

TEACHERS AMONG THEMSELVES.

(Paper read by Mr. F. Hicks before the Teachers' Association.)

The subjects which have principally occupied the attention of this Association during the present session have been almost, if not entirely, connected with the direct work of the teacher as an instructor. Such peculiar attention must necessarily be the case in all associations of men—whatever their occupation. Even when men in some particular line of life band themselves together for any purpose, whether of amusement or otherwise, one may safely estimate that at least one-half of their intercourse and conversation will have reference to their daily work in life.

This being the case, it would be no matter of wonder if our Association confined itself exclusively to the consideration of modes of teaching and other matters bearing directly upon the school-room.

It will be my endeavour, this evening, first to shew that these relations are not few nor unimportant—that their cultivation or neglect has, in many ways, a powerful effect on us teachers, and, indirectly, through us, on our schools. Nor this alone, but, also, that the direct influence of such action on our schools cannot be lightly reckoned.

The most careless reader of the history of our present civilization cannot fail to have remarked the tendency of men engaged in some common pursuit to unite themselves into associations. These associations have, naturally, for their object, the preservation of the interests and the furtherance of the projects of the members, individually and as a class. The immense influence that these associations have exerted on the governments of the countries in which they exist, and the share they have contributed to the bringing about of our present condition of enlightenment and civilization, appear from the mere mention of the names of a few of these combinations and their results.

The Association which was formed expressly to gain and did gain the Englishman's charter of liberty.

The immense associations of the various churches now existing. (Of course I do not mean to ascribe the power of these all to the combination—but the associations are, at any rate, the means.)

The association of merchants which founded the vast Eastern Empire of Great Britain.

The Association, which, secret from necessity, has been so influential in liberating Italy within the last few years, and the result of whose endeavours will long continue to exert a beneficial influence at least on Southern Europe. To come closer to ourselves—the English Educational League and the various teachers' associations in England. No country in the world is, probably, just now making greater progress in primary education than England, and any one who has read the recent educational periodicals of that country cannot fail to perceive the influence exerted by the teachers' associations—from the College of Preceptors downwards.

Examples of this nature might be multiplied, but I will conclude with the statement that this is an age of associations—ours is a civilization of associations.

This, then, being the case; and we, having formed ourselves into an association, the question naturally arises—“Have we secured such results to the community and to ourselves as might be expected? and are we securing such results as may be expected from an association of men like us, who from our education should know our power and how to use it? Do our schools feel a fresh impulse after the second Friday in each month? Are we rising, as a body and individually?”

The first of these latter questions may, I think, be safely answered in the affirmative. And this I reckon a proudly distinctive feature of our association. We are not bound together like commercial guilds merely to advance our personal interests, but we almost ignore them to consult on the best methods of perfecting ourselves for the work we have in hand, and to consider how best to perform that work. On the other hand I think it is a fair subject of consideration, whether, in thus ignoring our other relations, we are acting for the best for our schools, for the community and for ourselves.

But it may be asked—What are these relations? The answer is simple. They are the same as those between men who compose any other association.

1. The relation between men and women who are engaged in the same pursuit for the same ends.

2. The relation between men and women who, to a great extent, take from the shoulders of the people upon their own one of the most important duties of the people.

3. The relation between men and women who are acting together, and with the Government of the country in what is now recognized as the most vitally important labour of the community.

The consideration of these three relations will, I fancy, occupy as much of your valuable time as you will be willing to concede me this evening. We will proceed at once, then, to the consideration of the first relation.

“That between us as men and women who are engaged in the same pursuit for the same ends.”

That this is a relation of considerable moment to us, and that important results may be expected from a healthy condition of it, may be argued from the fact before alluded to—the benefits which have occurred to the community from associations formed to cultivate this relation alone.

The enumeration of all the means by which this relation is or is not now drawn close, and the enumeration of some of those by which it might be strengthened, and the probable effects of all such means would alone be beyond the limits of this paper—and we have yet other subjects to discuss. But a few of these means may not inappropriately be considered here. The first and most obvious of these means is the cultivation among teachers of mutual respect. Far be it from me to assert here that we have not this respect for one another to a certain extent. But I candidly ask you—Are you satisfied with the position in the community occupied by teachers? Do you think the class and the individuals are as highly rated in the scale of our general civilized society as they should be?

Compare our education and training; compare the necessity to the community and the influence upon it of our labours with those of the priest and of the lawyer; compare these! and then account for the fact that the two latter not only manage their own affairs, but ours also.

This condition of things certainly exists, and may not some of it be traced to a laxness of this first bond among us?

I will not mince the matter further, but will state the case

in the words of a teacher writing to the last number I have received, Dec. '71, of the most widely circulated English Educational Periodical.

He says:—“Our enemies tell us that the characteristics of our profession are jealousy of one another and the selfish view we take of our own personal interests.”

