



Life, Literature and Education.

Our Eastern Debate.

Mr. Herman Morse, Middleton, N. S., has suggested that the following subject be taken for our Eastern debate:

"Resolved that a general system of Macdonald Consolidated Schools, such as those instituted by Dr. J. W. Robertson, would be more advisable for rural districts than the present rural-school system."

This subject is both timely and valuable so far as the educational interests of our country are concerned. The Maritime Provinces are, without doubt, pushing the new system more energetically than any other part of Canada. In Ontario and other parts, while many advantages of the Consolidated School are recognized, there are doubts and objections, and even some hesitancy as to whether the work of the graded school such as the Consolidated School must of necessity be, is, after all, as effectual in producing the best final results as the old ungraded schools, in which the pupil must be, to a great extent, thrown upon his own resources. We hope that the coming debate will do much to render all these hazy points clear, and that every aspect of the subject, practicability, expense, etc., will be fully covered.

As mentioned before, only our Eastern Provinces and the Eastern States will be permitted to enter this debate, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and P.E.I. to enter the lists against Quebec and the Eastern States. All the rest of our readers, in Ontario, and elsewhere, will sit in judgment.

To N. S., N. B. and P. E. I., then, we will assign the affirmative in the contest, and we trust that Quebec and the Eastern States will give our seaboard Provinces a good fight of it. The only rules we shall specifically lay down are:

1. That essays do not contain more than 800 words.
2. That essays must be received at this office not later than May 19th.

As in our last debate, two essays on each side will be published, and prizes of books will be given, with, in addition, a Society Pin to the leader of the winning side.

Now, will you kindly take note of this announcement? We shall not again repeat it, or refer to it at all, until the essays have been received. We have no space for continuous repetitions, so kindly keep your "Farmer's Advocate" of to-day, that you may have it to refer to when writing.

"Massachusetts, Connecticut River, and Boston Bay, you think paltry places, and the ear loves names of foreign and classic topography. But here we are; that is a great fact, and, if we will tarry a little, we may come to learn that here is best. See to it only that thyself is here; and art and nature, hope and dread, friends, angels, and the Supreme Being, shall not be absent from the chamber where thou sittest."—Emerson, in "Heroism."



Ralph Waldo Emerson.

(Born, 1803; died, 1882.)

Ralph Waldo Emerson, who has been called the "most original and influential writer that America has yet produced," was born at Boston, Mass., on May 25, 1803, the son of a clergyman, who died in 1811, leaving a widow, with six little children, and but little means of support. Mrs. Emerson, however, seems to have been a woman of unusual courage and ambition. She had resolved upon educating her children, and of having some of the boys enter the ministry. Accordingly, she kept boarders to assist in obtaining the money necessary, sent her children regularly to school, and encouraged them, when at home, to read the best literature.

Although all of her family proved studious and clever, Ralph was the only one destined to become famous. At the age of eleven years he entered the Latin School, but, although he was always known as a thoughtful youth and a bookworm, he appears to have made no brilliant record at college. In mathematics, in fact, he was almost an utter failure.

After graduating, he taught school for a while—and detested it. He was still determined to be a minister, and as soon as he had earned enough, went to college again, with that end in view. In 1829 he was ordained, but, although he first call was to one of the most important Unitarian churches in Boston, his term in the ministry was short.

With a rebellion against formalism, more extreme, even, than that of the Puritans themselves, he concluded that the individual consciousness is all in all, and creeds and rites superficial and unnecessary. The rite of the Lord's Supper—the first rock among those that occasioned his separation from the ministry—he considered as never intended for perpetuation. Feeling thus, he could not conscientiously continue his pastorate in a church in which both rite and creed were necessities. Hence, in 1832, he resigned, and never afterwards accepted the regular pulpit of any church, although he continued to preach, from time to time, until 1847.

Shortly after his resignation his wife died, and, broken down in health, he took a trip to Europe, where he came first in touch with Landor and Coleridge, Wordsworth and Carlyle. Of the latter, brilliant, high-minded, iconoclastic, dyspeptic Carlyle, quarrelling with his wife at

Craigenputtoch, he writes, "Carlyle, so amiable that I love him." It was clearly an instance of the affinity of souls—two souls attuned to the chord of greatness. Emerson has said of friendship: "Friendship requires that rare mean betwixt likeness and unlikeness that piques each with the presence of power and of consent in the other party." In his life-long friendship with Carlyle was this demonstrated—that "mean between likeness and unlikeness"—the sturdy independence of the rugged, blunt, all but pessimistic Carlyle, echoing to the equally sturdy, if less chaotic, more cut and hewn independence of the sunshiny, optimistic, saintly Emerson.

