

# Messenger and Visitor.

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## CHRISTIAN EDUCATION.

### An Address Delivered Before the Convention at Moncton.

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Perhaps it is well that someone beside these learned college professors should say a word upon this subject, if for no other reason than to emphasize the fact that education is properly the work of the people at large. We sometimes say that our educational institutions are located at Wolfville. I would remind you that they are scattered throughout these provinces, from Campbellton to Halifax and from St. Stephen to Sydney. Wherever there is a Baptist home, a Baptist church, a Baptist farm, a Baptist workshop, a Baptist counting house, you have a Baptist educational institution. The schools should not be saddled with the whole responsibility for educational advancement. They represent the crest of the educational wave, and they can only be maintained and forwarded in their work as they are upborne upon the broad bosom of the supporting sea. The sea is the people. They live and move and have their being in us. If henceforth no breath of educational impulse should blow upon us as a people, the college would soon disappear, as in a calm the wave dies down into the indistinguishable dead level of the ocean. Then the very deep would rot. Not only so, but the college must get its flavor from the people as the wave gets its flavor from the sea. If there is to be a savour of life in the schools at Wolfville, it will be because we have it in our homes and churches. If Acadia tastes of God, it is because we are a God-impregnated people. We look to our brethren in the schools to catch for us the first rays that fall from the rising sun of science; we expect them to scan the horizon of knowledge with a broader outlook than we can command—they have the altitude for that—but we should not expect them to greet truth with any lustier cheer, or transmit it with any keener zest than we do ourselves. We are commissioners for education, every one of us, under the great seal of the Kingdom. Until a man loses his interest in Christian life, he cannot surrender his interest in Christian education.

For the constant outlook and reference of education is toward life and its enlargement. Education is the effort to produce the life-full personality. Things have educative value and potency according as they make for a rich and abounding life in men. The greatest educator that ever appeared upon this planet, the one whose thought has proved most germinal, whose spirit most quickening, whose discipline most salutary and resultful, went about his work with the words on his lips: "I came that they may have life and have it more abundantly."

Now since education is tributary to life, the question presses—What is life? What is your life? How do you gauge it, how mark its ebb and flow? We are not seeking a close scientific definition of life in the abstract, but a handy workable statement of our crystallized experience concerning human life. Will you accept this: "Life is the Response of one's being to the Universe about him and the God above him?" If that be true, then the more varied and full-toned the response, the ampler the resultant life will be. And whatever wakes this response is educative. It e-du-cates, leads out the capacity, to be filled with the content for which it was created. This is the business of education.

A child is born into the world. "He is a stranger in a strange land. To nothing is he a greater stranger than to himself. He has no suspicion of the capacities that are in him for apprehension, for joy and suffering, for varied emotion and passion, for action and eternal duration." He has no consciousness of a past. Whether he is the first child of the first man, or the last in a succession of myriads of generations, he knows not. So of the space around him and what is in it. To him, the walls of his little room are the limit of the universe and the persons who hover about his cradle the only beings it contains. Of wide plains, and high mountains, and broad oceans, of an infinite space with its suns and systems, of the multitudes of men and the myriads of the heavenly hosts, he has not the slightest apprehension. So also of the future. He knows nothing of to-morrow; has no expectations; is imprisoned in the present passing moment.

But at the birth moment the education of the child begins. In part it is spontaneous. Immediately upon

his entrance into the world environment makes appeal to him and awakes responses. He responds to the air, and breathes; to the light, and sees; to sound, and hears; to his mother, and feeds. The first ray of light that falls upon his eye gives him his first experience in optics. The first sound that strikes his ear begins his education in acoustics. He takes his first lesson in manual training.

"What time his tender pain is prest  
Against the circle of the breast."

If now, he is favorably conditioned and skillfully handled the responses will come thick and fast. He is a bundle of possibilities, a harp of a thousand strings that may be made to vibrate in sympathy with everything in earth and air and sea and sky. He will come to adjust himself to his surroundings, and coordinate himself with the universe. He will learn to walk and run and swim; to speak and read and write and sing; to plough and paint and carve and build. In all this he is making his response to the universe. The same fact holds regarding his mental and emotional activities. When he calculates and contrives, when he weeps and wonders, when he loves or hates, when he is touched by the tender radiance of the dawn or awed by the tempest's power, or racked by pain, or harrowed by grief, or drenched with the darkness of mystery, he is making his personal response to the universe about him.

Do you see where this thought leads us? If the response of one's body to the physical elements about him be full-toned and harmonious, he will have abounding physical life. If the response of his intellect to the thought-provoking facts of nature and humanity be quick and clear and strong he will enjoy large mental life. But, suppose there is no response from his spirit to the living God? Or suppose that response be but feeble, partial, abortive? Then at the top of him he is an uneducated man. In the department of his being where he should be flooded with life, he is withered, atrophied, dead.

"O life is life when 'tis seen in God."

This is life that we may know God through Jesus Christ. We only live in the truest sense as we come to understand the mind of God, to rest in the love of God, to enjoy the fellowship of God, to feel the power of God, and, according to our capacity, achieve the purpose of God.