This, be it remembered, is the view of our enemies. But *licet et ab inimicis doceri*—let us learn a lesson even from them. They, doubtless, are just as jealous of each other as we are, and it would be a pity if we did not hold as tightly as possible to the few personal interests they allow us.

There must be, among us human beings, whether priests, lawyers, or teachers, the constant working of those feelings of which we are, as it were, bundles. But it is a well-known fact that rarely or never has a clergyman been heard to speak or hint, in the most remote manner, anything to the detriment of another clergyman.

Indeed this has become a characteristic of the profession so marked as to distinguish them from all other classes of men in this one respect. As a teacher it would be invidious for me to charge our body with indifference to this law of self-preservation; but, when we compare the fact just adduced with the charge of our enemies there certainly seems to be room for drawing our first bond a little closer.

I do not myself believe that we are more jealous of one another than are men and women in other professions. Nay, I believe that we are less so than some. But by our human mental and moral constitution there must always be among us a possibility of increased mutual respect and diminished jealousy.

The consideration of this first bond (first in order merely) is a delicate subject and one not easy to be handled by a teacher; but I rejoice in the opportunity it has afforded me of uttering my poor denial of the aspersions of our enemies.

I will now draw your attention to the second of the relations proposed to be considered.

“The relation existing between men and women who, to a great extent, take from the shoulders of the community upon their own one of the most important duties of the community.”

That these duties may be performed to the satisfaction of both parties concerned—that the teacher may work with confidence and a quiet mind, and that the parent's mind may not be disturbed by doubts as to the improvement and development of that which he holds most dear of all—that this may be the case, it is absolutely necessary for the teacher to command the respect and perfect confidence of the people.

One of the means of securing this respect and confidence has already been alluded to.

The consequence of a good, healthy condition of this relation between the teachers among themselves and the people, I cannot better illustrate than by the following testimony of Mr. Shuttleworth, as to the education, social position and professional standing of primary school teachers in Prussia. He says:

“During my travels in different provinces of Prussia I was in daily communication with the teachers. I had every opportunity of observing the spirit which animated the whole body, and of hearing the opinions of the poor respecting them. I found a great body of educated, courteous, refined, moral, and learned professors, labouring with real enthusiasm among the poorest classes of their countrymen. I found them wholly devoted to their duties, proud of their profession, united together by a strong feeling of brotherhood, and holding continual conferences together for the purpose of debating all kinds of questions relating to the management of their schools. The teachers in Prussia are men respected by the whole community, men to whom all classes owe the first rudiments of their education, and men in whose welfare, good character and high respectability both the Government and the people feel themselves deeply interested. I cannot but feel how grand an institution this great body of more than 28,000 teachers was, and how much it was capable of effecting.”

He goes on to say that—

“As the character of every nation depends mainly upon the training of the children,—how essential it is then, to the moral welfare and therefore to the political greatness of a nation that the profession of the teachers should be one insuring the perfect satisfaction of its members, and commanding the respect of the country?”

A foot-note adds—

“Since these remarks were written the course of public events in Prussia has given a very remarkable proof of their correctness. To the National Assembly, which met in Berlin, in May, 1848, the people of the provinces elected no fewer than eight teachers as representatives, giving this striking proof of their respect for the ability and high character of the profession.”

Mr. Kay Shuttleworth goes on to say that the Prussian Government found it necessary to protect teachers in their relations with the general public. A law was passed that no teacher who had been once elected, whether by a parochial committee, or by trustees, or by private patrons, should be dismissed except by permission of the country magistrates. This protected the teacher from the effects of the mere personal prejudice of those in immediate connection with them.

Now, we teachers in Canada are almost defenceless in this respect,—and a glance at the position here will shew what must be the effect of this condition on us individually and as a class. There are throughout this Province very able teachers who are engaged in carrying on some of the most important schools in the country,—and what are the terms of their engagement.

Remember for a moment the conditions I have just read, and compare with the conditions I am about to state.

The teachers to whom I refer are employed not only in the large cities in Canada, but also in villages and rural districts, for academies, &c. They are engaged by boards of trustees, not one in a hundred of whom had the slightest experience in teaching, or is skilled ever so little in the science of pedagogy—and what are the terms of engagement. They are engaged only for one year; at the end of each year their engagement terminates and must be renewed.

I challenge anybody to instance from any department of skilled labour among our community as humiliating—as servile a condition as this! I regard the shop girl or telegraph operator—the brakeman or switchman on a railroad, all of whom hold their situations (like our judges) during good conduct—I regard them as far above these teachers in the terms of engagement they exact and in the confidence in their ability thus expressed by those who employ them.

But it may be argued that the precaution is a necessary one—the interests at issue are so great, &c., &c.