In the works of the two men we see continually this likeness and unlikeness. "I should say sincerity," says Carlyle, "a deep, great, genuine sincerity, is the first characteristic of all men in any way heroic." "Greatness once and forever," says Emerson, "has done with opinion. . . . Deal so plainly with man and woman as to constrain the utmost sincerity."

Again, both preach the gospel of work. "He that can work is a born king of something," says Carlyle; and Emerson, "See only that thou work in every hour, paid or unpaid, and thou canst not escape the reward; whether thy work be fine or coarse, planting corn or writing epics, so only it be honest work, done to thine own approbation, it shall earn a reward to the senses as well as to the thought. No matter how often defeated, you are born to victory. The reward of a thing well done is to have done it." And so one might go on multiplying examples. Yet, with all his iconoclasm, Carlyle is more conservative than Emerson. Carlyle would let a few idols stand; Emerson says, "I unsettle all things."

After his return from Europe, Emerson began his career as a lecturer. His headquarters, however, he always made at Concord, near Boston, where he settled after his second marriage, there finding a life uneventful without, yet rich in growth within. Wonderful friends, too, he found in this quiet spot—for this was a period golden to American literature. Longfellow, Hawthorne and Lowell were members of the little coterie that met frequently at Boston for conversation and "dinners," and Emerson was not a least-valued member of the circle. In his garden, too, for a time, worked Thoreau, the most unique hired man, perhaps, that ever was. One is not surprised that Emerson was not long in finding the young philosopher out, and that he wrote of him to Carlyle as a wondrous young man whom he had discovered, and of whom, some day, much more would be known.

In 1836 Emerson's first book, "Nature," appeared. "Sartor Resartus," it will be remembered, was rejected by eleven publishers, and it is not strange that "Nature" found difficulty in finding appreciative readers. In twelve years, in fact, only 500 copies were sold. "Nature" was too deep, too mystic, to catch the common ear; but philosophers were talking about it. Later, in rather rapid succession, appeared "Essays," "Representative Men," "English Traits," "Conduct of Life,"

"Society and Solitude," "Natural History of Intellect," and others, all short books, written in the form of essays or discourses, and replete with thought. Gradually the force of the lessons that he strove to teach dawned upon his audience, and his audience grew. Emerson became known as the greatest philosopher of his country, and one of the greatest in the world.

And now, just a few words as to his work. It is scarcely to be expected that the youthful, immature reader will fully appreciate Emerson, or, even the reader, be he twenty or eighty, who has not thought deeply into the problem of life, or learned how far to accept when a great man uses exaggeration for force or poetic license. Emerson, though his success was not in poetry, was poetic, and he often uses a poet's liberty. For instance, he says that the "great" must consent to "hate father and mother, wife and child." This is not meant to be taken literally, and one must read carefully the context to know what he means. One must study Emerson to grasp his thought, and one must study life.

Yet, the young reader cannot afford to completely overlook him. It is an interesting experiment for such to read one of Emerson's works, carefully underlining the passages that impress him, and that especially appeal to his understanding; then, to put the book away for two, or three, or five years, until new experiences, new thought, have mellowed or illuminated his life. Let him now go over the book, underlining those things that have now become clear and forceful, and the experiment will be a revelation.

Nevertheless, for young or old, immature or mature, there are lessons in Emerson which need not be lost. He would teach men to stand on their own feet, to think independently, to be out-and-out men, accepting no conventions because they are conventions, cringing to no man, hewing a clean, independent and forceful way through the clutterings of this world. Carlyle would "patch the tailor." Emerson, too, would have a hand in the remodelling. A foolish consistency he rejects as the "hobgoblin of little minds." He would have men grow, even though they should trample every preconceived idea under their feet. This is the doctrine of self-reliance which crops out somewhere in every chapter of his work, in phrase or sentence, or paragraph.

We should like to compare the thought of Emerson with that of the ancient philosophers, but we cannot this time be prolix. So, that we leave to you. If you will, read "Epictetus," "Marcus Aurelius," "Plato," and see how closely and how often Emerson has approached them. After all, thinking men are not so different, be their time that of Nero or Edward. "In every work of genius," says Emerson, "we see our own rejected thoughts," and in Emerson's work, when we find it, we recognize the thought of the old stoics, not plagiarized nor elaborated, but rather the thought of all time, not "rejected," but thrown open to the Twentieth Century sun. Thus, indirectly, too, does Emerson teach another lesson.