

Widening Educational

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mistake to weaken this function by imposing on the schools an elaborate array of courses designed to provide facilities which exist in much better form outside of school. The schools should do a few things well rather than many things poorly, especially at a time when teachers are scarce and salaries are low.

The Curriculum

One of the most frequently expressed criticisms of education is the tendency of theorists to advocate too varied a curriculum. This plan has often failed because too much from the basic subjects had to be sacrificed for the sake of trimmings which are useless without the basic subjects and because curriculum expansion took place without the personnel and funds to make it work. It has also been found that competence requires much the same qualities in all fields — work and thought, and that students don't learn to work and think by sampling a variety of soft options and doing a little bit of everything and not much of anything.

This type of curriculum is sometimes recommended because everyone is not going on to university because certain subjects will not be "useful" to certain students. On the first point, many observers are finding that there is no difference whatever between the requirements of a university and the preparation useful for a good job. On the second point options are dangerous at the high school level, for students are not ready at that stage to decide what they want to do, or to know what will be useful to them later; nor will they know what jobs are available to them when they graduate. To be practical, how many men of forty are doing the kind of work which at fourteen they anticipated they would be doing? Students must get some experience in life before they decide what to do.

What are the "real needs of the high school graduate going into industry?" It is a Vice-President of Canada Packers, not a university official, who listed them as language, mathematics, physics, chemistry, history, geography and basic economics. "Actually," says the Vice-President in charge of personnel of the Inland Steel Company, "the complexities of business are such that someone who understands history, literature and philosophy, who is in a position to do disciplined thinking, has the type of mind that will ultimately succeed."

The same situation applies in practically every field of employment, for the best equipment for young job hunters is not a specialized collection of facts and skills but the trained mind and the developed common sense. It is a common mistake to judge the value of schooling by what a pupil will "use" later on. Actually, the deciding factor is the extent to which the subjects trained him to use his capacities. Education, it is said, is really what is left over after most subjects are forgotten.

Standards

Much has been said about standards, and space is too limited to discuss them here. One rule should be remembered, and there are very few exceptions to it — the lower the standards the higher the failure rate. Automatic grading, too much emphasis on 50%, i.e. on work half done, and fear of the possible "frustration" of failure is the poorest possible preparation for life itself. The boy who makes 50% in high school arithmetic will have to make 100% in his arithmetic when he goes into the bank. And a bank clerk won't be "graded" in the next level until he masters his work. The girl who just passes in high school typing and shorthand will be expected to work at the 100% level by her future boss. Teen-agers who are being trained to think will later be the men who will have to build bridges and buildings to exact specifications, perform surgery on patients with precise skill, put on a roof that will not leak, handle public business with care and responsibility, own a house with absolute accuracy. Care at school will save trouble later, for life can't be lived well at the 50% level.

A school which passes everyone whether he works or not is simply deceiving its students and forcing them to postpone their real education until they get out into employment. The same applies to a school where the marks are too high for example where practically everyone makes 75% or more. Experienced employers and colleges to which these students are sent have become increasingly aware that the value of matriculation certificate depends, not on the subjects taken, but on standards of the school from which the students come, not on the length of time spent in school, but on the work actually done.

I recall an experience which illustrates this point. A well-known woman whose hobby is educational reform called on me one morning several years ago to discuss her view that high school standards should be lowered. That same afternoon her husband, a prominent business man, came in to seek students who would be leaving high school and who might be interested in entering his firm. What kind of students did he want? These are phrases he used: "Hard workers"; "able to assume responsibility"; "top third of the class"; "no run-of-the-mill stuff". I mentioned his wife's ideas, and he replied that he had often told her she wouldn't last long in business if she put her theories into practice.

Just one word about failure — such is a big subject. It is far better for a few who don't work to fail at a good school or in a real course than for all to pass

at a weak school or in a soft course. A boy, parent, or educator who thinks that it is "academic" to talk of standards should read Dun and Bradstreet's recent survey which pointed out that nearly half the businesses established in Canada from 1949 to 1952 (a time of comparative prosperity) failed, and failed to a substantial degree through "incompetence."

