

The Western School Journal

(AUTHORIZED BY POSTMASTER GENERAL, OTTAWA, AS SECOND CLASS MAIL)

VOL. XIII

WINNIPEG, FEBRUARY, 1918

No. 2

Editorial

Is It Fair to Children?

Last week I visited a school and observed a spelling lesson. The average age of the pupils was ten and a half years. The lesson for the day included such words as distinctive, infliction, inflexion, variation, notation, and others of like class. Only one or two pupils appeared to have any idea as to the meaning of the words. These were evidently above the average intelligence, not only for that class, but for classes generally.

The young lady who was teaching appreciated fully the difficulty and was doing her utmost to overcome it. And yet under strong protest, she knew that the pupils should be practised not on words of this kind, but chiefly upon little words they use in their written work from day to day, and in those words they use in daily speech. She would be very content if perfection went this far. But she was not free. There is a great spelling bee ahead and every thing must give way to this. The authorities have so decided it—and who would dare to combat the newspapers and the Trustees' Association?

New let us be fair in this thing. A spelling bee is a very interesting thing—yes, and if properly conducted a very good thing, but when it encourages or compels teachers to emphasize what should not be emphasized in education it is a very bad thing. We are not very certain, indeed, that as at present conducted, it is a good thing for the school life of Manitoba. It is getting better spelling—of a certain kind, but not of the kind most needed, and it is interesting the people in the schools, but it is not creating an interest in the things

really worth while. The thing was well intended, no doubt. It had spectacular features that made it popular, but we can't let it go at that. Hasn't it about served its purpose?

It is only fair to the young lady mentioned to say that she was doing what so many good teachers are attempting, she was explaining the meaning of all the words in the lesson and explaining them carefully. In this way she hoped—mark you, hoped—that the vocabulary of the pupils would be enlarged and enriched. Yet she knew, and every one else knows, that normally, a vocabulary is not increased and enriched in this way.

But what could she do? I leave it with you. Is the thing fair to children and to education? And in these days when new standards are being established—well, let us be serious.

Our Pioneers

All up and down this land there are teachers and others doing heroic work in education—breaking new trails, adapting themselves to new conditions. It is difficult to learn of these, because real reformers are naturally reticent, and professionally teachers object to blowing a trumpet. Occasionally a worker in a backwood settlement does work so striking that his good deeds are heralded abroad, and it is well that such should be the case. All honor to those who have done pioneer service, teaching the strangers in our land how to live and live with us. But there is another class of workers deserving of equal praise. These are the teachers who enter our ordinary rural schools and who infuse others with new life, who make the waste places glad, and