

THE TEACHERS' CONVENTION

(By J. R. Sanderson, M. A. Ph.D., President High School Teachers' Association of the Lower Mainland)

Note—In last issue we published an article on the Teachers' Convention by a lady, Miss M. E. Colman. Because of the outstanding importance of the work of this profession and this magazine's interest in the Educational life of the community, we have satisfaction in publishing this second impression—like the first, written by request.—(Ed. B.C.M.)

"Obviously education is important. Everybody who has a child knows that the future of that child depends upon the way in which it is brought up. Is he to be competent for the business of life, or incompetent? a profitable member of the community, or a parasite? is he to be a burden, or self-supporting? cultured or ignorant, refined or brutal, social or anti-social, a citizen or an anarchist? and the answer to all these questions is to be found in education." So said the Rt. Hon. Fisher, Minister of Education in England, in his address on the educational estimates.

And at the Educational Convention held in Vancouver the latter part of April, under the auspices of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation, there was no lack of emphasis on the importance of this vital factor in the life of the community.

It was the Third Annual Convention of British Columbia teachers since the Teachers' Provincial Federation took over from the Government of the Province the holding of such a yearly gathering. The first convention held by the B. C. Teachers' Federation was at Victoria in 1920, and although the numbers were not large those who were present became enthusiastic enough to ensure a very promising future for the convention idea under its new management. The 1921 assembly was held in Vancouver, and to provide for as representative a gathering as possible arrangements were made for the pooling of expenses, and, as a result of this 500 teachers were in attendance. This year with about 700 in attendance, the convention was again held in Vancouver, but because of a legal technicality, the plan for the pooling of expenses had to be abandoned at a rather late date, and as an emergency measure the teachers were given the opportunity of contributing voluntarily. To this they responded in an exceedingly creditable manner with a total of \$3,480; creditable, because the bulk of this naturally came from the larger centres of population where the teachers stood to profit least by it.

The purpose of the convention was three-fold. Social, in the first place, for the work of the teachers means their distribution to every corner and crevice of the province, and a year's isolation is a long enough separation from the fellowship with others of a similar training which means so much in one's work. Secondly, inspirational, because brought into touch at the general meetings of the convention with the larger aspects of education as presented by educational experts. Here, too, the teacher meets the heads of the Education Department, and is able to get a grasp of the work of the Department as a whole, and in that way to relate his work to that of his fellows. And, in the third place, there are the sectional meetings, by attendance at which a teacher discusses with those engaged in the work of the same grade or of the same subject, the problems common to all, and it is in such meetings that he obtains the definite benefits of the convention.

As indicated at the beginning the teachers spared no pains in emphasizing the great importance of education, but the convention was not by any means a self-glorification meeting; in fact there was manifest throughout an attitude of very serious introspection, and in addresses one repeatedly heard the question, "What is wrong with education?" The

teachers themselves courted criticism—and got it, and they, in turn, offered some.

Here are some of the criticisms.

Many teachers are said to be poorly educated, and poorly trained. And yet, as was stated by the Minister of Education, British Columbia has the largest percentage (36%) of University-trained teachers of any province in Canada. Again it is said that the teachers do not pay enough attention to fundamental subjects, and do not work sufficiently for thoroughness and concentration. Further, that the pupil of the modern school is said to lack the ability or the desire for real hard work and intensive thinking. The suggestion was made here that perhaps too much is done for the pupils by the teachers in the larger centres, as we find that "in the ungraded schools of the country the pupils have formed habits of concentration and habits of work which enable them to overtake in a short time the pupils, that are very much better prepared than they." It is also claimed that the product of the schools is of too low a standard—due possibly to the demand of the public for the teaching of too many subjects—non-essential subjects—"frills." Teachers are criticized for not entering sufficiently into the life of their communities, and because of this are not understood by the public. One speaker, indeed, claimed that the chief thing wrong with our education was the apathy and general lack of knowledge on the part of the public regarding education—due to the fact that the teachers were not sufficiently enthusiastic about their own cause. He urged the teachers to get out and "sell" education. Many of the criticisms offered, however, were somewhat conflicting: for example, the criticism of those who complained of "frills" was offset by those who continually complain that the curriculum is not broad enough. Because of this it was suggested that the only possible way to reach any generally satisfactory conclusion was to engage the service of experts to conduct a survey into the educational system of the province. (It might be said here that this suggestion of a survey was but one of three such suggestions made during the convention week, one of the other two emanating from the high school section relative to the curriculum, and the other from the public school section for a general investigation into the work of the schools.)

Perhaps the most serious complaint made against the educational system was its cost. In answer to this criticism it was pointed out that British Columbia has very little grievance on this account, compared with the other three western provinces, the cost of education per pupil in British Columbia being \$10 less per year than in Saskatchewan, and \$6 less than in Alberta. It is higher than in Manitoba, but that is because the population in the latter province is more concentrated than in B. C. But why all this criticism in connection with the cost of education? it was asked. Largely because educational returns cannot be tabulated in rows of figures, but must be in terms of mental and moral values, as indicated so ably in the quotation which heads this article. If the effect were more closely and obviously connected with the cause there would probably be no criticism. It was suggested as well, in the matter of the cost, that education was made "the goat" for a great deal of the public dissatisfaction with the increase in taxation. A rather amusing incident was related of a real estate exchange which had been very active in its campaign for the reduction of educational expenditure while at the same time advertising some property which it had for sale and calling attention to the "excellent educational opportunities within two blocks for children