

4. NO ROYAL ROAD TO LEARNING.

In addressing the pupils of the Central School, Hamilton, on the occasion of his retirement from that school, Mr. Sangster said :

I feel assured that you will continue to give your earnest attention to your studies—that you will still manifest the same application and perseverance that you have hitherto. Work diligently and faithfully ; for, without labor, there is no excellence. There is no “royal road” to learning. The temple of science is placed on a hill and can only be reached by climbing. Foot by foot, step by step, with your face resolutely set towards the top, you must press onward, if you would attain to any eminence. If you find the way steep, and for a moment feel disheartened, fix your gaze steadily on the prize at the summit, and remember the dear ones “at home” who, with anxious, loving hearts, are watching your efforts. Bear in mind that, at every step you take, you are passing the spot where thousands and tens of thousands have halted, never to go further. Let your motto be “Excelsior.” Resolve never to be discouraged by difficulties—not to believe any obstacle insurmountable. Recollect that, if your lessons contained no difficulty, they would be valueless to you. In addition to the fact that, in overcoming these obstacles, your intellect is compelled, in a manner, to take a firmer and more comprehensive grasp of the principles involved :—the daily habit of successfully coping with difficulties, gives the mind a power and a vigor which it would never otherwise possess. Bear down all opposition by dint of exertion. Remember that the difference between men is not so much one of talent as perseverance, energy, unconquerable determination,—an honest purpose once fixed, and then—victory. If you have great talents, diligence will improve them, if but moderate ability, industry will supply the deficiency. Possessed of energy, there is no position so exalted that you may not aspire to fill it, there is no degree of excellency to which you may not attain. In short, an indomitable will is the grand secret of success, is the great quality before which every impediment melts into insignificance, and the want of which no circumstances, no opportunity, no talents can supply. Cultivate, then, the habit of doing with all your might whatever you may have to do. Most of you have to carve your own fortunes. Upon your own individual exertions depend the position you are to occupy, and the influence you are to exert in society. From what I have seen, I feel convinced that the world will yet hear of some of you—that many of you will hereafter fill offices of trust and responsibility. Aim high, work hard, see that your motives are all good, and that your principles are pure, and never for an instant dream of failure ; go forward in certainty ; victory is yours.

Strive after greatness of character ; Remember, there is absolutely no connexion whatever between this greatness and that of position. It pertains no more to the prince than to the peasant, no more to the statesman than to the chimney sweep, but is equally within the reach of all. As has been well remarked, “he is the greatest man who chooses the right with invincible resolution ; who resists the sorest temptations from within and from without ; who bears the heaviest burdens cheerfully ; who is the calmest in storms, and whose reliance on truth, on virtue, and on God, is the most unflinching.” Be brave,—brave in maintaining the truth, and battling against error. Never shrink from doing what you know to be right. Be sure that the course you purpose taking is correct, and then follow it resolutely. Do your duty unflinchingly. Be alike unflinched by jeers, by threats, by solicitations, by self interest, by any considerations whatever. Try to understand your duty and responsibility to God, to society, to your parents, to yourselves. Never be guilty of a mean and unworthy action. Never do or say anything, the remembrance of which might hereafter cause you to blush ; and withal, humbly pray that your moral culture may keep pace with your intellectual attainments, and that, as your minds become illuminated with the light of substantial knowledge, your hearts may become enlightened by grace.

My dear boys and girls—It is quite unnecessary for me to say that this last proof of your attachment has given me pleasure. I thankfully accept this beautiful and appropriate token of your regard. Its intrinsic value is, indeed, great—far beyond anything I have merited—but many thousand times more precious to me are the feelings which prompted you to present it, and the sentiments of esteem and respect which are breathed in your address. I feel quite unworthy of so much love and consideration. I thank you, dear pupils, not only for your goodness on this occasion, but also for the cheerful manner in which you have uniformly submitted to the restraints and regulations peculiar to the school room ; for the many acts of thoughtful kindness I have received from you ; for the disposition to aid me and to lighten my labors which you have always evinced, and for the happy spirit of harmony and mutual concession which has characterized your intercourse with one another.

I feel, dear boys and girls, that this is the hour of my life. Never again to me can come an hour at once so full of joy and of sorrow.

