

## \* Special Papers. \*

## FOSTERING A NATIONAL SENTIMENT IN THE SCHOOL-ROOM.\*

IN these days of commercial activity and industrial enterprise we are constantly asking ourselves the question, "Will it pay?" But how few there are who seriously ask at any time, "Is it for the good of the commonwealth?" The standard by which we are prone to judge all things seems to be that of personal gain, and to such an extent has this become the custom that we seldom or never give a man aspiring to a public position credit for any other motive than that of self-aggrandisement or the emoluments of office. We are intensely practical in the matter of making everything pay, and pay in the narrow sense of personal advantage.

Even the school education of the day is strongly tinged with this worship of mammon and nearly every change in our curriculum seems to be made with a view to fitting the youth of our land for participation in the great national game of money-getting.

Not only are our Public and High schools engaged largely in the industry, but a host of other educational institutions have sprung up and are training our youth in particular branches of the game.

That these latter have many excellent features and do good work in their respective spheres, I do not deny, but I do contend that in all our institutions the students are trained too much on the principle that the battle of life for which they are being fitted, consists in wresting from this earth and from their fellowmen just as much of the filthy lucre as they possibly can.

True, the bread-and-butter problem is an important one, and no one entrusted with the training of our youth dare despise it in his work of teaching, but there are other things to be inculcated, and the teacher who neglects these is not doing his whole duty in the great work to which he has been called.

We believe that apart from the active and regular instruction given in our school-rooms, a great deal can be and is being done to train the children in prompt and business-like habits, in courteous and affable conduct towards their fellows and in morality and uprightness. May we not believe that our schools can be made still further useful by making them the means of fostering in our children a noble and manly patriotism, that shall the better fit them for the discharge of the duties of citizenship in this fair Dominion of ours?

A little is done along this line by those teachers who are imbued with a strong national sentiment themselves, but while we boast of our schools as one of our greatest national institutions, is it not true that our children leave the school-room with little or no knowledge of the duties the state requires of them as citizens, and with very crude ideas of their privileges and responsibilities as members of the commonwealth? And yet, with the masses, the opportunities for imbibing sound principles on these import-

ant subjects end when they leave the public school; they are then left to the cajolery and sophistry of a partisan press; they are swallowed up in one or other of the great political parties and become blind zealots with no principles to guide them and no political creed except that of their party chiefs, to whom they give a full and unquestioning allegiance.

We hear much in these days about the destiny of Canada, and while I admit that the press is, and will continue to be, a mighty engine in forming the destiny of our country, I firmly believe that a more potent factor in the moulding of our future is, or should be, the school teacher, who, coming in contact day by day with the impressible minds of the children, is able to give the current of their thoughts and acts such a tendency towards what is right and pure as not all the corruption and casuistry of rank partyism can, in after years, wholly change. Day after day, in the course of our teaching, come to us opportunities for instilling into the minds of our pupils a proper pride in the history, resources and institutions of our country, a hatred of all selfish log-rolling and corrupt practices, and an earnest desire to emulate those who have sacrificed self in the interests of country; to do their quota in developing the resources and in purifying and strengthening all our national institutions.

And, indeed, will not the earnest labors of the teacher in this direction react upon the regular school work? As we broaden the minds of the children and help them to realize that they are now preparing for a great work to be intrusted to them in the not very distant future, and as we inspire them with a desire to prove themselves worthy of the heritage that is theirs, we shall have the satisfaction of seeing them study with increased earnestness and intelligence, as those who work with a purpose in view. It will also establish a nobler mainspring of action among the pupils than exists among those whose minds have not been thus awakened.

The nineteenth century, which, in the phenomenal advancement made in science and art, in civilization and education, stands unique among the centuries of the world's history, is fast drawing to a close. In our own country, at least in Upper Canada, the foundations have been well and truly laid and we are about ready to begin to uprear the superstructure of an enduring, enlightened and moral nationality. Our fathers did their work well and have handed down to us a goodly heritage, and now we, standing almost at the threshold of a new century, are confronted with the question, "What shall we do with this heritage?"

We have been so busy since we became a nation that we have scarcely had time to mark our growth or examine ourselves. But now the necessity for this retrospection is being borne in upon us. We are, as it were, entering upon man's estate as a nation, and if the boy is father of the man we needs must look back before we can safely judge what our future is to be.

A century ago Upper Canada was founded and the grand old U. E. Loyalists began to hew out for themselves humble homes in our forest wildernesses. Seventy-five

years ago we find Canadians, conscious of the justness of their cause, rallying to the defence of their country and sealing with their blood their claim to what was then a forest heritage. Half a century ago the momentous question of responsible government agitated our ancestors. The struggle was hot but the boon was obtained, and the bitterness that had been engendered died out as time wore on. Nearly a quarter of a century ago another giant stride forward was made when the provinces of British North America decided to join fortunes and become one broad Dominion with community of interests and aims. This gradation of important events is full of instruction to us, marking the progress made during the century and teaching us that as these successive generations had a work to perform in the progress and development of the country, so we too have a work to perform, different from theirs and yet none the less onerous and important.

The consolidation of the various parts of the Dominion in sentiment, fraternity and national aspirations, as well as in name and system of government, must be accomplished; the undeveloped resources of the nation must be turned to account and made the means of blessing to mankind; the broad acres of our yet unsettled regions must be dotted with peaceful homesteads and the virgin soil of our boundless prairies must be made to yield bountiful harvests for the support of an industrious population; our educational and religious institutions must be maintained, strengthened and made effectual in dispelling intellectual and moral darkness; our civic and political institutions must be purged from all that is vile and corrupt, and the ballot must be used as a sacred privilege, not prostituted to ignoble ends but respected as the birthright of a free citizen, not to be basely sold as was Esau's of old, while many moral, political and social problems crowd upon us, demanding the earnest consideration of all enlightened and patriotic citizens. This is a part of the work that devolves upon us and more particularly upon those who come after us. The opening years of the next century give promise of being the epoch that shall decide our political destiny as well as many other problems affecting the stability of our institutions and the character of our people. Whence then are to come the men upon whom shall fall the brunt of the struggle by which we must emerge from our embryonic state into that fulness of national life with institutions, Christian not in name only, but in spirit as well, with a political system purified of all the dross that now clings to it, and a homogeneous national sentiment that will result in peace and prosperity within our borders, and blessing to mankind in general? From the school-rooms of our land during this the last decade of the present century. And by whom are they to be trained for the great work that lies before them? Largely by us, the teachers, who, day after day, have presented to us the opportunity of moulding the character of the boys and girls who as men and women shall mould the nation.

But what are the means by which, while giving diligent heed to all our other school work, we may seek to stamp this national

\*An essay read before the Wentworth Teachers' Association, in Hamilton, on Friday, October 3rd, by Robert Burton, of Dundas.