

Special Articles

THE TEACHER'S COMMISSION

(This address is republished by request. It was delivered just twenty years ago before the Winnipeg Teachers' Association. It is given without any alterations and readers are asked to overlook crudeness of expression.)

"How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnished, not to shine in use,
As tho' to breathe were life. Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one, to me
Little remains; but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence; something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns, to store and hoard my-
self,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought."

For those who feel within their hearts an echo to these words, I have a thought today; to those content to sit in slothful ease, I cannot speak. The living soul is he who strives and hopes and yearns for greater things; but he is dead who is the slave to thoughtless custom and routine. My message is for those who live. A sermon you may call it if you will; to me it will be but a meditation.

I have this day received a commission, that which none could be more delicate, none more important, none more sacred. I have been entrusted with the duty of moulding the lives and shaping the destinies of forty of God's little ones. Surely this is a wonderful trust; surely in accepting it, I may feel that I have been honored above my worth, exalted beyond my station. Honored? Yes, but more than honored. I am possessed of a holy fear. Exalted? Yes, but more than exalted. I am humbled when I consider mine own insufficiency. What if I should misdirect these lives? What if I should establish in these young minds wrong ideals? What if I should fail to develop those habits and tastes, and those powers of being that are necessary to noble existence? What if I destroy rather than edify? What if I crush out rather than foster those feelings and aspirations that should be the property of every living soul?

Yet, with all my imperfections and with all my fears, I have taken upon me

the burden of ministering to the needs of these little ones—little ones who have also their imperfections and their fears, and as I lend myself to my labor, I can hear the words of that brave man hero, the Sage of Chelsea; who though he sometimes spake harshly, yet always spake with sincerity and with power of conviction: "Blessed is he who has found his work, let him ask no other blessedness. He has a work, a life purpose; he has found it and will follow it. How, as a free-flowing channel, dug and torn by noble force through the sour mud-swamp of one's existence, like an ever-deepening river there, it runs and flows, draining off the sour, festering water, gradually, from the root of the remotest grass blade; making instead of pestilential swamp, a green, fruitful meadow with its clear-flowing stream."

A work then, I have, a noble work, but yet a perilous. From no School Board have I received my call; from no Department have I received my authority. I have heard a voice—it is the voice of my country and my God. I have perceived a need—it is the need of anxious parents, and the need of their helpless children. Oh! for power and wisdom to do my duty now; Oh! for clearness of vision and for willing heart; Oh! for tenderness and patience and deep humility.

Would you hear my country's call? "I bring you here those who are my hope. I bring you the children of the wealthy and the children of the poor. I bring you those who differ in race and in language, in customs and in tendencies. I bring you the physically strong and the physically weak, the mentally sound and those to whom nature has not given a full measure of strength. I bring you my boys and my girls, who are to be the fathers and the mothers in this great land. Will you