Some pedagogists call this school of thought hard and undemocratic. If they are right so is the process by which a boy "makes" a hockey team, becomes an officer in a cadet corps, wins a debating contest. A boy does so in the process by which a man succeeds in employment or supports a wife and several children; and so is the effort required by a woman to run a home if married or have a career if single. There is nothing undemocratic about standards. But at the present time, says the Montreal Gazette, "there is a curiously real possibility that democracy is coming to be identified with mediocrity. As a result the educational process is in some danger of being kept so well within the capacity of the mediocre that the child of unusual intelligence must almost be encouraged to assume mediocrity."

If education, says Lord MacMillan, who has had wide experience with education and business, "is to inspire our youth to face life with courage and happiness, it must concern itself with the ideals of duty and service rather than with securing an easy shelter from all risks." On education and politics, U. S. Army Secretary Frank Pace commented that "if government is to accomplish all we expect it to, then it will need a constant influx of young men and women of the highest caliber, and representative of the best that education can produce." "To confront the world we are moving into," says Saturday Night, "we must have a higher calibre faith of sheer barbaric courage. The sentimentality which seems to underlie so much of our modern schooling gives us neither." Again and again we hear these days the warning that the greatest danger to modern democracy is the possibility of its becoming soft and that the educational system should not encourage this danger.

Capacity Of Youth

One of the most frequently heard criticisms of some theories of education is that they underestimate the capacities of young people. The average teen-ager is not a baby, but a curious and energetic young citizen whose brain and body are at their peak of capacity. He is capable of sustained effort and direct reasoning and he will respond remarkably well to work and responsibility provided his intelligence and capacity are invoked and given ample scope. He will not respond (man never did respond) to being over-mothered, over-taught, over-amused, and under-worked. "We sin against children," says a well-known teacher, "by insulting their intelligence. The deepest instinctive desire of the young human animal is to try things beyond his powers, and to stretch his mental as well as his physical muscles. It is thus he grows. You can kill his growth by doing things for him; you can bore him to death by asking him to do easy things." This argument cannot be carried to extremes, for school is not a workhouse. But there is far too great a tendency to water down the curriculum, to offer what students themselves call "easy courses" and to bring next looks down to the level of the slowest student. Some talk of frustration so much that they begin to assume everyone is frustrated. Actually the real frustration in education is that which results from unsatisfied curiosity and unused energy.

It is significant to note that this view is rapidly replacing the pedagogy of ten years ago. In fact the results of this pedagogy have been condemned so often that, says the Minister of Education for Ontario, "public opinion is amazingly emphatic and practically unanimous." "Young people," he adds, "like hard work in school and I see no reason why they should not be drilled and drilled well in fundamentals. It is a mystery to me why anyone should wish to take hard work and competition out of our schools when the young people must face both of those as soon as they leave school. Why not prepare them for real life?"

This viewpoint is often labeled by pedagogists as an attempt to "turn back the clock" or to revert to "the good old days" and they attack it by recalling the disadvantages of the old system. Actually it attempts to bring education a little closer to the realities of life, to aid the process by which boys and girls become men and women in a hard world, and to prevent teaching from becoming a fuzzy sort of do-gooding and schools from becoming a kind of educational conveyer in which all proceed at the pace of the slowest. "Education," says President Sidney Smith, "can be a great adventure, but it is a tough adventure—mountain climbing, not sleigh riding." One might add that sleigh riding always requires a long walk back uphill.

Many observers have indicated that children don't get enough to do in the early grades, that games, projects, and audio-visual aids have replaced reading, thinking and homework. It has often been pointed out that so much time is spent in "interesting" pupils that elementary work gets pushed further and further into the upper grades and pupils lose interest because the work seems to them to be childish. Perhaps there is some truth in these criticisms; whatever the situation is, it should be thoroughly examined and it should be examined by elementary high school and university teachers, with the purest supplementary and consultative co-operation (not the direction and

supervision) of "experts" who plan theories but don't teach children.

Language work is a good example of the need for careful study and experiment in schools. The last methodology of teaching English is most elaborate and it requires much time and many work books. But by the end of the course does the pupil really know how to read, does he want to read, and does he read? And can he write in reasonably correct and readily understood English? This subject is debatable, for many teachers and employers are complaining that English is the weakest subject in the schools today and the emphasis on remedial English seems to indicate that something has been left out somewhere.