And herein lies the argument for Christian education. Is it not a forceful and compelling one? In Christian education we seek first of all to arouse the religious faculty and summon the spirit of man to answer to the fact of God. Our watchword is, "In the beginning—God"! That is our dominant note, in harmony with which we seek to lead forth all the powers of the personality into full choir and chorus. It is thus we make our contribution to human life, calling upon the highest faculty within man to respond to the highest fact and force about him and above him.

In contrast with this—the Christian ideal of education—how pitifully poor and mean are the ideals of education avowed by the bulk of our people to-day. The vast majority of them still proceed upon the assumption that the aim of education is to produce money-makers. The young are to be fitted for making a living rather than for living a life. Property instead of personality is the end in view. Money spent in schooling is profitably invested only as it yields dividends in dollars. Knowledge is a useless commodity except as it can be converted into cash. Now the idea must not be tolerated for a moment, that Christian Education holds itself aloof from industrial and commercial life. It pays reverent heed to man's material needs. Accepting joyfully the facts of our material resources in this country, it stands ready to play a leading part in their development. It aims to send each man to his special task in a freer spirit and with a finer skill. Thus it is bound to be richly productive everywhere, enhancing wealth and bringing comfort into every home. Undoubtedly, a good education is a valuable and permanent commercial asset.

Yet this result is secondary, not primary to our thought. A man may sit down to six-course dinners every day, and still his soul be shrunken and starved. A country may grow rich and populous while decaying at the core. What shall it profit the nation to gain the whole world, and lose its own soul? Not wealth and populousness make a country truly great, but the quality of its manhood and womanhood. What sort of man shall all this social, industrial and educational mechanism shape? The ultimate question is, not, how much shall

this child gather and spend, but, "what manner of child shall this be?"

We should remember also, that where life is not placed under the dominance of the moral intelligence, not responsive to God, education may become a perilous thing. Knowledge is power for evil as well as good. It makes men ingenious and masterful in evil. It takes intelligence to concoct the clever crimes of modern days. A man must have knowledge of drugs before he can compound the subtle poison. He must be an expert in figures before he can successfully falsify the accounts of a bank. It is not 'the man with the hoe,' the light of whose brain has been blown out, that society has most to fear, but the man with the pen, the man with the surgeon's knife, the man with the political pull, whose conscience is corrupted and who has no fear of God before his eyes. The operations which most menace us are not those of the thug, the sand-bagger, the safe-cracker, but those of a conscienceless, characterless intelligence. The safety of our land lies in putting intelligence under the guidance of conscience exercised in the fear of God. It is this we seek to do.

The first grip of the problem must be taken in the home. Life is often shamefully stunted and sterilized because no rational, persistent, organized effort is made to quicken the child in the home life. His questionings are discouraged, because we are too lazy or ignorant to answer him. His bright enthusiasms for the life that is about him in bird and bug, in worm and fish and flower, and tree, are sacrificed to a spotless frock and a clean pair of shoes. We fear dirt and noise more than we do death and the devil. And we pay the penalty in the mental and moral anemia of our children. For after the first spontaneity of nature has died down, there is a tendency toward sluggishness to be reckoned with. Human nature gravitates towards sensuality. Then ideas come indolently and a reluctance to thought numbs the soul. There are men to-day who would rather be hanged, drawn and quartered than do a bit of consecutive, vigorous thinking. Their mental machinery has grown so rusted that 'twould be torture to set it in motion again. It was stopped away back in childhood's days by a heavy parental hand. Like "grandfather's clock," "stopped short, never to go again."

We have also much to do with educational work in the church. In all her departments of activity the church is, or should be, an educational institution; in the Sunday-school with its mothering touch coalescent with the influence of the home, in the Young People's Society with its culture work, in the prayer-meeting with its stimulating thought and worship, in the preaching service where the will of God as revealed in holy writ is expounded and applied to life in all its varied interests and duties. The church like its Founder came that the people might have life and have it abundantly.

There is place also for Christian Education in the public schools of this country. If this is a Christian country, the public school should be held level with the general Christian consciousness of the people. This does not mean that the school shall teach religious dogma. It does not mean that you tack on a Bible-reading at one end of the session and the catechism at the other. But it does mean that teachers in this country should be men and women who respond to God as well as to the works of His hands. As one has well said, what we need is not so much the Bible in the school as the Bible in the school-teacher. More and more we shall have the life we desire in the school as we have it in the home and church.

Then, up from home and church and school we shall send an increasing multitude of our youth to receive the incalculable benefits of the Christian college. Then our brethren at Wolfville will do their work with a joy and effectiveness such as they have not yet known. Before eager and responsive minds and hearts they will bring forth the treasures of science, of philosophy, of literature, of history. In the full blaze of all the light that pours in from the Christian horizon they will lead our sons and daughters in the way of life. Mighty is the Spirit of Christ, they will be used to fill imagination, heart and will with all the fulness of God.

Fathers and brethren! We are fellow-workers. We may toil in different angles and on various sections of the walls, but we are working on one building, the splendid, immortal Temple of Truth. Here we meet to greet and cheer each other. May great heartening come to us all!

And Thou, O God, of whom we hold  
Our country and our freedom fair,  
With thy tender love enfold  
This land: for all thy people care,  
Uplift our hearts above our fortunes high,  
Let not the good we have make us forget:  
The better things that in thy heavens lie:  
Keep, still, amid the fever and the fret  
Of all this eager life, our thoughts on Thee,  
The hope, the strength, the God of all the free.