

WHERE EDUCATION FAILS

BY THE EDITOR

LAST Sunday I attended a church in a country town—for I had joined the migration from the big city and had gone "home" for Thanksgiving. The hymns and the general service was much the same as when I was a Sunday School scholar in that same congregation more than a quarter of a century ago. There were the same fathers and mothers—not all, of course, for there were some vacant seats. Those whom I remembered did not seem to have changed much, for what matters a few more wrinkles and a shade greyer hair? But what struck me most forcibly was the limited number of people between twenty and forty years of age. Eliminate the visitors, and the rest were under twenty or over forty.

And I was led to wonder why these people were content to let their young folk go away to the big cities to work and marry, and to add to the city's population. Here were a number of people, owning property which was growing slowly but surely less valuable, because the population of the town was dwindling. And not only was their property getting less valuable, but the social life of the town was becoming less attractive, and things generally were showing retrograde rather than advancing progress. Yet these people seemed to have no pangs of regret, no ambition to stay the exodus, no visible desire to build up the community as thousands of newer communities in the West are being built up. In other words, the community itself seemed like an aged man sitting in an easy chair by the kitchen stove calmly awaiting that inevitable dissolution which comes to all men sooner or later.

THE pathos of it all appealed to me in a new way. The problem of the Ontario town and village was presented in a new light. What the cause? What the remedy? Who the doctor?

The cause is complex no doubt. Wrong education forms a large element. The High School is perhaps the greatest cause. It is educating the young people out of the towns, teaching them that the professions are accessible, and offer great rewards. The High School teacher is not a native of the place, has little sympathy with its progress or possible future, and is bent only on producing scholars who will shine in the big business college, the Model and the Normal schools, the colleges and universities. The High School teacher's progress does not correspond with the progress of the town; it depends rather on the success of his pupils at the greater centres of college education. His aim, therefore, is to drive the young men and the young women out of town.

These thoughts led me to wonder if the High School should be abolished, or simply reformed. Abolition is impossible perhaps, but reform should be easy. The trustee board might begin by saying to the teachers: "Now, gentlemen, we desire you to inculcate into every pupil in your school that it is his business to so educate himself that he will help the town and the county to become bigger and greater. Your courses of study must be such that our young men and women are fitted to take part in the activities of this town, and not in the activities of the big city. You will be held responsible for the young people you drive out of town." The teachers would probably think the trustees were crazy, but it would lead to a valuable discussion.

Dr. Robertson, in his address to the Y.M.C.A. convention in Toronto last week, said that education should include three departments—domestic science for the women, who managed the homes; nature study for the farmers, miners, fishermen, foresters, and men in towns; and manual training for men in industrial life. This in brief is my idea. Why should any country support three High Schools which exist for the purpose of taking the county's best young folk and sending them away to help build up other communities? Still it is true that the High Schools of Ontario, except in a few of the wiser cities, are simply depleting the rural communities of their finest human products.

OTHER reforms might also be made. Changing the spirit of High School education is not the only remedy. The spirit of the people must be changed. They must believe in their town and county and possess a determination to build it up. The man who buys a dozen farms, dispossesses them of people and populates them with sheep or cattle only is a man who must be fought. The man who refuses to lend his capital to enterprise and will invest only in first mortgages is another person who should be taught a lesson. The retired farmer who goes to live in a small town and votes down every suggested improvement and development must be educated to better sense.

The growth of the small towns in Ontario depends upon the growth of the population in the rural district surrounding it and upon the growth of local industries. The men in the towns can do much to farmers and encouraging them to adopt such methods as will employ more people and market more products. The great factors here are good local markets for all sorts of farm products and first-class facilities for shipping.

The growth of local industries depends on local patriotism, shipping facilities, supply of labour, and a first-class board of trade. When local patriotism dies, the town begins to fade away. When the board of trade ceases to find work to do, the town is doomed. Ten righteous men would have saved Sodom; ten determined, broad-minded, patriotic men can save any one of the moribund towns and villages of Ontario.

NOT many years ago I was speaking to an audience in the famous fruit valley of Nova Scotia, the Land of Evangeline, and I pointed out as best I could that to my mind Nova Scotia was backward only because her young men were not encouraged to stay at home. They were educated to believe that success could be won only by going to Boston or some other New England city. A lady came to me after the meeting and thanked me for my criticism, saying that it came home to her, because she had six brothers in the United States.

Yet to-day rural Ontario is getting into much the same condition as rural Nova Scotia. The farming population is not growing as it should, and many of the rural schools have only half the pupils they once had. The young men have gone to Toronto, or Buffalo or Detroit, or to the great Canadian West. Is rural Ontario content to be the breeding-place, and the schoolhouse for a few large cities or for the newer provinces? Is rural Ontario willing to pass through the distressing stages which have marked the recent history of the agricultural sections of the New England States and of New York State? Surely not. Yet this is likely to occur unless the government of Ontario and the business men of the smaller towns waken up and take measures to prevent it. It is time to cry "Wake Up, Ontario."

ENCOURAGEMENT

Mr. Rowland Brittain, of Vancouver, writes: "I take this opportunity of expressing my satisfaction with the Canadian Courier, the Editor of which seems to provide in a healthy manner for all phases of Canadian life. I wish him continued success in his efforts."

Mr. Jas. P. Hill, of Welland, says: "I do not think you are overdoing the Canadian side of the question. Your strong Canadianism is certainly one of your drawing cards."

FEW will deny that there is more money to be made in agriculture in Ontario to-day than at any other stage in the history of the province. There are also fewer privations and more pleasures. The Agricultural College has helped, and there has been a general advance in all farming methods. All that Ontario requires now is that the young men shall be taught to stay on the farm. Abolishing the present High School and establishing agricultural High Schools would accomplish much. A few years ago there was a burst of enthusiasm about teaching agriculture in the rural schools, and at least two text books were authorised. To-day in the village book stores odd copies of these text books are to be found upon the bargain tables, a mute tribute to a short-lived provincial ambition. It is hard to say who should be hanged for this crime, the writers of the text books, the Minister of Education, or the public school inspectors. There is a culprit somewhere. If the Ontario Agricultural College is the stumbling-block, abolish it and use the money to establish the teaching of agriculture in rural schools. Transfer the experiment plots to the centre of every township, and bring this sort of education to the farmer instead of asking him to go to Guelph for it. At any rate, let us do something to save the situation.

BUILD up the agricultural communities, keeping the farming population of every township growing and the first step will be taken toward building up the declining towns and villages. The next step will be to make the towns and villages help themselves in other ways. Perhaps it might be wise to have a Provincial Board of Trade, presided over by a Cabinet minister, to whom any discontented and discouraged town or village could go for advice and assistance. It could maintain a staff of experts, who were well up in industrial and commercial possibilities, and these could be sent out to give expert advice as to the methods best suited to each community. One town might be advised to put in a huge cheese factory, another a butter factory, another a canning factory, another a knitting factory and so on.

The other day I bought some apples in a Toronto grocery store which had come all the way across the continent from Washington Territory. United States apples from a Pacific coast state selling in Toronto stores in competition with apples grown in the greatest, or what should be the greatest, apple province in North America—think of it. I asked the grocer why. "Honest selection, scientific packing, and co-operative selling," was the answer.

What value has education for the farmer and the villager if it unfits him to compete with producers and packers two thousand five hundred miles away? What value has physics, and trigonometry and algebra and geometry if they do not fit us to take from nature that which she is prepared to give us if we have but common sense?