The natural years for learning are from birth to the early teens. Young minds are like sponges ready and able to absorb, and they should be given enough to absorb so that when the age of reason comes the teen there will be a good foundation of knowledge with which to reason. There is some indication that too much elementary work is crowding the high school years because too much precious time is being wasted in the early grades. The upper years will be "hard" if the fundamentals are not mastered in the early grades. Many difficulties would disappear if a way were found by which the student with weaknesses were permitted to start back where he first got into trouble and overcome the weaknesses. He will gain time in the long run and will benefit more from such a plan than from automatic grading or from shifting to other subjects.

One way of doing this is to "group" grades, for example to put grades 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 in one group. Pupils can then see what's ahead and behind, the teacher can handle subjects over a longer range of time and content, and, if it should be necessary, the fast pupil can do 3 years in 2 and the slow pupil 3 years in 4 rather than skip or repeat grades. Another way is to entrust all the arithmetic to one teacher, all the French to another, and so on, so that the continuity of competent instruction is encouraged. Perhaps such plans will work, perhaps they won't; at least the schools should be permitted to try them.

The present teaching of other languages is also open to question. Young people are not introduced to French or Latin until they are about twelve years of age. Is this the right method? Authorities on the brain have indicated that languages should actually be taught in the first grades when the areas in the brain which deal with language and communication are in the best condition to respond. Dr. Wilder Penfield has recently shown that the brain of a child up to the age of 10 to 14 years is "especially adapted to the learning of languages" whereas after that stage it gradually, inevitably seems to become rigid, slow and less receptive. "Why," he asks, "should foreign languages make their first appearance long after a boy or girl has lost full capacity for language learning?" Most teachers will agree for pedagogical reasons that it is tragically wrong to postpone language training until its effectiveness is reduced or lost.

Another question requiring careful study is whether or not modern pedagogy is paying sufficient attention to developing pupils' capacities to work for themselves as distinct from teaching them. As one observer puts it, does the teacher do the work and the pupil hear the teacher or does the pupil do the work and the teacher hear the pupil? Too much teaching and not enough working results in a brain which can receive better than it can produce. The result of "not training and exercising the brain, indicates a neurologist, Dr. W. Grey Walter, is a situation where "it seems to be degenerating into something more like a spinal cord, able to receive instructions and implement reflex co-ordination but incapable of initiating any independent or original idea." George Bernard Shaw was more than half serious when he indicated that "if you wash a cat it will never again wash itself . . . if you teach a man anything he will never learn it." If there is any truth in the accusation that "the three R's in our schools today stand for Rest, Relax, and Receive," then the present methodology requires careful and critical examination.

The main target of current criticism is the rigid bureaucracy which is the chief feature of North American education. Somehow, without the public appreciating what was going on, the direction of education became centralized during the 1930's in the hands of officials and "experts" instead of trustees and teachers. In an era when America and Canada were fighting for the freedom of democracy, their educational systems went totalitarian, until by 1950 the freedom of the schools was lost and old school and home and school and public relationships were destroyed.

No profession or public activity has been so hidebound by imposed directions, regulations, curricula and theories, and, as these have multiplied, the initiative of the teacher and the contributions of public opinion declined. "Educational administration" became the thing to do, and the enrollment in the normal schools dropped sharply. More current criticism of the educational system in both Canada and the United States is a healthy democratic reaction to the efforts, not of teachers or schools, but of "professional experts." A prominent professor of education has recently called the problem "the chief weakness of public education in Canada."

Many authorities have become concerned over this development, not only because of the mistakes which have been made, but also because of an old principle,

so sharply revealed during two world wars, that dictatorship, whether Nazi or Communist, always begins with educational bureaucracy and cultural standardization. It is no exaggeration to say that at the present time one man or group strategically placed can control an entire educational system. This simply won't do in a troubled world especially in a country which values freedom. The same point applies to controlled uniformity; schools and teachers are different and to try to force them into the same mould serves only to defeat the aims of both education and democracy.

Education is like democratic politics or free enterprise in business. It requires self-reliance and initiative, freedom for thought and experimentation, recognition of the dignity and worth of the individual. It does not thrive on centralization and standardization, on rigid formula of material and method, or on the tyranny of mediocrity which always results from forced uniformity. There is only one effective relationship which brings results in education and that is direct and trusting association between school trustees and public opinion on the one hand and the staffs of individual schools on the other.

