

*Special Papers.*

## \*ADVANCED ENGLISH SCHOOLS IN RURAL DISTRICTS.

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MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—To-day I can adopt almost the exact language of St. Paul, and say that I am happy to be called upon to discuss certain matters that pertain to the welfare and happiness of the farming community, because I know that you, Mr. President, are an expert in all things that concern them, that will add to their usefulness and increase their prosperity, for from your youth up you have been intimately associated with them, you know their wants, and sympathize with their noblest aspirations. It is therefore a more pleasant duty for me to introduce this matter to the consideration of the members of this Association than it would be under different circumstances. The thoughts that I shall present have been floating through my mind for some time past, and though they may be somewhat crude in form, yet I trust there will be found sufficient truth in them to merit some discussion. I do not for one moment entertain the idea that I shall say all that can be said favorable to the proposed scheme, nor do I flatter myself that I am capable of answering all objections that may be raised to the details as now developed, for I am fully persuaded that the principle underlying this subject is sound, and merits our most thoughtful consideration. Our educational work has been rapidly developing of late years, and something of this nature is required to round off and fill out our otherwise admirable system.

The age in which we live, when compared with those of former times, has not inaptly been called the practical or utilitarian age. Old ideas and old theories are respected, not for their age alone, but for their inherent value. Everything is now subjected to the keenest criticism, the most rigorous scrutiny, as well as the most searching analysis. Whatever fails to respond affirmatively to these tests is cast aside as of little or no value, while that which passes this ordeal successfully is valued more for its worth in the every day affairs of life than for any other specific quality. Theories, as theories, are quietly falling into the rear in the march of mind, while the van is being crowded with common-sense thoughts and matter-of-fact conclusions. The dust and cob-webs of centuries are being brushed away rapidly, by the ruthless hand of practical utility. In science, in art, in literature, in education, in fact everywhere, things that are hoary with age and venerable with years, fail to command the respect once accorded to them. It seems as if the decks are being cleared for action, and that we are entering upon another and more important phase of that great struggle, the struggle between right and wrong, between intelligence and ignorance. Apparently the command has been given to close up the ranks and prepare for action. Even among the most highly civilized nations, there are great problems to be solved, problems of civil government, of the relation that capital and labor should bear to each other, as well as those that bear specially upon the renovation of society in many of its most important features.

And while I would not for one moment underestimate, or seek, in any way, to depreciate the value of the other agencies engaged in up-building society, and elevating the great masses of mankind, yet I feel that in this work, as in the solution of the great problem referred to, the schools of the future are to play a very important part. The sphere of their influence is steadily enlarging, but not to the extent it should be, nor with the force they can and shall command. Our present school system, though practically less than half a century old, has brought our own fair Province well to the front among the nations, and has given us a world-wide reputation. And now that the pulsations of a national life are beginning to throb through the arteries of our young country, the need of trained and cultivated intellect, of high aspiration and noble endeavor, must be apparent to every thoughtful person. Nor should these advantages be

limited to the few who may enter the learned professions; they must permeate the whole of society, for to quote the words of the late John Bright: "Palaces, baronial castles, great halls, stately mansions, do not make a nation; the nation in every country dwells in the cottage."

And how are these things to be obtained? and in what way shall we reach the nation that dwells in the cottage? Evidently the schools must become an important factor, for they can be so located as to reach the people, and become centres from which much good shall emanate, while the teachers shall become trustworthy agents in this great and noble work. I have unbounded faith in the work done in the school-room, and the utmost confidence in the integrity and unselfish devotion of the teaching profession. One of the greatest and most important interests of this country, the education of the young, is now confided to their care, and they are proving themselves worthy of this great trust. Politicians will of necessity work for party advantage, and in their anxiety to score a party victory may even sacrifice some of the dearest and most cherished interests of our country.

But no such temptation besets the pathway of the teacher. Dealing, as he does, with the intellectual and moral natures of those who are to shape the future destinies of this land, he eschews the schemes and devices of the political partisan, and seeks to unfold, in all their fulness and power, the hearts and intellects of those who are to be our successors in developing the resources of our native country. This is his great work, and none but the noblest and best in the land should be entrusted with it.

If the trend of the times is toward the practical and useful in our educational work, and I am decidedly of that opinion, then I can see no reason why a class of schools, specially adapted to meet the wants of the farming community, should not be established throughout our rural districts, but on the contrary there are strong reasons to be urged in favor of such a step. Our High Schools and Collegiate Institutes, situated as they are usually in some centre of population, do not meet the wants of these people, either as to location or course of study. These secondary schools, as a rule, are so inconveniently situated as to render them almost valueless to the great majority of farmers, as places of intellectual culture for their families. It is true that there are quite a number from the rural districts who attend these schools, but they are either the children of well-to-do farmers, or of those who are prepared to sacrifice a great deal for the education of their families, and who desire to fit their sons for one or another of the learned professions. Looking at this matter fairly from whatever point of view we may select, there is only one conclusion at which we can arrive, and that is, so far as location is concerned, the present system fails to meet the reasonable requirements of our agricultural population.

