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IMPRESSIONS OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MORAL EDUCATION

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TO the student of educational problems the National Conference on Moral Education in Relation to Citizenship, held in Winnipeg on October 20, 21 and 22, was a most impressive gathering. One could not but realize that it was no ordinary educational convention. Its whole atmosphere was different. It was something unique in the educational history of the land. For the first time, there seemed to be a national awakening to the fact that the education of children is not the business of the professional teacher alone but of all citizens. The fifteen hundred delegates assembled represented many creeds and races. They came from every province in the Dominion and from rural districts as well as from cities. Almost every walk in life was represented; and all, desirous of ascertaining how best to prepare the rising generation for worthy citizenship, seemed to be "of one mind" as well as "in one place."

A few words as to the inception and final carrying out of the idea of holding a national conference to emphasize the importance of moral education may be of interest. It was no impromptu gathering. For three whole years the educational soil from the Atlantic to the Pacific had been carefully tilled in anticipation of three days of sowing and a full harvest in due time.

It was in 1916 that the idea of holding this conference was conceived. The greater part of the civilized world was then engaged in a war that called for the exercise of the highest possible intelligence by all the belligerents. Never was the necessity for technical skill to provide the sinews of war and to make good the losses caused by war more apparent. Yet, notwithstanding these facts, the idea of laying greater stress on moral education as a matter of national concern was conceived, and the succeeding years of war witnessed an ever-widening, ever-deepening interest in the movement and an ever-growing expectancy as to its possible outcome.

Not less significant than the time in which the project for a National Conference on Moral Education was conceived is the fact that it was the idea, not of some visionary, or even of one whose special business is to safeguard the morals of the people, but of a practical business man. It is also very significant that the movement from its inception has received very general endorsement by and financial support from business men, and that, in the National Council of Fifty, appointed by the Conference to carry out its plans, the business world is well represented.

One may reasonably hope for a very decided forward movement in educational work in Canada if its business men seriously assume their fair share of responsibility in educational matters as the Conference has indicated that many of them are prepared to do. The work of education is in no way different from other great national undertakings in that its success or failure depends largely on the amount of capital put into it. With educationalists struggling single-handed to improve educational conditions, the task has always been difficult—and in many instances discouraging. They have had their conventions; they have pointed out wherein improvements were desirable or even absolutely essential; but too often no changes have been effected. Changes invariably mean additional expenditure, and these are largely beyond the control of the teaching profession. With the business world linked up with the educational in determined effort to give the children of this land the best possible in education, our fondest dreams should be realized.

The National Conference in Winnipeg, while differing in

many ways from ordinary educational conventions, resembled them all in the number of resolutions passed calling on educational and other bodies, ranging from school boards to the Federal Government, to take certain steps to improve educational conditions. There is this essential difference, however, so far as the work planned is concerned: the resolutions passed have the endorsement not only of representative educationists from every province of Canada but also of representatives of many of the most influential organizations of the land. If these organizations will endorse these resolutions as unanimously and as enthusiastically as their representatives have done, the fact that it will cost considerable to effect the suggested changes will prove no serious obstacle.

The programme for the Conference was carefully prepared. Provision was made for nine sessions, with speakers and leaders in discussions numbering thirty, besides the nine presiding officers—a different one for each session. Various topics were discussed, but most attention was given to the central theme, Moral Education in Relation to Citizenship.

It is impossible in this short article to attempt any summary of the various addresses. Only outstanding impressions can be touched upon.

In the opening address on The Spiritual Gains of the War, Dr. C. W. Gordon (Ralph Connor), as if anticipating the obstacles that might be met with in carrying out any programme on moral education along national lines, made a strong plea for national unity. Many things had been clearly demonstrated, he said, by the war. Of these he regarded as chief, the reaffirmation of conscience as supreme in human conduct, the greatness of the individual, the common man, and the supreme worth of comradeship in the making of a nation. In speaking of the comradeship of war, he pointed out how it bound man to man in spite of differences of race and supposed differences of creeds. He deprecated the idea that true religion, the business of every man, should act as a wedge to separate one from his fellows instead of as a bond to make all one. To quote his words, "Wherein your religion separates you from your neighbor it is wrong; wherein it binds you to him it is right. If Canada is to emerge into something higher—reach the plane of peace and security with progress and plenty, she must catch this spirit of comradeship. If this Conference could evolve a nation-wide propaganda on this get-together spirit—which would be preached in every province to every individual, the solution of the unrest situation would be largely found. If that mysterious oneness which linked the boys in France together could be instilled into young Canada, our next generation would look upon a Canada greater than anything which we can now visualize."

Several of the speakers emphasized the close, if not absolute, connection between moral and religious teaching, but in no instance was the introduction into our schools of the Bible, that great library on faith and morals, definitely advocated. This, one may venture to suppose, was not so much because of a lack of appreciation of its value as a suitable text book for moral instruction, as of a realization that the brotherhood or comradeship of the battlefield is with us as yet only an ideal to be striven for in our civilian life.

If one were asked directly—What was accomplished at the National Conference on Moral Education to insure more satisfactory ethical instruction in our schools? he might have some difficulty in giving a satisfactory answer, if indeed he could answer at all. The need of inculcating high moral ideals was repeatedly emphasized; but the wisdom of making morals a