

Asa Gibson,

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10<sup>6</sup> Golders Way

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"Yes, but - who are the Geddes?"

Of course it doesn't really matter who they are, since they are what they are, and yet perhaps the man in the street may be forgiven a little natural curiosity. He had never heard the name, probably, until comparatively few months ago; and then, one after another, the members of the now historic family came forward and quietly took their places in the front ranks of those who are winning the war for us.

Where did they get the brains, the administrative ability, the touch of undeniable genius that makes them so valuable to the nation? It is an interesting question but one that is not easy to answer, for the Geddes hate publicity in any form - a characteristic which no doubt contributed to the sensational abruptness of their leap into the limelight.

A glance at the family history is, however, illuminating.  
on the Geddes side  
Their grandfather/was, so to speak, the Hudson Bay Company.



He had a large family and his children evidently inherited their father's brains, for when the old gentleman lost practically all his money they tackled the problem of keeping themselves with conspicuous success. They had, of course, been brought up in great luxury and the struggle was not an easy one. In those days few women launched forth on any business enterprise, yet four of the daughters founded a school for girls in Edinburgh which soon became famous - one of the sisters, in particular, proved to be an exceptionally brilliant woman.

It is a curious fact that the whole family remained unmarried with the exception of the youngest son. For many years he had a rather rough and difficult life, and it was not until he was nearly fifty that he wedded a distant cousin, ~~the~~ daughter of the late Rev. Alexander Anderson D.D.; a girl several years his junior who was also the youngest member of a large family.

He was working in India at the time as a civil engineer, and it was in India that his eldest daughter and son, now Mrs. Chalmers Watson and Sir Eric Geddes, were born. The children were brought home to England while they were still quite young, and eventually their parents settled down in London, where Sir Auckland Campbell Geddes was born.



Their father devoted himself to their up-bringing, which was of the ultra-strict Early-Victorian variety. No governesses figured in the daily curriculum, and though their home education was by far the biggest factor in their lives, from the very first they were sent to a day school - and from the very first they disliked their lessons and proved pleasantly troublesome and healthily naughty.

When Mrs. Chalmers Watson was about thirteen - by which time another son and daughter had been added to the family - the Geddes moved to Edinburgh, and there the boys were sent to the George Watson College.

But Eric proved incorrigible. He couldn't or wouldn't be "good" in the accepted sense of the word. At sports, especially swimming and football, he excelled; at lessons he did nothing. Intensely energetic, bursting with health, he was always in mischief, always "difficult" at home. Boarding schools failed to tame him. He went quite cheerfully from one to another, apparently learning nothing; but his forceful personality and natural gift for organisation invariably made him a ringleader among the boys.

His was the temperament that can do practically what it likes. Clever with his hands, he could make almost anything -



and among other activities he proved himself a particularly good gardener. As he grew older he was full of plans and ambitions, but totally unable to settle down to any serious work. He began to study medicine, and dropped it. He even passed an examination with a view to entering the army - and changed his mind. At seventeen he was literally shipped to America by his exasperated parents, and the family waited breathlessly to hear of his end on the gallows - the only possible ~~end~~ <sup>finish</sup> for such a hopeless character!

Always unexpected, he has ended as First Lord of the Admiralty - for the present. It is difficult to predict where his boundless energy may lead him once the war is over.

The story of his meteoric career is common property. It is also characteristic. A lumberman and porter in America, an engineer in India, a rapid climb to the top of the North Eastern Railway ladder in England, and then - the War. No other man in the history of the world has been a civilian, a Major General, and a Vice-Admiral within the space of a bare three years. The constant change, the incessant wear and tear, might well have worn out even the strongest physique. But Sir Eric Geddes is untiring. He never dreams of taking a holiday; his children - he has three boys - hardly ever see their father. His motto is



work, work - and again work. Yet he is not an intellectual man; he does not think deeply neither does he plod. His extraordinary success is due rather to a gift of "vision." Intuitively he seems to know what lies ahead, and with incomprehensible rapidity he has his plans cut and dried, ready to deal with the next emergency. To outsiders his personality is almost terrifying, yet his tact is already a bye-word.

All this - and he is only forty-one!

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Sir Auckland Geddes is absolutely unlike his elder brother in appearance and character, but shares his gift of unfailing energy. As a boy he was not nearly so troublesome, and the day school in Edinburgh sufficed for his education. Though a very good English scholar and a great reader, he too, distinguished himself at games rather than books and became the captain of the school football team. His weak eyesight, however, proved something of a handicap, and latterly he has devoted himself to walking and fishing in his few spare moments.

It was his eyes, too, which prevented his embarking on an army career - a great disappointment, as he always had a passion for military things. When quite youthful he wrote a book on bicycle drill, and all his holidays were spent in work in connection



with the Volunteer movement, of which he was an enthusiastic member.

