

very good renderings were given without help. The difficulty lay in the idea enfolded in "Prayer is the burthen of a sigh." The idea of the "sigh" being the bearer or messenger which carried the prayer was difficult to explain, but the images of the eagle flying upward bearing her young, the horse carrying his burden, were helpful. The pupils were unable to word it, however, without assistance, and this paraphrase was suggested:

"Prayer is sometimes carried up to heaven on a sigh," or, "A sigh sometimes carries a load of prayer upon it."

One paraphrase, which was considered very clever by the pupils, read thus:

"Prayer is the load carried on a sigh,

The dropping of a tear,

The skyward looking of the eye

When no one but Christ is near to see it."

The third stanza was quickly disposed of, being paraphrased with general success. The class were full of stories of babies' prayers, and the interest was keen and happy. Their simple faith and unspoiled belief were refreshing; even the *hard* boy was tender and innocent for the moment.

The Sunday-school lesson of the Prodigal Son helped us in the fourth stanza. We read the lesson for the coming Sabbath every morning, at first alternate verses with the teacher, then boys first verse and the girls second; then girls first verse, boys second, so on alternately; at the end of the week one person volunteers to read it all. We know the lesson pretty thoroughly, and it came in nicely to explain:

"Prayer is the contrite sinner's voice,

Returning from his ways;

While angels in their songs rejoice

And cry, Behold, he prays!"

Here my class have stopped; we have made two lessons of it already. When a question arose as to what we should have in an optional half-hour to-day, the request was, "Oh, can't we have reading?" by which they meant the lesson above described. But I considered that they had had as much for one day as was wholesome, and so they will have the lesson to-morrow. I noticed several small dictionaries that had not been brought before, and the words for to-morrow are being looked up in them. These will be "vital," "native," "watchword," "fellowship," "pleads," "eternal," "intercedes," "trod."

There will have to be special explanations of certain phrases, as: "Vital breath of the Christian is prayer," "His watchword at the gate of death," "Enters Heaven with prayer," "Saints appear as one," "mourners," "By whom we come to God," and perhaps some other which appears to me perfectly plain may require simplifying to suit the intellect of some small questioner. When all has been thoroughly sifted and no rocks of stumbling remain, we are going to do something very delightful—we are going to sing it to a fine tune. It will add another to our list of good hymns, and nothing pleases a weary class more than to say, "Take your Readers now, and sing such a piece right through." We are able to sing "Lucy Gray" (to a solemn hymn tune, yet they like it), "The Evening Hymn," "Lord Ulin's Daughter," "The Bugle Song," "By Cool Siloam's Shady Rill," "Rock me to Sleep, Mother," and some others, which give variety to the music exercises that they study on the staff daily.

## Special Papers.

### EFFICIENCY OF OUR RURAL SCHOOLS.\*

BY D. W. PARSONS,  
Principal of the Delhi Public School.

I have no hope of saying anything new in regard to the efficiency or non-efficiency of our rural schools, but I am content to be a repeater, knowing that it is mainly by repetition that some lessons are instilled.

The rural schools of Ontario are accomplishing important work, in so far as pupils are there taught to read, to write, and to do elementary operations in arithmetic. Certain facilities have been provided, and parents have been compelled to make use of them, with the above result, and in some cases with the additional advantage of making

some progress in grammar, history, geography, drawing, and so forth. There is reason to fear, however, that comparatively few go beyond this primitive mark sufficiently far to successfully grapple with the High School Entrance Examination.

