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A GLANCE AT THE SITUATION.

"Grinning and Bearing It."

(By SCRUTATOR.)

"Though man a thinking being is defined.
Few use the grand prerogative of mind.
How few think justly of the thinking few!
How many never think,' who think they do!"

"CHAT" WITH AN OLD-TIME POLITICIAN.

The other day I met one of our few remaining politicians of "the good old school." Although an octogenarian and more, he continues hale and hearty, and I felt pleased to find him still a most interesting conversationalist. He entertained me with stories of the political adventures of the colony since the establishment of responsible government, in some of which he himself had taken an active part. Government by parties, as he intimated and as every observant person knows, is an historical growth of English development, due to causes peculiar to ourselves. The meaning of it has been the orderly transition from one state of civilization to another; and now that the transition has been accomplished, and party lines no longer correspond to natural lines, it has become doubtful whether, even among ourselves, it works with perfect success.

OUR "VEXED LABRADOR BOUNDARY QUESTION."

Thrown wholly upon our own resources to work out our own destiny, we Newfoundlanders may, some day, have to fight for our liberties against invaders from outside—when I say "fight" I mean, of course, to contend, politically and commercially! Ambitious men there may force their way to the front, aspire to a certain kind of dictatorship, and covet their neighbors' goods, if not their territories. Dominions are just enlarged schoolboys. The smallest trifle will sometimes bring about a misunderstanding between rival adjoining or nearby dominions, as long as it is undecided which of them is in the right. Indeed, we have at this moment our "vexed Labrador Boundary question," which is taxing all the diplomatic skill and political ingenuity of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Justice, and the Government's Minister Extraordinary, Sir P. T. McGrath, to effect a satisfactory settlement. It has always been thus and so, from the Greek democracies to the Italian Republics, or the Spanish States in modern South America.

THEIR DREAMS OF A MILLENNIUM.

Then, again, they will have their war of classes, such as we have now, their internal revolutions, their dreams of a millennium to be brought about by political convulsions. These are Nature's methods of disciplining human character and bringing us to know that life is not all a holiday. Out of such struggles great men have arisen and great countries, and, so far as I know, greatness cannot be purchased at any lower price.

THE PRESENT POLITICAL CONDITION.

The political condition here, at present, is not, I think, entirely satisfactory. In our island home there are no privileged classes—or, at least, there ought not to be—no inherited institutions which require to be modified to suit the change of times. Where all are, or may be, with proper management of public affairs, comfortably off, there is no dissatisfaction with the distribution of property, and, therefore, there is really no natural division of parties, which constitutes the principle of parliamentary government. Parties here are artificial, and therefore unnatural and demoralising. It would be far better if the heads of the departments could be selected with reference to ability and character, and were relieved, as they are in the United States, from responsibility to the Legislature. Politics in democracies tend always to intrigue of faction, but the peril is intensified where there is unreality in the very form of the constitution. The good sense of our people has prevented so far any serious harm; but, at the present juncture, the outlook for the future is not reassuring.

GOVERNMENT BY PARTIES.

Every wise British politician is both Radical and Conservative. He has two eyes to see with and two hands to work with, and to condemn him to be one or the other is to put one eye out and and tie one hand behind the back. To colonies where it has no natural appropriateness at all, where party is purely artificial, and party politics therefore are not a contest of principles, but a contest of intrigues, only a British conviction that what is good for ourselves must be good for all mankind, could have induced us to think of applying it. General good sense happily neutralized in a great degree the anomalies of the system. When the moral health is sound, the political health cannot be seriously disordered.

HOW DEMOCRACY WORKS WITH US.

On the whole, democracy works like galvanism in disintegrating the existing conditions of human society; but human society occasionally falls into a state when disintegration cannot be helped. Constitutional government in the overseas dominions is full of anomalies. It might have been better if, instead of leaving some of the smaller colonies to govern themselves, the Imperial authorities had been careful to send out efficient governors, who would have attended to colonial opinion, and ruled firmly, with no consideration of anything but each dominion's good. A monarchy, when there is security that the monarch himself is a wise man, is the best of all forms of government. But as things stand at present, this is out of the question. As long as the dominions are under the authority of Downing Street, and Downing Street is under the authority of the British Parliament, it is impossible that the affairs of the colonies will receive anything like fair and impartial consideration, or that the persons selected to conduct their affairs will always be the wisest that can be found. The policy adopted is measured, not with a view to the good of the colony, but to party advantage at home.

OUR INADEQUATE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM.

In one of my previous articles I spoke of our present imperfect and inadequate educational system and mentioned the unfortunate fact that some fifty thousand of our people, young and old, out of a poulation of two hundred and sixty thousand, could neither read nor write. This I regarded as a disgrace to the colony and a sinister reflection on the manner in which the large amount of money voted annually by the Legislature for educational purposes, is manipulated. In no other British colony in the world, similarly circumstanced, does such a deplorable condition exist. Even outside the Empire altogether we might learn valuable and instructive lessons. Take Denmark, for example. There is practically no illiteracy in that little kingdom—the birthplace of our good Queen-Mother, Alexandra. To the establishment of the people's high schools there and a most efficient system of education generally, under the influence of Bishop Grundtvig, the spread of culture among the Danish people is largely due.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A GREAT SYSTEM.

