

Educational Men and Matters

THE TEACHER AND THE SCHOOL

By Thomas Allardyce Brough

NOW that the titanic struggle which broke upon the world in 1914 has been succeeded by a seeming peace, those who have eyes to see are conscious of the fact that one age in human development has come to a close, and that another order of things is due us, to be realized through evolution if we are wise, but through revolution if we are unwise.

In this age of reconstruction, of evolution, as we trust it may prove, the wise man sees in the teacher and the school an influence second perhaps to no other in power and beneficence. Therefore I make no apology for touching on one of the questions of greatest interest in connection with our primary and secondary schools, the question, namely, of the man teacher and the woman teacher.

In the early days of the public school in Canada the teachers were almost exclusively men. Those were the days of physical force in education, and it was felt that it took a man to handle the big boys and often mature men who were to be found in the schools in the winter months. There was a lurking suspicion, too, in some quarters, that the average woman's endowment in brain-power was limited.

But milder manners gradually prevailed; moral suasion began to dispute the preeminence with physical force, and here and there the woman teacher proved her capacity both to teach and to govern a school. The fiction of woman's mental incapacity also faded slowly away when about forty years ago the universities opened their doors to women students, who not only showed themselves capable of passing examinations and taking degrees, but frequently, also, won standing amongst the prize-winners and medallists.

From that day to this there has been a steady increase in the percentage of women teachers in our schools, a corresponding decrease, of course, in the percentage of men teachers, until one sometimes fears that at no distant date the man teacher will be as rare as the dodo. At present in Vancouver, in our public and high schools, there are, in round numbers, three women teachers for every teacher of the other sex.

The claim I am about to make may appear ungallant, and I may be classed as a poor sport, when I say that the victory won by the women has not been the result of a contest altogether even. Many boards of trustees have considered appointments mainly from the point of view of dollars and cents, and have selected women teachers on the score of "cheapness," to save the pockets of the ratepayers. But these days are passing. "Equal pay for equal work" is the slogan of the new voter.

The claim is just, if we can but measure the work. A moment's reflection, however, will serve to convince us that we cannot measure the work of any class of teachers, men or women, and appraise its value in money. The teacher's best work cannot be paid for in this medium of exchange: the bulls and the bears of the stock-market cannot make or break the influence that may inspire the boy or girl throughout life. In short, if we are to discuss the question of the man teacher and the woman teacher on its merits, the element of salary must in the meantime be left entirely out of consideration. We must first endeavor to decide what is best for the child and for the state, irrespective of cost. When we reach a decision on this the financial side of the case will come up for settlement.

That women have proved their abundant fitness for the work of teaching must be admitted by the most skeptical.

In fact they have been so successful that one may be pardoned for asking in all seriousness whether the field should not as soon as possible be abandoned to them. And if teaching is not a man's job, the sooner he is out of it the better for himself and the schools. Sentiment should not be permitted to weigh with or in a matter so momentous.

Happily Nature stands ready to help us in our difficulty. She has in her wisdom seen fit to give the child a father and a mother. The home was the first school, and the father and mother the earliest teachers. But as specialization developed with the progress of civilization, special schools became necessary to teach children what their parents could not so well teach them at home, and to train them with others as members of larger social organizations. In these schools the teachers are in loco parentum, and at the same time special officers of the state. And it is at once evident that unless there are both men teachers and women teachers in our schools neither parents nor state are adequately represented. Each class of teacher, also, should be assigned the work it is best fitted to do. It is not a question of the superiority of one over the other: the good of the child and its value to the state is,—first, last and always,—the one matter to be considered.

With this principle in mind it will be found as a rule that the mother instinct makes women the more suitable teachers for young children. The child's nature in early years responds more readily to her influence. But as it develops it responds more and more to the influence of the man teacher, and when the scale is turned it is better that its school training should be mainly, though not exclusively, in his hands. From the age of six to ten the average child is not likely to suffer much in being left to the care of women teachers. But from this age I am convinced that its best interest as an individual and as a future citizen will be most fully served if it is brought more and more under the influence of men of character and intelligence. I think I am on safe ground when I set forth the claim that on a city staff men teachers and women teachers should be found in about equal numbers.

If education were merely the preparation of pupils for examinations, written and oral, the solution of the problem would not be half so difficult. The best teacher would then be without doubt the teacher who year after year could pass the highest percentage of candidates. Such a person is usually a good teacher, but not always the best. Though it is not the case that the boy who is a dullard in class, and persistently fails in examinations, is likely to be a brilliant success in life, as some would almost persuade us, whilst the brilliant pupil goes down to defeat in later years, it is nevertheless true that examinations measure a pupil's power only partially, and this helps to account for the great contrast sometimes seen between a boy's standing in school and his achievement in after years. Character, common sense, persistence, adaptability and enthusiasm, even without skill in absorbing book learning and in passing examinations, cannot fail in the end to command success, and the constant aim of the really good teacher is to fix and develop these.

Furthermore, every thoughtful observer recognizes that much of what is best in the training of the boy and girl of to-day comes not by way of the class-room at all, but through games and athletic competitions. And here the interested man teacher is invaluable. He leads and trains the boys, and it is a noteworthy fact that the training of the girls in these activities also commonly falls to his lot. Games and sports afford the readiest opportunity for calling forth and

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