

The Wayside Philosopher

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THE PREMIER AND SECONDARY EDUCATION.

The Honourable John Oliver in his address at the formal opening of the Lord Byng High School—took the position, first, that there was too much book-learning as he called it, in the secondary schools and, secondly, that those who received University educations should bear the cost of them.

That the Premier is a man of ability is shown by the career he has had, politically and otherwise, in British Columbia.

One would naturally expect to rather find him conscious of his shortcomings and inclined to emphasize the value and necessity of what is sometimes called secondary education.

Usually we appreciate those things we have been denied. It is, however, probably the fact that, not having had an education himself, the Premier is only able to judge of education by its commercial or, what some would call it, its practical value,—and therefore he does not understand the real value of education and cannot rightly gauge its value and effects.

Even from the standpoint of practical or commercial value, probably he is unacquainted with the actual case for the University men. Perhaps it would surprise him greatly to find that, in all lines of endeavour in which they are interested, University men have an earning power altogether disproportionate to their numbers and far in excess of that of their less fortunate competitors.

Take the Premier's own line of labour,—farming, and he will not go far into the statistics of agricultural incomes in the Dominion of Canada, before he finds that the income of the University-trained farmer constitutes a considerable total, in percentage, of the total agricultural incomes, whereas their number is relatively a comparatively small one.

The writer is unacquainted with the facts regarding University men engaged in agriculture in British Columbia, but is quite confident that an investigation into the facts of the case would show that the afore-said educated farmers of British Columbia are earning at least double the income that their numbers would warrant, and that if there are 10 per cent. of the farmers of British Columbia University-trained and educated, they are earning 20 per cent. of the total return to farmers in the Province. At that they would only be maintaining the average of what University-trained farmers are doing throughout Canada.

Turning to other occupations we find the case still stronger in favour of the University-trained man. When the writer graduated from his Alma Mater years ago, the Westinghouse Electrical Company had the policy of looking for practical men. University graduates were at a decided discount, and found it hard to obtain a position with it. One has only to look at its policy today, and the percentage of University graduates in those lines that were formerly closed, or practically closed to them, to see that the University graduate has been able to take care of himself in the less theoretical lines of electrical industry.

If the Premier wishes a further illustration, let him turn to rail-roading which was for years so much the "stamping-ground" of the practical man that the idea of a University graduate being able to hold his own in such a field was thought too trifling to be worth attention. It is true that, in this department of work, the practical man still holds a large portion of the field

but step by step his regime has been "cribbed, cabined and confined," until today, even in railway work, there is no particular portion in which he can say with assurance "I hold this field for all time to come, no matter what your Universities may do or say."

Let us now look for a moment at what the Premier's policy would mean to the country in many instances. The attendance at our colleges and universities is largely made up of the sons and daughters from our poorer families. Here and there, we have those who are unfortunate enough to have their education provided for them without any financial struggle on their part, and one has only to look at University history in Canada to realize that as a rule it has been an untoward thing for those who might otherwise be called the favoured of fortune.

It follows, therefore, that the large majority of Canadian college boys and girls are either in College and University at a tremendous strain upon their families, or working their way through by their own labors, and the proportion of College students who are earning their own money to put themselves through, is four or five times as great as those who are able to attend college without any demand upon their earning powers.

Not only is this latter a large group comparatively among Canadian students, but it is an important one and comprises the majority of those who have a high conception of what education means, and are willing to sacrifice greatly to secure its benefits.

It would be an easy matter to select, off-hand, a number from this class whose services as University Presidents, business men, political leaders, farmers, merchants, authors, poets, etc., have been of incalculable value to Canada—and the writer knows personally of more than one beside whose services to their country, the services of the Honourable Premier himself would look decidedly scant and insufficient.

In his University days the writer remembers meeting with one student of an Eastern University who, by working at farm labour and by teaching school, had earned enough money to pay his first year's expenses at his University. At the conclusion of the year he was obliged to return to his work of school-teaching to secure the money to pay the further expense of University education. Some years after the writer had graduated and entered upon his life's work in the West, he saw in an Eastern University Chronicle the record of this student's graduation. To-day that student is the president of a leading University and occupies a secure position and reputation as a scholar. Yet, had it not been for the aids that endowment and other sources offered, that student would have been today a struggling school-teacher filled with a wonderful conception, wonderful ambition and totally unable to realize the one or achieve the other.

A university education is not a "sine qua non." Of that there can be no question, but no one can look at our Canadian history for a moment without seeing that secondary education, so-called, is a highly-paying investment for Canada and one only regrets that the Premier of our Province should prove himself incapable of appreciating its importance.

The University of British Columbia requires, and will require for some years, to get an appreciative and intelligent support from our Provincial Government. Such a support can not be given by a man whose ideas