

❖ Special Papers. ❖

ONTARIO SCHOOLS.

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A PAPER READ AT THE TEACHERS' CONVENTION
AT STRATFORD.

(Continued.)

VIEW OF PROFESSIONAL WORK.

Another shortcoming which lies at the door of many of you is the contracted view you accustom yourselves to take of your professional work. The eye adjusts itself to near or distant vision. A watchmaker will at once detect the broken cog or spring in a watch, though it utterly eludes the inspection of a mariner, and the latter will clearly perceive a sail in the distance, while it is yet invisible to the mechanic. So with our mental vision, we are short or long-sighted from habit. It is so much easier to see the things nearest to us that we are, too many of us, content not to look for those which lie beyond. Hence even the most experienced and thoughtful among us are, in a large measure, ignorant or heedless of the subtle influences for weal or woe which invest the teacher's work. How seldom do most of us stop to consider the extent to which the destinies of our Province, our Dominion, and even our Empire are indirectly moulded or determined in our school-room? The petulance, the ignorance, or the insubordination of an unruly child, unrebuked, or uninformed, or unchecked by an unfaithful teacher, or the seeds of virtue and wisdom and self-restraint dropped into receptive soil by a beloved instructor, may change the whole course of a nation's history. It is a peculiarity of your work that its final and grandest results are hidden from your view. You till the soil and sow the seed, but you do not garner or even see the ripened grain. The harvest belongs to the distant future. You require to look at your handiwork, in its higher aspects, through the eye of faith set to distant adjustments. If you never regard it except through myopic glasses, small wonder you are purblind, small wonder you become in that case teaching machines—paltry automata, mere things of cogs and springs, and wheels, and gearings, wound up and set to run more or less languidly from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. I repeat it—the finer, and higher, and most useful results of the true teacher's ministrations are to be sought for in the remote future, and chiefly, it may be, in the world beyond our present ken. Of teachers more truly than of any other class of human agents, it may be said that the good or the ill they do lives after them. You are

THE NATION'S FORMERS,

and the beneficent effects of your efforts, if rightly directed and faithfully pursued, will be as much more potent and far-reaching than those of all its reformers combined, as prevention is better than cure, or as it is easier to train the pliant saplings in a nursery than to straighten the gnarled and twisted boles of forest trees knotted and hardened by a century's storms. Every noble thought or true conception, or holy aspiration, or lofty aim, or generous im-

pulse; every pious precept, or prudential rule of life, or Christian virtue, or patriotic craving you can press home into the inmost hearts of your pupils, so as to become the controlling influences of their after years, not only dignifies and adorns their own existence here, and possibly contributes to their eternal felicity, but helps by way of parental example and precept to mould the character and sweeten the aims and purify the lives and elevate the actions of their children and their children's children in successive generations. When a stone is dropped into the calm bosom of one of our lakes it gives rise to concentric eddies which widen and flow in larger and yet larger circles, till they reach and break upon the distant strand. So it is with your influence as a teacher. Steadily swelling outwards from your respective schools as centres, it spreads and spreads through the ages in ever-widening circles, which never, never break, save on the shores of eternity. Oh, to any one of right feelings and clear perceptions how such thoughts as these warm and gladden the heart and glorify the labor! Magnify your office, look your occupation squarely and honestly in the face, and you will be amazed how much you can find in it which is above and beyond mere routine. Once you learn not only coldly with the mind, but feelingly with the heart that you are or ought to be something far higher than teaching machines, doling out information and grinding in accomplishments, you will anxiously seek to avail yourselves of every passing opportunity to give your pupils that

HIGHER EDUCATION,

properly so-called, which consists in the repression of evil tendencies and the cultivation of the finer mental and moral susceptibilities. True, your "course of studies" takes no cognizance of such acquisitions, and your test examinations and school inspections never reach them at all. True, the mistaken standards by which your success as teachers is officially measured apply so exclusively to text-books and subjects as to discourage, if not altogether prevent, the higher teaching to which I refer. Yet a child who has been taught to be forgiving, modest, gentle, generous, truthful, and forbearing—who has been trained to ardently love whatever is right, to thrill in sympathy with all that is lofty in sentiment or heroic in action—whose powers of observation, perception, and reflection have been developed, strengthened, made keen and alert, is, in my opinion, even if unable to read or write, incomparably better and more usefully educated than one without these qualities of mind and heart and intellect, though crammed from Alpha to Omega with every branch of study in the Public and High school course and the university curriculum. The whole energies of our system are at present directed to the manufacture of learned boys and girls. Yet the world is rapidly outgrowing its mistake of supposing that learned boys and girls become, in process of time, able men and women. There is abundant evidence to show that the most learned boys and girls of one generation are, as a rule, unknown in the next—that the prize-winners of our schools and universities are not as a class conspicuous in after years for

ability or goodness or greatness of character. Placed, however, as you are, between a set of duties which the State and society say you must perform, and another set of duties which your conscience tells you ought not to be neglected, seeing they are of higher moment, what ought you to do? Simply and always your best. The problem is how to perform those duties while not neglecting these. Work conscientiously and lovingly, work in patience and faith; do your whole duty to your schools and to your scholars, and leave the results to Heaven. The more you ponder on the subject, the grander will your labor appear—the more clearly you will perceive that if,

They also serve who only stand and wait,

now exalted are your opportunities of doing the will of your Heavenly Father, and of being of use in your day and generation.

WANT OF DETERMINED EFFORT.

Perfunctoriness is a fault not exclusively, I fear, confined to our younger teachers. It implies want of determined effort, want of honest hard work, want of that impartial and exacting habit of self-criticism which ruthlessly compares our results with our ideals and goads us to climb, by the ladder of experience, to higher and broader places of excellence and usefulness. Our age, with all its manifold improvements and advantages, is, in a large degree, an age of shoddy and pretence. In every walk of life and in every department of human labor there prevails more or less abundantly a disposition to fulfil the letter and neglect the spirit of our obligations. In all industrial pursuits, whether manual or mental, professional or mechanical, perfunctoriness sits like the "old man of the mountain" astride the workman's shoulders. "It will do." "It is good enough," "Let it go," and similar phrases are constantly in the mouths or in the minds even of those from whom we might have expected better things, and consequently mediocrity or worse is the stamp of very much that is done. "It will do," is the maxim of the careless and the refuge of the sloven. "It will do" degrades aim, paralyzes effort, dwarfs usefulness, emasculates character, and saps the strength and beauty of many a prominent life. "It will do," is one of the fatal upas trees of humanity beneath whose deadly shade lie blighted promise, wrecked homes, broken resolutions, lost honor, ruined projects, marred success. It is the half-way house on the road to perfection. It is stopping short of completeness, and means makeshift, negligence, failure. It is the signature of incompetence and the sign manual of indolence. Let not, I beseech you, this fatal phrase find a place in your vocabulary. There are only two modes of feeling in which you can perform your duties. You must work either in the spirit of the artist or in the spirit of the day laborer, and it is the spirit alone that dignifies labor and makes all work, rightly done, respectable. I regard an humble shoemaker who constantly strives to excel himself by endeavoring to turn out each successive pair of shoes superior to any he has made before, as a more reputable workman and an incomparably better artist than the most exalted painter, or sculptor, or musician who has ceased to work in that