

❁ Special Papers. ❁

ONTARIO SCHOOLS.

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A PAPER READ AT THE TEACHERS' CONVENTION
AT STRATFORD.

(Concluded.)

But what shall I say of those, and there have been, possibly still are such, who actually carry their text-books on

MEDICINE, LAW, OR DIVINITY,

into their school-rooms, and surreptitiously read them there? What shall I say of those who never devote even one hour a day to the thoughtful preparation lessons, or to their intellectual improvement as teachers—whose whole waking hours out of school are given to frivolity or to music or to studies foreign to their calling—who day after day drag their leaden limbs to school, fagged out and exhausted by a night's severe application to legal, medical, or theological works, and spend the day vainly trying to fix their weary thoughts, and to compel their unwilling powers to the drudgery of uncongenial duties? Of these I dare not venture to say what I think. I can only hope that none of you are in this category. I do not care to characterize as it deserves the conduct of those who thus give the cream and blossom of their time and zeal to private concerns, and only the sorry residue to the labor they have undertaken to perform. If on this occasion I do chance to address even one teacher who is in this awkward predicament, to him let me say, "You may intend to remain in the profession only for another year, or for another month, or for another day, but for conscience sake, for honesty's sake, for the sake of such dregs of self-respect as still belong to you, do not spend that year, or that month, or that day in stealing the time belonging to your school. Your time is not your own to do as you like with it. Your agreement as a teacher covers much more than the six hours' actual superintendence and instruction. You bind yourselves not to neglect your work, but to teach to the best of your ability. Your covenant, at all events, by implication as, I feel assured, would be decided in any test case submitted to the courts of law, involves all your time not required for needed rest, refreshment and recreation. I deliberately repeat it, your time belongs not to you, but to your schools, and is paid for by the community. Consequently, in using, or misusing, it for purposes outside your school work, you are breaking the eighth commandment as distinctly as if committing any other theft. There are

SEVERAL OTHER POINTS

on which I should like to dwell, but the rising numbers at the head of these sheets warn me to desist. If what I have been privileged to write to you causes even a very few—nay, causes even one teacher to accustom himself to take higher views of his profession, and to emancipate himself from the faults and shortcomings to which I have referred, and to do, hereafter, in his school-room with all his might whatsoever his

hand findeth to do, I shall be amply repaid for the few hours I have been able to snatch from professional duties, to devote to this paper. It would have been a real pleasure to me had it been possible for me to accept your kind invitation to be personally present with you. No one can feel more keenly than I do myself how flat and cold are pen-and-ink exhortations. At best the written sheet is but a poor substitute for the living voice. Thoughts are never winged with such penetrative power as when they flow from a full heart and fall upon open and receptive ears. I have written to you earnestly, and yet I trust not unkindly. I keep a very warm corner of my heart for teachers. Your work appeals to my sympathies above all other human occupations. Trials and crosses, deprivations and discouragements environ your lot in life, but these are peculiar to no particular avocation, being the common heritage of man. Did time serve I could, I think, show you that it also has rewards and compensations and indemnifications inherently its own. You sometimes worry or fret because teachers are not held in higher esteem by the public—because, in common parlance, the profession is not more respectable. Let not your hearts be troubled about so small a matter. It makes all the difference in the world to you what you yourselves think about your calling, but why should you be concerned with regard to what the Hon. A. B., or Judge C. D., or the Rev. Dr. E. F., may think or say about it? Why should you feel hurt because Miss Shallow or Mrs. Shoddy affects to look down on you and does not seek your acquaintance?

IGNORANCE, VULGARITY AND PRETENSION,

even when dressed in broadcloth or silk and riding in a gilded coach, are still only ignorance, vulgarity and pretension, and should move you to pity or contempt rather than annoyance. People of small hearts and narrow minds regard money as the only or as the chief standard of respectability. Though still, perchance, flavored with the washtub or the wheelbarrow of their earlier years, such persons try to ape what they wrongly suppose to be the airs of their betters, and in the attempt make themselves both offensive and ridiculous. They would condescend to either Gladstone or Bismarck if dressed in corduroys, and from the lofty attitude of their insufferable self-sufficiency and stupendous ignorance, would affect to look down even on the Archangel Gabriel if he came to dwell among us in humble guise and of low estate. Why should you permit such people to disturb your equanimity? Why should you care for the notice or the companionship of those whom, in all things save the single accident of wealth, you know to be your inferiors? The world acknowledges at length that your labor is respectable. It rests with you yourselves to force from it a recognition of your individual respectability. If your profession is to be raised in public estimation, you must raise it yourselves. If you wish the public to respect it, respect it yourselves. No Act of Parliament can help you in this matter. The status and dignity of your calling are lowered by every incompetent or unfaithful man or woman suffered to

remain in your ranks, just as they are elevated and adorned by every true and earnest teacher to be found among you. It is to be hoped that an increasingly large number of young people will embrace teaching as a calling for life. At present a great part of your best material is yearly diverted into other pursuits. Yet it may be fairly questioned whether, all things considered, teaching does not offer as fair a prospect for life as any occupation within your reach. Other professions may seem to you more remunerative and less laborious. Appearances, however, are frequently deceptive—far-off hills in summer commonly look greener than those on which we stand. In Canada and in the United States the so-called learned professions are universally so overcrowded, that it is hard work for the rank and file to make both ends meet. Thousands of hard-working

DOCTORS AND LAWYERS AND PARSONS

and surveyors and engineers are not making clear of expenses the incomes of first-class school teachers. Of course there are exceptions—a few draw prizes in the lottery of life, but you have also in your profession some positions, with large salaries attached, to which you may aspire. If at present you are unknown and at the foot of the tree, it altogether depends upon yourselves how long you remain so. Climb, if you will—by all available honest means climb, but remember that to climb you must work. The quickest and surest way to get out of a lowly position, is to make yourself conspicuously efficient in it. If you would rise, be true to yourselves; there are glorious opportunities awaiting each one of you in the more or less distant future. Be prepared to seize these as they present themselves, and there is no power on earth that can keep you down. The most formidable lions that stand in your path towards distinction and honor are indolence and procrastination. These you must boldly face and conquer. Be diligent and prompt in equipping yourselves for chances that are certain to come. That tide in your affairs "which taken at its flood leads on to fortune" may not have reached you yet, but sooner or later it will lap the strand at your feet. Let it find you with sails trimmed and rudder shipped and anchor weighed, and all ready to cast-off and to catch the golden opportunity which once lost never returns. Emerson has tersely written that no man has truly learned anything until he knows that

"EVERY DAY IS DOOMSDAY."

Assuredly every day in your lives is freighted with chances, is vital with possibilities, is pregnant with fateful openings towards good or evil. Bind upon your wrists and write upon your foreheads that "now" is the grandest word in the English vocabulary. If you ever hope to achieve greatness or to become a man or a woman in the noblest sense of the term, "now" is the time to begin. To-day is the best day in all your lives. To-day is an assured fact, is here within your grasp. To-day invites you to seize each of its flying hours, and to stamp it with the indelible hall mark of some holy deed done, some good resolution carried out,