

The School House as a Community Centre

By JOHN BRADFORD, Community Secretary,
Montreal Y.M.C.A.

THE first National Conference to consider the use of school buildings as neighbourhood or community centres was held in New York City, April 19th to 22nd.

Educators, social workers, Government officials, playground experts, members of Boards of Education, volunteer and paid workers, representing many lines of service, gathered from centres as wide apart as Montreal, Que.; Chicago, Ill.; Louisville, Ky., and Boston, Mass.

It was found that the Movement for the use of school buildings by the people after school hours had been growing for the past seven years, and that in dozens of cities and towns hundreds of buildings are open from one to seven nights a week.

What, then, is a Community Centre? The definition given in a report of the New York Social Centre Committee is as follows: "A Community club house and acropolis in one." "A Community organized about some centre for its own political and social welfare and expression; to peer into its own mind and life; to discover its own social needs, and then to meet them, whether they concern the political field, the field of health, of recreation, of education or industry. Such a Community organization is necessary if democratic society is to endure. There must be an unifying social bond of feeling, tradition, experience, belief and knowledge, a common meeting ground, spiritually and concretely speaking."

But there must also be a Community expression through activity, self-government and self-support.

Such a centre for any progressive neighbourhood can the school building become.

The first extended use of school buildings was begun in Rochester, N.Y., in 1909, and since that time the growth of the Movement has been rapid and far-reaching.

The first use of a building for such purposes in Canada was the opening of the West Highlands School in Amherst, N.S., in the winter of 1911. Since then Montreal, Toronto, St. John, N.B., Brockville, Winnipeg, and other places have opened school buildings for public use.

Activities cover a wide range. Neighbours who are fond of music organize an orchestra. Winnipeg has six, the members of which are all foreign-speaking residents of that progressive city, boys and young men form a band, others a dramatic club or minstrel troupe; the mothers, a Mothers' Club; the older men, a study group or civic club; a group of older boys, a gymnasium class and boxing and wrestling clubs; the girls, a class in folk dancing, millinery or a Camp-fire Group. Any activity which comes in response to a neighbourhood group need, and these combined groups organized under the general supervision of the Board of Education and its representatives and finding a home in a school building constitute a Community Centre. The beginnings may be small, but the growth is often best from small beginnings, as the opportunity for experiment can be given a freer outlet, and any mistakes made are, as a rule, easily rectified.

And surely this has been a great discovery! "Which do you think is better for your neighbourhood at night—a dark, deserted school building, or a schoolhouse lighted and cheerful, with sounds of industry and merriment—

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Spectator

Comments on Matters of Interest from
Week to Week.

A very important debate has just been concluded in the Canadian House of Commons on what is known as the bi-lingual school question in Ontario. The subject is one that is bound to give the statesmen of our country a great deal of trouble unless it is handled with wisdom and justice. The people who are pressing this question are not the people to be put off with specious arguments or inconclusive decisions. Lincoln's wise epigram still holds: "Nothing is settled until it is settled right." Make-believe settlements are the source of irritation. Unjust settlements only cover the fires of discontent for a time, and sooner or later they will break out afresh with greater fury than ever. The settlement of a question such as the status of the language of an important element of our citizenship can be concluded by no rule-of-thumb method. The bluff refusal of a majority of the people to give it a hearing will not do. It will never do to proclaim that "might is right" in the midst of a struggle to overturn that rule and establish the might of right. The French-Canadians are a people deeply imbued with a sense of mission in the world. They in many respects resemble the Hebrews of Old Testament times. They have a very well-defined conviction, not formally expressed perhaps, but inwardly felt, that they are the chosen of God in this country, at least to interpret the will of God in Church and State. The Church in this Dominion is not merely the "Catholic" Church but the "Catholic Church" as set forth by French-Canadians. In this, of course, they run at cross purposes with their Irish Roman Catholic brethren. Protestant Canada may smile at these dreams of influence, but while it is engrossed in making money and dwelling upon material things, the supremacy may pass into the hands of those who have been dwelling upon spiritual things. No people with a vision of service and the consciousness of a divine mission can lightly be set aside. The destiny of the French-Canadian is one of the interesting and exciting problems of the coming years in this country.

The introduction of a resolution in the House of Commons asking the Parliament of Canada to use its good offices with the Province of Ontario to bring about a settlement of the question of language, was not based upon any legal right to do so, but an appeal to the hearts and consciences of the people of Canada to express themselves as favorable to the French-Canadian contention. They knew that the matter of education was in the hands of the provinces. They knew that a former government had been cast out of power by the people most urgent in having it introduce remedial legislation for the minority in a certain province. They knew that a parliament that would venture to advise a self-respecting province on how it should manage its own affairs would in all probability have little thanks for its pains. What, then, was the object of introducing such a resolution in such an uncongenial environment? It seems to the writer to indicate a singularly confident conviction in the essential rectitude of the position taken by our French-Canadian friends, and what they really wanted or hoped for was not the approval of parliament but the presentation of their case to a listening and attentive country. They wanted to argue their case before a jury constituted of the Canadian people,

and parliament was the place to catch the ear of that tribunal. This was the essence of the position taken. It was held that it would do the cause and the people of Canada good, to have it frankly and fully discussed in the hearing of all. The effect of such an appeal is usually helpful to a good cause. It at once conveys the impression that they who call for public discussion have no fear of the fullest light.

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The fundamental difficulty does not seem to us to be impossible of solution. The French-Canadian desires first of all that his children shall be taught in their mother tongues but has no objection to their being taught English. The legislature of Ontario desires above all that all children of Ontario should be taught the English language and has no objection to their children being taught French. Any one of judgment must know the value, the broadening influence of a knowledge of languages other than his own. There are scores of Ontario citizens who are sending their daughters to France or importing French governesses and tutors that their children may have the French language. There is really no objection to the existence of two languages in that province and therefore the problem is, after all, merely a regulation that will ensure the knowledge and use of the English tongue, after which children may have as many languages as they please. If Ontario would only see that real English is taught in her English schools it would be a more attractive tongue to our French-Canadian citizens. The point, however, that Spectator desires to make is this. The statesmen of Ontario will make the mistake that has too often led to failure if they do not seek to settle this question on the basis of fundamental rectitude. The plea that there is no mention of it in the constitution or that the cost involved is too great can only last for a time if the thing that is asked for is essentially sound. If it be not sound, then the people of Ontario and of Canada ought to be instructed in the elements of its unsoundness.

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THE TRUE NEED.

Thomas Curtis Clark.

I do not wish to see my sins more plain,
But this: to know Thy life, without a stain.

I would not see the vileness of my heart,
But this would know: how pure and true
Thou art.

I would forget my paltry life, so small,
And know Thy greatness, Thou, my All in All.

Oh, teach me not how deep my spirit's night,
But flood me with Thy beams, Thou Perfect
Light!

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The great secret of the tender heart lies in the fellowship of Jesus Christ. It is the continual wonder about Jesus, that He was so strong and yet so tender-hearted. No authority could make Him quail; no array of power could ever daunt Him; and yet a bruised reed He would never break, and smoking flax He would not quench. He was not tender because He knew so little. He was tender because He knew so much. All that was hidden from duller eyes He saw—all that men had to bear and battle through. Their helplessness, their crying in the night, their inarticulate appeal to heaven—all this was ever audible to Jesus, and kept His heart as tender as a child's.—G. H. Morrison.