The course of study is not such as to commend itself as being well adapted to give the intellectual culture necessary for those engaged in agricultural pursuits. There is a strong belief in the minds of not a few of the leaders of our educational thought, that only certain subjects of study should be used as instruments in training and developing the mental faculties. But to me it seems more reasonable to suppose that true intellectual culture can be, and is, best obtained by the study of those subjects which naturally belong to the line of life which the student purposes following. This has been recognized in the past, and is now, to a limited extent, acted upon in the preparation of the course of study for these secondary schools, because in the curriculum there are now four optional courses open to the student—a classical, a modern language, a science and a commercial course. It does not require very keen discernment to see that these options furnish valuable information and useful knowledge to the student in preparing him for his life work, and that they are selected for their utility.

The principle of utility has been acceded to by our educational authorities, but only to a limited extent, and that directly in the line of preparation for the learned professions or commercial life. Nothing is being done to keep the young men of talent and education on the farm, or induce them to take up the study of agriculture as a life calling. The facts seem to point in an entirely different direction, so that the farming community are

looked upon as the great recruiting ground of the the professions and commerce. No one can look into the early history of the leading men in commercial, professional and political life, without finding that either they or their fathers were closely connected with farm life.

Now, if it be true, and, in our opinion, the evidence points strongly that way, that many of our best young men forsake the farm and seek advancement in one or other of the learned professions, there must be some cause for it. If, therefore, we can diagnose the case with sufficient accuracy to determine what some of these causes are, then we have made some progress toward a solution of this problem. There are two primary causes to which we may fairly assign the bulk of the evil complained of. These briefly stated are, (1) There is a desire common to the majority of mankind to avoid manual labor, and secure what to them seems to be a more genteel or respectable means of earning a livelihood; and (2) The influence exerted by our educational system aids in perpetuating this view, by directing the mental activities of our young people along the line of the learned professions. These two causes are very closely connected, and seem to be inter-dependent the one upon the other.

In regard to the first we will simply pass it by as not bearing directly upon our educational work, and turn our attention more particularly to the second. In considering this statement we are led to enquire, Is it true? and our answer is that the general trend of our educational work is directly in the line of the University, and hence toward the learned professions.

It must be apparent to the most ordinary observer that the great part of the work done in our High and Public school leads directly towards a professional career. The idea is rapidly spreading that in these schools the best interests of a large number of our young people are, to a greater or less extent, sacrificed to conform to this tendency in our educational work, and the time has arrived when we should ask ourselves the question, Whither are we drifting? This tendency will be more clearly seen if we look somewhat carefully at the various examinations candidates are required to pass, and the direction in which these are leading our young people. The lowest is that for admission into our High schools, and the course of study in our Public schools is so arranged that pupils of twelve or fourteen years of age, if reasonably well taught, have but little difficulty in passing this ordeal. Next in order comes the literary examination for a public school teacher's certificate; then follow the matriculation examinations in law, medicine, divinity and arts. Now, it will be observed that these examinations are literary in their nature, and are based upon the somewhat broad and comprehensive course of study prescribed for our High schools. The combined influence of the course of study and the associations surrounding the student while attending school lead directly to either a professional or literary career in life. Recent changes have placed the teacher's examinations more directly on the line of a University course than formerly, and now First-Class teachers' certificates are granted to students who reach a certain standing in the University course. In addition to these purely literary schools, there are Normal and Model schools for training teachers, and medical, theological and law schools for students desirous of entering any of these professions. Should any further arguments be necessary to prove the statements already made, we have only to turn to the official records for their confirmation. From the last report issued by the Minister of Education for 1887, we learn that there were 15,344 pupils enrolled in the Provincial High schools. Of these, 1,100 were preparing for matriculation into one or other of our Universities, 723 for the learned professions, and 5,777 for teachers' non-professional certificates; making a total of 7,600, or nearly 50 per cent. of the total enrolment. Against this we have 1,733 who are taking up the commercial course, and not one solitary student devoting himself to the study of agriculture.

From what has already been said it is quite clear that these secondary schools, whether we look at their location, the course of study pursued, or their influence in determining the vocation to be followed by the student in after life, do not meet

\* An address delivered before the Ontario Teachers' Association at its twenty-ninth Annual Convention, at Niagara-on-the-Lake, August, 1889.