

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN QUEBEC.*

NO body of people who come together for purely selfish ends can ever rise above the mud of grovelling egoism from which such ideas are sure to germinate, and if we, individually and collectively, are here in Montreal this week, and in this hall to-night, merely to further our own interests without any thought of the public weal, the sooner this Association dissolves into its original atoms and goes down into blank oblivion, unhonored and unsung, the better will it be for the cause of public education. If, on the other hand, we, as a body, are inspired with the divine spirit of progress, forgetful of vile self, equal to our opportunities, willing to do our whole duty without fear or favor; then may our Association become a mighty influence for good; then may it indeed be a true leaven of improvement, permeating the mass of apathy which has so long rested, incubus-like, on the breast of educational public opinion in this Province. Shall we yield to atrophy; or, standing on the broad basis of humanity and human thought, shall we catch the dawning gleams of awakening sentiment in that hulking giant, public opinion, who now lies supine, but yawning and stretching so that those who are awake to the influences which are at work around us can hear his mighty muscles crack; and, extending the guiding hand, shall we place his feet straight on the road which will ever lead him onward and upward to higher and better things?

Education in every land, to be true, must be based on true princi-

ples. It, in all its parts, must belong to the people, and they must feel that it so belongs. It must be of such a kind as to suit the circumstances, the environment, the genius of the people. Its warp and woof must be spun from their finest heart fibres; it must be, in short, an embodiment of the mental activities of the people themselves.

Is this true of the educational system of this Province; is it at one with itself? As we follow it from the elementary school, through the secondary school, the college, and the university, to that body which is supposed to rule and guide its destinies, are we impressed with the conviction that they are integral parts of the same unit? Do we feel one part respond with heart throb to the heart throb of another? Are we convinced that it fulfils the demands of a true education for a whole people? As we watch that little one yonder with bright eyes and curls, following the dusty road, slate in hand, to the little red school house at the cross-roads, as we think of the educational idea represented by that picture, let us place our finger on the pulse of the body to whose care that idea has been committed, and ask ourselves if that idea is represented there? Can we feel the responsive throb, or can we see, as it were, where the axe of the executioner, opportunism, with cruel stroke, has severed the life-giving artery? I leave the thought with you; it must be faced; it will not down till a satisfactory solution of the difficulty is found. No amount of sophistry will remove the obstruction.

A mighty monarch once called before him the noblest, the wisest, the best of his courtiers, and pointing

* The President's address delivered at the Montreal Convention of teachers by H. J. Hewton, M.A., Inspector of Schools.