This is all very true, but our interests are at stake too, and besides this we are not the only members of the community who are entrusted with great interests—ministers of religion—judges—bank-clerks—government officers and many others have committed to their care vast interests, and they are not so open to inspection as the teacher, nor would frequent changes in their cases be more harmful. Yet none of them are compelled to take service on such degrading terms. It would be fair enough to engage a teacher for a certain period, (say 6 or 12 months) on trial and then decide. And I maintain that a teacher here, who shews to the satisfaction of a school-board by such trial, that he is in every way qualified for his post, ought to be engaged on some terms agreed on, not so humiliating as those referred to. Such terms as these in themselves argue nothing but a lack of confidence between the people and the teacher, and the longer they exist the lower will the teacher fall in the scale of society, and the more will society suffer in its turn from the fall.

Now we are not under such a Government as that of Prussia,—we are under as free a Government as any man can wish for,—many lines of life are open to us,—we ought not to wish for or need Government interference to secure us equal rights with our countrymen.

We, above all others, are responsible for this condition of affairs, and we alone can bring about a change.

That this condition may not be lightly regarded, and to strengthen what I have just said, I will read the reasons of the Prussian Government for giving as much liberty as possible to teachers, and for fettering their hands as little as possible.

1st. Because the teachers of Prussia are a very learned body and, from their long study of Pedagogy, have acquired greater ability than any persons in the art of teaching. They are, therefore, better qualified than any other persons to conduct the instruction of their children; but if those persons who have never studied pedagogy could interfere with them and say—“You shall teach in this way or in that—or else leave the parish”—the teachers would often be obliged to pursue some ridiculous, inefficient method, merely to please the whim of persons not experienced in school management, and the enlightenment of the people would thus be considerably retarded.

2nd. Because if the ministers, or parishioners or school trustees had a right to turn away a teacher, whenever he chanced to displease them, the teachers would always be liable to, and would often suffer from, foolish personal dislikes, founded on no good ground. They would thus lose their independence of character by being forced to suit their conduct to the whims of those around them, instead of being able to act faithfully and conscientiously to all, or by being exposed to the insults or impertinence of ignorant persons, who did not understand or appreciate the value or importance of their labour, or by being prevented from acting faithfully to the children from fear of offending the parents; and they would thus, generally by one or other of these ways, forfeit at least some part of the respect of the parents of their children, and would, consequently, find their lessons and advice robbed of one half their weight, and their labours of a great part of their efficiency.

These are very weighty reasons for the existence, in Prussia, of something which does not exist for many of us here now nor for many other very able teachers in this Province. And if any teacher present can shew how we are to get this thing except by our own determinate endeavours, he will undoubtedly confer a great boon on those who are now or who may in future (as any of us may) be in the humiliating position I have described.

No; I am convinced that nothing but increased mutual respect, increased determination to uphold one another, increased confidence in ourselves and in our worthiness to be regarded at least as confidential servants—nothing but these can ever raise us to such a position among our fellow-citizens of this free country as is guaranteed to Prussian teachers by a powerful government which stands and grows (so the whole world says) on the foundation built by the teacher.

The condition of the Prussian teacher naturally leads us on to the consideration of the third and last relation I have proposed to discuss this evening.

“The relation existing between men and women who are acting together and with the Government of the country in what is now recognized as the most vitally important labour of the community.”

This relation is one much easier to deal with than either of those we have been discussing. The first one, from its very nature, was delicate to handle and could not well be probed very deeply as to its existing condition.

The second relation was a special one, in which the teacher occupied a position in the community almost entirely peculiar to his own class, in some respects.

But the relation we are now to consider he occupies under exactly the same circumstances as exist for all other members of the body of the people.

To realise this fact let us consider, for a moment, the action and relation to government of other associations which now exist in all civilized communities. Such associations as synods, boards of trade, the bar, agricultural associations and others.

These associations are similar to our teachers' associations; they are formed independent of government by merchants, lawyers, agriculturists, and are supported alone by them. If they ceased to be attended they would die, and so would our associations.

The only difference between these corporations and our own is constituted by certain privileges which have been gained from the government, and there is no reason why our corporations should not also, in time, obtain such privileges as may be deemed necessary. Corresponding to each of these associations there is, in the Executive Government, a Cabinet officer. The bar finds in the Executive its Minister of Justice, the Agricultural Society its Minister of Agriculture, the Boards of Trade their Ministers of Finance and Public Works, the Teachers' Association its Minister of Education.

Let us now look into the connection between these boards and these ministers. Are their relations close? They are so close that were these boards, especially those of trade, to cease to exist, it would be impossible to carry on the work of the government of the country as it is now carried on.

To illustrate this I may refer to the late meeting of the Board of Trade at Ottawa. There were discussed there many projects, most of which were such as could only be carried