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AN ADDRESS

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BY THE CHIEF SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS FOR UPPER CANADA.

THE subject of my present Address is *The Nature and Importance of the Education of Mechanics, with special reference to Upper Canada*. This is one branch of a general subject which I have already discussed in two Lectures now before the public. I have considered education in reference to the Agriculture of our country—its "*Importance to an Agricultural People*." * I have also considered it in relation to our civil Institutions—its "*Importance to a Free People*." † I now propose to consider it in connexion with the trades and manufactures of our country—its *Importance to Mechanics*.

If this subject cannot attract by its dazzling brilliancy, it is commended by its practical utility. If it does not survey the heavens, or explore the earth, or traverse the oceans, or contemplate the wonders of ancient or modern cities; it relates to that without which the heavens could not be surveyed, or the earth explored, or the seas navigated, or cities erected. If it travels not over the history of nations, it has to do with the vital principle of all civilized nations. If it does not investigate any of the institutions or laws by which communities are incorporated into Provinces, or States, or Kingdoms, or Empires; it comprehends the tissue with which every part of them is interwoven, and without which society could not exist.

And yet, strange to say, this subject, so fraught with interest and importance, has scarcely formed the topic of a single remark in any of the discussions which have taken place in regard to the material and social advancement of our country. We have had much written on a system of University Education for the professions, but nothing on a system of Education for Mechanics and Tradesmen. We have many endowed schools and seminaries for teaching the Greek and Roman classics, but not one to teach the Practical Arts. Far be it from me to undervalue the importance of ample provision for liberal or university education; but I hold it, to say the least, not less important to provide for practical or Industrial Education, adapted to the trades and manufactures of the country. I believe that scientific mechanics and manufacturers are as important to the interests and prosperity of the country as classical lawyers and literary scholars. I rejoice in the advantages which the latter enjoy; but I deprecate the neglect of the former. And it is with the view of contributing something towards remedying such neglect, and of presenting the true interests of the mechanical classes, that I have selected the subject of the present Lecture—*The Education of Mechanics,—its Nature, its Importance, and the Provision necessary for its Attainment*.

I. I am, in the first place, to explain the nature of the education which ought to be sought and provided for mechanics. Education is the acquisition of that knowledge and that cultivation and development of our faculties—mental, physical, and moral—which

will fit us for our destined duties of life. In childhood and youth we should learn the principles of what we are to practice in manhood and old age. Education, properly speaking, is, or rather should be, practical life in principle; practical life is education in action.

It will be observed, that by education, I do not mean merely that which is taught in the school, nor merely acquiring knowledge; I mean all that is taught and learned at home as well as at school, every where and on all occasions,—all the principles that are imbibed and all the habits that are formed, from lisping infancy to legal majority—the parental stamp of character, the normal apprenticeship for life, and probably for eternity. To ascertain, then, the education proper for a mechanic, it is only necessary to inquire what will be his future position and employment in life? This will be chiefly three-fold, and will therefore determine the proper character of his preparatory education.

1. He will be a member of society; and, as such, he should know how to read and write the language spoken and written by such society; he should understand the relations and duties involved, and be acquainted in some degree with the ordinary topics of social intercourse. This supposes instruction in the grammar or structure of his native tongue; for I presume no one thinks that the mechanic, any more than other professional men, should be a murderer of the QUEEN'S English all the days of his life. It supposes also instruction in the correct and intelligible writing of that language—the language which is the vehicle of all his thoughts, the instrument of all his intercourse with his fellow-men and with the histories of other nations and of past ages. The instrument of language is more used than any other, and ought, therefore, to be better understood. The exercise in learning how to use it properly, involves a branch of mental discipline highly important to intellectual development, and to a proper standard of intellectual taste and pursuits. I have known many persons rise to wealth and respectability by their industry, virtues and self-taught skill; but from their utter want of training in the proper mode of writing, or speaking, or reading their native tongue, they are unable to fill the situations to which their circumstances and talents and character entitle them, and in which they might confer great benefits upon society. Let no parent who hears me impose such an impassable gulf between his sons and those rewards and positions of power and usefulness to which intelligent industry, enterprise and virtue conduct.

And if the intended mechanic should be trained to a mastery of his own native tongue, he should, on still stronger grounds, be instructed in the nature and importance of his social relations and duties. If he should be taught to speak correctly, he should also be taught to act uprightly. He should be correct in his actions as well as in his words. He should surely be not less grounded in the principles of morals than in those of language. If he is expected to be an honest man, he should be grounded in the principles of honesty; if he is expected to be a Christian man, he should be nurtured in the doctrines and precepts of Christianity. The conduct of the man is the development of his youthful training. It is the Christian and social virtues that form the basis, the cement, and the very soul of individual and social happiness; and it is a rare thing indeed, and contrary to nature, that a man in a Christian country will exhibit these virtues, and enjoy the advantages and happiness which they confer, who has not been taught them in his

* See *Journal of Education*, Vol. I, pp. 257-268.

† *Ibid*, pp. 239-301.