He had already begun to study medicine at Edinburgh University when the South African war broke out, and he joyfully laid aside his books to become a lieutenant in the 3rd Highland Infantry. On his return he reverted to medicine and took his degree, proving himself in many ways a brilliant student. His experience was gained in a diversity of places - Edinburgh, London, Dublin - and the declaration of war found him Professor of Anatomy at the McGill University, Montreal.

At once he came home to help, and his present position as Minister for National Service speaks for itself. Naturally he did not arrive there without expending tremendous energy on his many tasks, but when he is at work Sir Auckland has no thought for anything save the matter in hand. He is absolutely unconscious of self; it is immaterial to him when or where he eats, or whether he eats at all. Apparently he has no need of rest - time simply ceases to exist for him while he is busy.

Incidentally he is married and has five children:

When the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps was formed early in 1917, few people were surprised to learn that the able Commander-



in-Chief, Mrs. Chalmers Watson, was a sister of the two famous Geddes. Yet the appointment came as quite a surprise to her. She was in London, attending to some ~~work~~ business connected with her medical work, when she was summoned to the War Office to discuss the possibility of substituting women for men in various occupations behind the lines.

She disclaims any reason for this choice, but the mere facts of her career show that it was in every way a wise one, and not by any means a matter of chance.

Like her brothers, Mrs. Chalmers Watson did not shine at school. But this was not due to any lack of brains; it was, rather, caused by her very brilliance, which enabled her to float comfortably along without any effort or necessity for hard work on her part. According to her own account she was very idle, very obstinate, and entirely devoid of accomplishments - though the statement is hardly borne out by the fact that the head mistress of the big school at St. Leonards, to which she was sent when she was fifteen, was anxious that she should go on to College with a view to becoming a house mistress. This project, however, was knocked on the head by the fact that she was wanted at home. At eighteen she returned to Edinburgh, and by way of amusement went in for the London Matriculation.



She failed - and that failure was the turning point in her life. For the first time the happy-go-lucky girl realised that brains are of little value unless backed by solid work. She never failed another examination - ~~more~~<sup>instead</sup>, she performed feats of learning that were little short of miraculous.

At that time there was the most violent opposition to women entering the medical profession, but undeterred by the obvious difficulties ahead she took up her studies and by sheer determination and ability won her way through. Nothing seemed to daunt her; she "crammed" whole subjects such as botany and zoology in the space of a few weeks; a three years' course was attacked and mastered within four months.

Mrs. Chalmers Watson was the first woman the Edinburgh University had ever examined in medicine, and the general impression among the learned Professors seemed to be that the whole affair was not quite "nice." She was carefully isolated, and the men students were not allowed to catch even a glimpse of her! All this did not tend to make things any easier, ~~for her~~, but in common fairness the examiners were forced to admit her capability and she came through the ordeal with flying colours.

All through her work was that of a pioneer. Supported and helped in a hundred ways by her mother - a woman of unusual energy



and resource - she fought steadily for the recognition and fair treatment of women. Through her influence the Infirmary at length admitted women students to its wards, and she is still working to get women into the University.

It was while she was ~~working~~ <sup>studying</sup> for her various exam<sup>inations</sup> that she became engaged to Dr. Chalmers Watson, but her father was now ambitious for her. Although she had already distinguished herself by being the first woman to take her M.B. in Scotland, he insisted that she should take her M.D. before being married. This meant two years work in London, but off she went to tackle it and incidentally put in a six months course of housewifery and cooking with a view to the efficient management of her future home. She was duly rewarded by being capped and married in Edinburgh on the same day.

Since that time Mrs. Chalmers Watson has consistently interested herself in women and women's work. In the intervals of writing books with her husband and carrying on a private consulting practice, she collected the necessary money and founded the Queen Mary Nursing Home, which provides about forty beds and every facility for medical attendance at minimum terms. Infant Welfare and kindred schemes have always had her sympathy



and support, and when war first broke out she became organising secretary for the Women's Emergency Corps in Edinburgh.

Could anyone be better fitted to control the Women's Army? By the way, no photograph does her justice. The camera seems to distort into rather hard lines a face of singular sweetness, with little humorous crinkles about the eyes and a ready laugh that is never far from the surface. With all her brilliance, with all her energy and ceaseless activity in public affairs, Mrs. Chalmers Watson is essentially a woman and a mother - as her two jolly little boys would be the first to bear witness.

And the rest of the family? Irvine Geddes, already famous as the Scottish International football player, is now a partner in the firm of Anderson & Anderson, and practically controls the Orient Line - though he is still in the early thirties! The remaining sister is debarred by health from undertaking very active work, but she is equally capable in her own way.

Small wonder that there is a catch-phrase current in certain official circles today - "Get a Geddes to tackle it!"