and where all that he did brought honour to us, we shall remember him chiefly as a friend and fellow-student.

C. L. B.