The last two decades have shown that the planning of physical facilities and the tinkering with curricula has been both ineffective and dangerous without a substantial change in the status of the teacher. The physical school just keeps out the weather and houses equipment; the curriculum is, or should be, merely a guide to what is being done inside. Good buildings and courses are useful only in so far as they help good teachers to teach. A barn with a real teacher makes a better school than a mansion with a poor one.

This point was lost for a time

in a tendency to provide buildings, slanting blackboards, audio-visual aids, and "extras", all good things in their places, but pure luxuries as long as teachers were, in the words of Hugh MacLennan, "the most exploited, neglected, and underprivileged class in Canada." Indeed some areas have added extra facilities and courses or even duplicated facilities when existing arrangements were not working through lack of teachers. Recently there have been encouraging signs of change. For example, the Ontario Department of Education announced more than a year ago that it would not contribute toward the cost of duplicating existing facilities or providing extras or frills. The Mayor of Saskatoon stated the matter bluntly: "If a gadget in a school or an additional expense does not directly or indirectly promote better teaching, then such things cannot be justified for a moment. In other words, what we should be concentrating on today should be better selection of teachers, a more liberal arts program for teacher training, much less emphasis on methods and on psychology, better treatment of teachers which will of course include better salaries, and more freedom for teachers to do what is their obvious business—namely, teaching." By and large the quality of education which the public may expect depends directly on the quality of the teachers, and the latter depends in turn on proper training, appropriate salaries and reasonable working conditions.

The emphasis on buildings and curricula is folly so long as the enrollments in the normal schools of the country are dropping steadily. Young people are not going into teaching and, what is more important, they are not staying in the profession when they do enter it. There are many reasons, of which salary is only one, and these reasons require careful investigation, study, and reform. Unlike other professional courses, the training of teachers is now a monopoly in the hands of a very few, and many keen observers of education have indicated that the main weaknesses of the system originate from that very fact.

Despite all proposals for reform within the system, progress will not be made until trustees and taxpayers offer larger salaries and regular increases. It is naive to expect young people to enter normal schools when employers are offering far higher financial prospects and when they see existing teachers leaving by the hundreds each year. A young man who wants to marry and raise a family will not remain a teacher at \$1500 a year; a young woman takes the obvious choice when offered twice a teacher's wage to become a waitress or clerk. The most practical investment school authorities can make by way of effort is to search out the best available teachers and by way of money is to pay the maximum possible salaries. A school will get exactly the educational facilities that its personnel can and will provide.

The responsibility is, of course, a two-way one. Teachers in turn owe their pupils real teaching, and the latter requires sound training, not merely in methods, but in the subjects to be taught, and continuous self-improvement through study. Salary and promotion should only be expected through performance and teachers should never expect advancement if they allow themselves to go stale. Professional freedom requires the responsibility of putting that freedom to the best advantage. Some progress has been made in several areas in this respect and, if it continues, there may be some truth in the recent predic-

tion of a professional observer that "there is a real likelihood that the next era in the History of Education will see the elevation to a dominant position of that now neglected figure, the classroom teacher."

The questions raised in this article are at the back of the current controversy over education. They require answers, and the only way answers will be found will be through careful study and adequate discussion. They won't be found through fictitious "surveys" of teachers' college personnel; too many of these have proved weak, sloppy, unreliable, yet dogmatic attempts to spread a preconceived doctrine or theory. Nor will they be found through the efforts of the adherents of one school of thought on education.

School authorities should make every possible effort to encourage discussion among differing groups and hear all sides before laying down a policy. Then the carrying out of the policy should be left to the best possible teachers that wise recruiting and adequate salaries can secure. Here the state's responsibility ends; the rest is up to the parents and most of all, to the students themselves. This department is conducted by the Prince Edward Island Teachers' Federation. Contributions are welcome and should be sent to Estelle Bowers, General Secretary, 98 Prince Street, Charlottetown.

CANADIAN EDUCATION WEEK

(Under the auspices of the Canadian Teachers' Federation)

MARCH 7-13, 1954.

RADIO ADDRESSES:

The following speakers will be heard over Radio Station CFXY:

Monday, March 8th—1:00-1:05 P.M.—The Hon. Keir Clark.

Tuesday, March 9th—8:25-8:30 P.M.—Mrs. J. F. Steele.

