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THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT'S FETICH.*

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THE mistaken but slavishly followed principle to which I shall call attention, and to which I think many of the most unsatisfactory features in our school system are due, may not be the sole and single source of all that is objectionable in the working of this system; I do not profess, that is, that I am going to lay bare the complete and only root of original sin, still less that I have some sovereign panacea to offer.

Let me say further that any weight this paper may be found to have will come neither from the writer's personality nor from any ability of his to express his views clearly and forcibly, but solely from the degree to which the paper will be found to give expression to the views of many—I think most—of the High School and College teachers in the province. Most of these are as capable as I of the task of expressing the very general feeling of dissatisfaction and unrest, very many more capable; but caring little whether or not I was the most suitable exponent of the general dissatisfaction, I merely determined that, where no one else seemed likely to speak out and to speak plainly, I would.

I desire, above all, to put what I have to say so plainly and in so straightforward a way that there shall be no doubt what are the points I am trying to make; so that, in case any attention should be paid to this morning's

discussion (and we teachers are not in the habit of having much attention paid to our views even on educational matters)—in case, I say, any attention should be paid to this morning's discussion, that there may be no mistaking just what the discussion is about, no beclouding (whether intentional or unintentional) of the point at issue.

The title of my paper implies that the Education Department is following blindly some idea which it has unwisely exalted to a universal principle, some idea which may be a good servant, but which is proving a bad master; and it implies also that there are noteworthy evils resulting from the slavish worship of this fetich. This is not the place nor the occasion to inquire whether this mistaken principle is the sole or the chief source of existing evils; there may be contributing causes; for example, the necessities of our young country, as yet only in process of development. Still less is this the place or the occasion to inquire how far there may be personal characteristics in those who determine our system that account for some things, or to ask whether political exigencies, or love of authority, or the fascination of fads, or that somewhat unclean spirit, the Zeitgeist, have anything to do with the matter. This is not for us to-day a political question, or a personal question, but an educational question; although under our system

*Read at meeting of O. E. A., April 6, 1899.