

Sowing the Seeds

Written for The Western Home Monthly by W. A. McIntyre, LL.D.

[Instead of the Editorial this month we are pleased to publish an article written for this Magazine by Dr. W. A. McIntyre, who has just been elected President of the Manitoba Educational Association. The article shows how teachers are thinking, and places a responsibility on parents everywhere.

Once again 'tis seeding time. On every hill and valley darkened ridges show where heavy drills have passed, and tired men and horses by their labored gait give proof of ceaseless toil. The precious grain is planted firm and sure beneath the soil; the swelling kernels feel the life within them stirring, striving, struggling toward the light. The sun looks down and smiles, the rain comes with her gentle wooing. Soon the fields will wear their robes of green; then will come the shot-blade and the filling grain; next the heads of golden brown. Then the end—the noise of binder and the drone of thresher, and at last the exchange of gold for gold.

Think you that is all? Is farming but a soulless process of increasing one to fifty? Surely not. Into those furrows, with the golden globules, goes the farmer's heart with all its hopes and fears. What if the sun should cease to shine? What if the skies should deny the needed showers? What if the rust should blight, the hail destroy, the frosts cut down? Surely if the tilling of the soil requires labor of the hand, the casting into earth of precious grain requires labor of the heart. From spring to fall 'tis faith and hope, and then more faith and hope. What wonder if a man should love the fields in which he works! His very life is in the clods. Of the farmer, truly may it be said that "Where a man's treasure is, there shall his heart be also." He, of all men, must know what this means, "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth"; he, too, recalling life in other lands and in other days must be able to accept in faith the exhortation, "Cast thy bread upon the waters and it shall return to thee after many days."

But there is in a farmer's heart still something more than hope and faith. Throughout the long and glorious months of summer, when the grass is growing and the grain is ripening, he must have a joy that comes to few—the joy of possession and the richer joy of anticipated return. He who overcomes, even if it be only the smallest obstacle; he who produces, even if it be only the most insignificant article of value, must of necessity know something of joy. What then must be the joy of him who teases the old earth until it smiles, and who transforms a wilderness into a garden of delight?

Faith, hope and joy! To these let us add thanksgiving. When the last sheaf has been gathered in, when the last bushel of grain has been safely stored away, when the owner of the field has reckoned up the cost and the probable return, when he thinks of the purchases that are possible, the joys to wife and family, the necessities and luxuries forthcoming, surely his heart must go out in gratitude to Him who crowneth the year with His loving kindness.

Nor is the farmer the only one who can rejoice and be glad. Directly or indirectly the whole world is concerned with his successes and his failures. There is not a storm which does not bring anxiety to the dwellers in the town, there is not a frost that does not send them fearful to their beds, there is not a drought which does not influence their manner and their speech and which does not stop the course of trade. For the

whole world is bound together by the law of interdependence—with the farmer in the centre. He is the one link in the fabric of society to which all other links are joined. Should he fail, then all fail. Should he succeed, then all must prosper. Indeed, in a facetious way it has been remarked, "He tills the soil and every man tills him."

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And all this is but a parable. The soil is the heart of a little child. The seed consists of the truths and ideas which are given him and which in his little soul may ripen into aspirations and action. The sun is the atmosphere of kindness by which he should be surrounded; the frost is but the killing rebuke without cause; the blight is the curse of materialism and corruption which from time to time sweeps over the land. And so the figure might be extended.

There is no crop like that which grows around the mother's knee—none so precious, none so lovely. There 'tis always springtime. There the seeds are ever being planted. There, too, 'tis always summer, for the harvest is ever being gathered, aye, and will be gathered till the end of life.

Men and women! What of the sowing? In selecting seeds for your fields, how careful you are to obtain the best! How you sift out the weeds! How you study the wind and the clouds! How you study soil! and how careful you are to deposit the seed in right amount and to proper depth! What of the sowing? What of the companions, the books, the language of home and street? Above all, what of the moral and social ideals that are continually placed before the children? What of the weeds—the prejudices, the untruths, the bitternesses that sometimes in some lands are found? Once again, what of the sowing? You do not treat all soils alike. How can you expect all your children to make the same progress in the same way? Is there not as much individuality in childhood as in the soils on the farm? And as to the faith and hope and joy—are not these to be reckoned with? Don't you know the long restless nights, the anxious yearnings of joy of seeing young life shape into noble manhood and lovely womanhood? And have you not almost as great an interest in your neighbor's children as your own? For by children, as by prayers, "the whole round earth is knit by golden chains about the feet of God."

Let us make it plain. Here are the little ones entrusted to your care. At first you are in sole charge of them. You are their nurse, their governess, their everything. These first six years are the formative years. Everything beautiful in thought and speech and action; everything holy in sentiment and ideal; everything Godlike in example and precept should be placed before them. Loving companionship, kindly counsel, these are asked for, these should not be denied. If these little ones could speak they would say, "I am ignorant, make me wise; I am helpless, give me strength; I am lost, show me the way; I am crude, give me finish; my heart is yearning, give me love."

And I know well there are few parents who hearing the cry of the children, will not respond, but oh! when the cry of the world is so loud and so persistent that the cry of the children is not heard—what then? Tell me what then?

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There comes a time when the children can be sent to school. Are you not proud of the school to which they are going? You have tried to get the best teacher! You have sacrificed to get the best—yes, really sacrificed. Then you have made the building a home, equipped it with curtains and blinds and a library. Everything is as spotlessly clean as your own parlors—and why not? These are your children, your dearest possession, and there is nothing too good for them. Yes, and you rightly demand that they study at their school all that makes for sweetness and light. They will be able to take your place on the farm, of course; you will see to it that they know how to do all that a good wife or a kind husband should perform. You will see to that, but the school will assist you in your attempt to broaden their intelligence, to strengthen their wills, to cultivate their tastes, to form their habits and to ennoble their dispositions. Yes, I know you will work with your teacher. How can co-workers accomplish anything unless they come to an understanding and unless they are in friendly relation? As for others, their school may be a failure, but as for you and your school, am I not right in saying it shall be equal to you and to your children?

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But there is more than school. The greatest force in education acts through the social milieu. The character of the social political and religious life of each community is impressed upon children. Industrial and economic conditions affect every last soul in the country—sometimes one is inclined to say that the best way in which any man can help to educate his children is not by getting a better school for them, but by entering into the life of his community to cleanse, to purify, to ennoble, so that everything sordid and mean and unjust in politics, industry and religion will disappear.

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Down in Panama the people used to die in thousands because of the yellow fever. The mosquito carried the disease from man to man. Then began an attack on the mosquitoes. It was swatting here, and swatting there. At last one reformer arose and proposed that they attack the breeding places of the mosquitoes. This done, the swatting was not necessary, and the yellow fever as an epidemic was at an end. Even so, with all our schools and homes in operation, we but reach the evils to which children are prone, one by one. By perfecting social and moral conditions, these evils need not arise. Have we not reached the time when every man should throw himself into public life? Righteousness, honor and justice must prevail, or our future is even more hopeless than if we were the prey of German militarism. "Better not be at all, than not be noble."