It seems that, before 1884, the Danish system of education was formal, dully classical, and intended only for the well-to-do. Bishop Grundtvig, a seer and a prophet, saw that the Danish people must not only be instructed, but cultivated, and that their national self-esteem could only be preserved if they knew the history of their own country and were made to be proud of it; that they must be insular and parochial if they were not taught to connect the history and progress of their continental nations. He knew, as we here in Newfoundland know, no country could exist by bread alone; but he knew, too, that no country could exist unless it discovered the art of providing bread for itself, and of softening the arduous work of gaining a living by something that was spiritual and stimulating. In the first place, he believed that no man was too poor or too lowly to grasp the glory of patriotism, or to understand the difference between right and wrong.

A GREAT EDUCATIONIST THE SON OF A SHOEMAKER.

It is doubtful, however, whether Grundtvig's policy of founding the high schools could have succeeded if it had not been for the force and character of Kristen Kold. The latter was the son of a shoemaker, and not a very prosperous shoemaker. He early learned to detest the traditional system of education, and the directors of this formal system made a cabal against him, and he was forced to give up his intellectual ambitions and to be content with the avocation of book-binding. His book-binding, however, was very thorough, and he respected, as most Danes do, the art of the handicraftsman. He became, by accident, acquainted with the writings of Bishop Grundtvig, and, thus inspired, he took courage and founded at Rodding, in 1844, the first people's high school. It was impossible that such an institution at that time could expect State aid. In the first place it was not to be merely an academic or bookish school. It was intended for all who would listen and understand. Its whole power depended on the personality of the teacher. Its appeal must be solely through the spoken word. It was a courageous experiment, for its success would depend entirely on the support of the people. In a short time a hundred men, old and young, applied for admission. But the women did not care to be left out. Co-education was looked on, not only in Denmark, but all through the Western World, as a horrible and dangerous innovation. The pupils of Kristen Kold's first school were almost entirely farmers, and these farmers could not attend his lectures in the summer season, when they were needed in the work of the soil; but in the early spring time and summer it was possible that some of the women might be free, and so he began by opening spring and summer classes for the women.

FOUNDATION OF A GREAT SYSTEM.

Thus we find that from this beginning grew the great system of Danish high schools, which, it is said, were the models on which the United States Chautauquas were founded; and also the system of university extension in English-speaking countries. But neither the Chautauquas nor the university courses have been as far-reaching in their effects as the Danish high schools. It is understood, of course, that these schools are not, like our high schools, introductions to college or the finishing off of the education of those who do not intend to go to college. Unless some very recent change has taken place in the Danish system, no requirement is necessary for the student except the desire to learn. There are no degrees given in these schools, no examinations, and no fixed standards of scholarships.

SOCIAL POSITION OF THE TEACHER.

In Denmark the teacher has an acknowledged social position. It is understood that he must be freed as far as possible from material cares. At the University of Copenhagen, for example, houses and pensions are provided for the professors; and teachers in the upper schools are so treated that they have a comfortable life, in a house and a garden, of which they have the tenure during their professional residence and a pension at a certain age.

HOW THE SCHOOLS ARE CONTROLLED.

Evidently, the duties of the government inspector of schools are very narrow in scope; he may report, but neither he nor the government can dictate to persons who consider themselves educational experts or to educated parents who know themselves just what their children ought to learn. It is the parents, through the teachers, who control the schools; but this does not in any way interfere with the high position which the teacher holds in a country where the education of a child to the utmost extent of his ability is looked on as an absolute necessity. No newspaper in Denmark would dare to assume that an examination is necessary in these high schools for adults. The high schools would be able to support themselves, even if they did not have certain grants from the communes. It is understood that the teacher will say what he pleases in his lectures; and, as the students of mature years choose these schools themselves, they would look on it as a degradation if an arbitrary examination or standard were imposed on them.

We here in St. John's have churches and schools more than equal to all our requirements, and some of us are aiming at a university; we talk and think much of education even, but seem to lack ability to make the most of the means available. We study sanitary questions and work in a round-about sort of way to improve the health of our city. But it is only to conquer the enemies of material comfort, that our own lives may be bright and pleasant "Woe to those that are at ease in Zion!" the prophet cried. Was this the language of a true seer? or the complaint of a sour dyspeptic, who grudged to others the enjoyment denied to himself? It is hard to quarrel with men who only wish to be innocently happy. And out of this wish there is growing a taste for amusement and the artistic side of life which has already come to something very considerable. We have even now a superabundance of nickel-shows and similar attractions. At present, like some of the other overseas dominions, we are neither prosperous nor contented. Our stepmother Nature grudges to individuals, and colonies, too, unbroken prosperity. She has a whip for the backs of most of us, and insists on our learning lessons which nothing but suffering will teach. But, in spite of it all, the spirit of "grinning and bearing it" and spending one's last dollar in amusement is rampant everywhere, nor does it seem at all likely that we shall have any appreciable improvement in things for some time to come.

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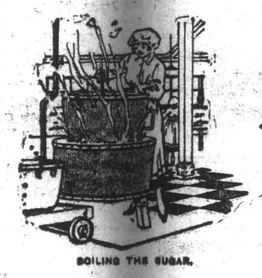

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