Never again can such conflicting feelings of pleasure and pain struggle within my breast. This moment would be one of unmixed bitterness, were it not that in which I receive from you such unmistakeable evidence of your love and so strong an assurance that I shall live in your affectionate remembrance. It would be one of great happiness were it not the last I am to spend with you. No longer are we to hold towards one another the near and dear relation of teacher and pupils. To-morrow another assumes the right to counsel and instruct you. To-night, however, you are still mine, and I am anxious to embrace this last opportunity by offering you a few words of advice.

Dear boys and girls, I cannot tell you how much I feel at leaving you—how unhappy I am in having to tear myself from so many that I love—how my affections cling to Hamilton. Perhaps none but those who experience it, can conceive the depth of sorrow felt at such a parting. Five years ago, to-night, I sat upon this platform with feelings very different from those I now experience, and yet almost as sad. Then I was a stranger in a strange place. I had just parted from many dear ones in Toronto, and within the entire circumference of this city I could not count one friend, no, not even an acquaintance. At that time not one bright or pleasant anticipation arose to reconcile me to the future. I thought but of those I had left, and of the cheerless prospect before me. I could not then foresee that hundreds of warm friends were together around me, to sustain me by their kindness and encourage me by their sympathy. I did not then know the treasure of love that God was about to give me in my pupils. I felt merely that I was friendless and alone. Now, how changed my position. In almost every face before me, and on either side of me, I recognize that of a friend. Hamilton has become endeared to me by many a hard day's work—many an anxious thought ; and many recollections, some pleasant and others sad, throng upon me as I review the past.

I do fondly hope, dear children, that we shall neither forget one another, nor the thousand agreeable associations that cluster around the period of our connection. While life and reason remain, the hallowed memory of these days shall never pass away. Long years hence, when age shall have bowed the body and silvered the hair—when care shall have furrowed the face, and sorrow seamed the heart—a word, a look, a passing shadow, the fall of a leaf or the sighing of the wind shall recall to vivid remembrance the events and incidents of the past five years, and pupils and teachers, we shall all be here together again. Once more, in fancy, shall we see one another, as if but yesterday. Again shall we hear the merry ringing laugh, and take part in the exciting game, or enjoy the mad romp with the winds. Again shall we sit together, as of yore, in the old familiar school-room, and battle with that stubborn problem that would not be “done.” Alas ! we shall then be scattered to the four winds of Heaven, and many of us shall have passed the bourne whence none return ; but, as these gentle memories of bye-gone days steal over those of us that remain, the dim eye shall brighten, and the hard heart grow soft under their soothing influence.

We now separate—you to go on in the prosecution of your studies under almost the same circumstances as heretofore, and I to go elsewhere to enter a new field of labor, to undertake new duties, and to assume new responsibilities. When next you assemble in your lessons, and look towards the well-known desk, you will doubtless miss one familiar face—but how many familiar faces shall I miss ? You will have parted with one friend, but with how many dear friends shall I have parted ? How long shall I have to labor in my new school before the faces that day by day gather about me awaken so many happy and agreeable recollections ? How improbable that I shall ever again meet with a class of boys and girls at once so intelligent, so industrious, so obedient, and so affectionate ? [At this period the young girls and boys, and, in fact, the greater portion of the vast assembly, were more or less affected, and continued to be so till the close of the reply. Mr. Sangster could scarcely command his own feelings sufficiently to proceed.] This watch shall always be one of the most valued and precious of my earthly possessions. While my heart beats beneath it, I shall never cease to remember the loved and dear ones who gave it me, and by whose affection it is consecrated. And in after years, whether near to or far from the scene of this night's proceedings, when gazing upon its face I shall clearly see reflected there the faces of those whom I now see before me, and whom I shall forever love as dear brothers and sisters.

And now, my dear pupils, farewell ! We part ! May you be prosperous and happy ! O Almighty God ! shield and guard these dear ones from sin and sorrow. Keep their hearts in purity. May all their aspirations be holy and lofty. May they be spared to long lives of honor and usefulness. Do Thou sustain them amid the dangers and temptations of youth. O let not one fall. Keep them all beneath the shadow of thine Almighty wings, and gather them at last, one by one, to Thyself in Heaven.