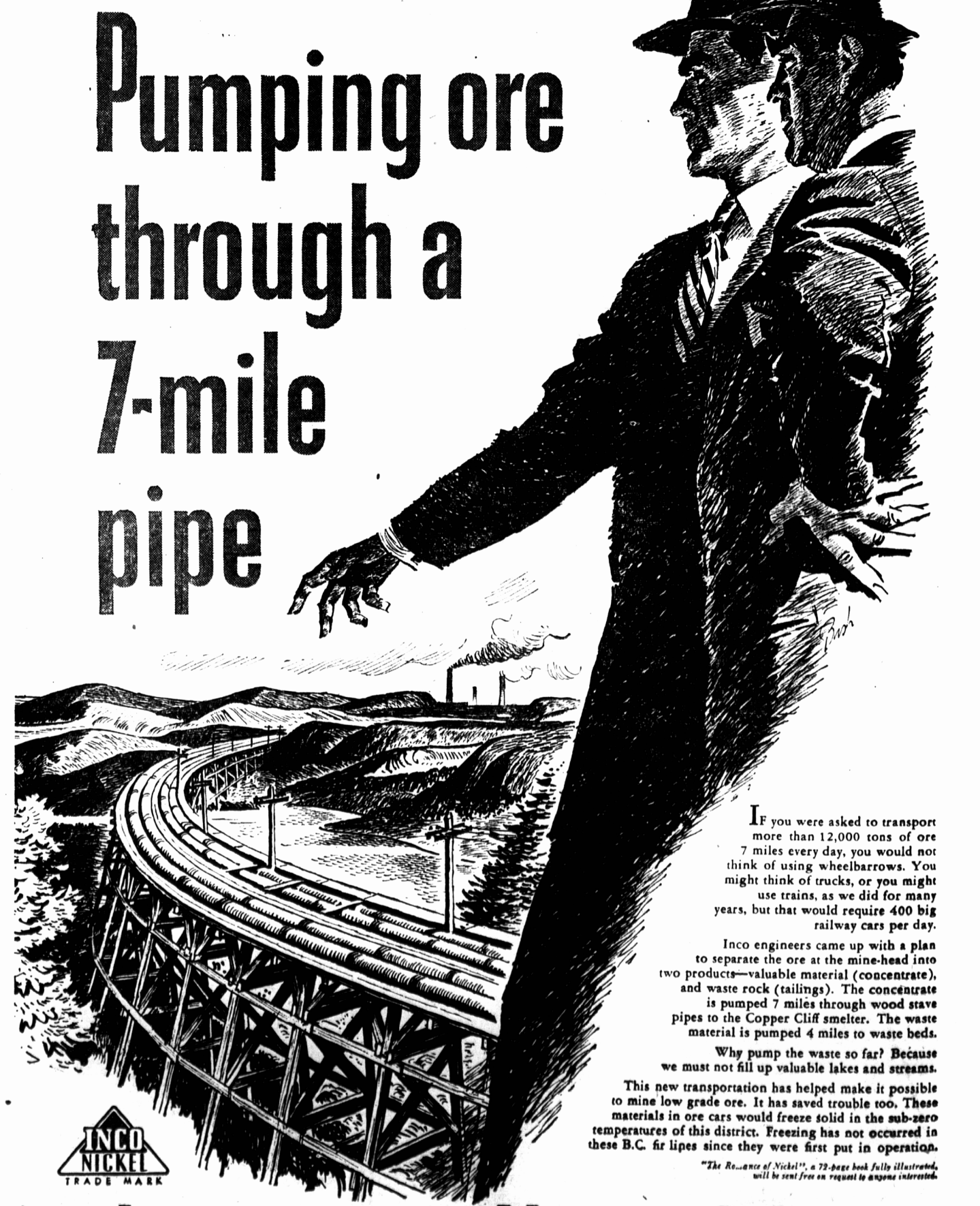
Wednesday, March 10th—9:10-9:15 P.M.—Mrs. Gordon MacDonald.

Thursday, March 11th—8:55-9:00 P.M.—Col. L. F. MacDonald.

Friday, March 12—8:25-8:30 P.M.—Dr. L. W. Shaw.

Saturday, March 13th—1:00-1:15 P.M.—Miss Doris Anderson, Mr. W. S. McMurtry, Mr. J. L. Dewar.

What's news at Inco*?



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