I am aware that departmental examinations are not an absolute test of the work done, but I may be permitted to make use of them as a gauge, since they are the only statistical means the public have of judging of the efficiency of a school. In what may be considered, at the very least, an average county of Ontario, the proportion of successful Entrance candidates stands at about one to forty-five. In this county are one town and four important incorporated villages, all containing flourishing Public Schools, and four of them efficient High Schools. These centres, it will be readily understood, furnish the greater part of even this small percentage. Add to these a number of smaller villages containing schools presumably superior to the purely rural school, and it follows that the proportion of Entrance candidates from the latter is extremely small. If these results are to be taken as a fair average, then the time has fully come when we may properly consider whether we are not justified in taking a forward step, and placing the education of our rural school pupils on a higher plane than it has hitherto occupied. Our financial ability, our social status, our prominent examples of Canad a brain and energy, all assist in teaching us that nothing is too good for the Canadian boy or girl. In treating of the efficiency of our rural schools, I readily admit, and note with pleasure, that in some cases the work is as good as can be desired, when not only Entrance candidates are successfully prepared, but when fifth form work is done, and that not perfunctorily, but with such thoroughness as to enable candidates to pass creditably the Public School Leaving, our first great boon, and even in rare cases the Primary, examinations. But this desirable evidence of progress is, without doubt, exceptional. Should any of our High School friends object to the word "desirable" in this connection and claim that we are on their side of the fence, the difficulty may be easily remedied by moving the fence over. We have no right to view this matter from the standpoint of advantage or disadvantage to any class of either schools or teachers. We have but one question to consider: what do the interests of the masses of rural children of this country demand? I say with no hesitation that these masses cannot afford the expense of attending our High Schools and Collegiate Institutes, and the standard I have mentioned must therefore be obtained in their own rural school, or not at all. "Continuation classes," a long step in advance, lessen the difficulty to but a part—the great mass is still on the outside. But some of my Public School associates may complain that to impose such a burden is to place the proverbial last straw. I know that it involves a world of arduous labor, and a rare economy of force, but I know equally well that it is not in the region of the unattainable, and that were such a standard of work at all general it would lift our Public Schools and our Public Schools teachers out of the stupefying and miasmatic swamps in which many of us now exist up into a far healthier and more invigorating atmosphere. I have said this higher rural school work is exceptional. It must and will necessarily continue to be so until certain existing conditions are radically changed. The efficiency of a school is but another name for the efficiency of the teacher, and there is no gauge by which we can more accurately measure the character of the work done than by the capacity of the worker. Now, what are the facts? Hundreds upon hundreds of ambitious young men with whom I find no fault, and whose ambition I commend, have set their mark high, and in order to reach it have been forced to make use of every legitimate financial device. Here comes in the old and never-failing standby, "teaching." It is not the chosen profession of this aspiring young man, and he possibly regards it with such disgust that nothing short of the exigency of his case would compel him to swallow the nauseating dose, the only redeeming quality of which is that it is not to last. Should he happen, by a fortunate accident, to possess ability as a teacher, his attention will be drawn away toward what he intends shall be his life-work, so that in but few cases can we regard him as a valuable acquisition. These transient operators, augmented by a vast host of comparatively

uncultured, untrained tyros, who ere long, at our present rate of progress, will be a multitude that no man can number, have come sweeping down upon our rural schools, and to this crowd is to-day committed the task of educating the great mass of our rural school children. We are the rankest of optimists if we expect satisfactory progress to be the resultant of the spasmodic, desultory, and destructive efforts of these passing teachers. The right of the people to this higher Public School education is acknowledged. It forms a part of the Public School curriculum, but it is practically nullified by the enforced absence of the strong professional teacher. He would be a great public benefactor who could invent a machine, a sort of fanning mill, that would sift out the grains of natural teachers from the bushels of chaff. But in the absence of such a device, the next available thing is to induce our government to so perform its paternal functions that we may have the establishment and permanent maintenance of a class of professional teachers of such an order of merit as is demanded by the nature of the duties they have to perform, a profession built up and maintained, not for the purpose of subserving the interests of its members, but because the educational interests of the country imperatively demand its existence—a profession uninvaded by our brothers of the High School, and whose plums belong to itself so long as its members prove themselves worthy to possess them. The obstacles obstructing the entrance to this profession should be such as to deter all who have not made this their chosen calling, and should be of such a standard of difficulty as to exclude those whose abilities are not commensurate with the high character and importance of the work. No certificate should be granted to one whose non-professional education is less than the Junior Leaving standard. The Model School should disappear with the third-class teacher, and its place should be taken by the Normal training school, in which the course should not be less than one year in duration. It is here that the pruning knife should be first applied, and that rigidly and unsparingly. A novitiate of one year should follow, and here, I apprehend, will be the crucial test. The newly-fledged teacher will be thrown on his own resources, in an ungraded school, to sink or to swim. The born teacher will come to the surface, the other will as surely sink. The experienced and observant inspector will rightly average him up, and, if he fails to show that he is the possessor of the power, tact, and ability that should characterize the true teacher, his sun should go down. Government having gone thus far in the way of securing the taxpayer against imposition, and of guaranteeing him dollar for dollar, should, in the exercise of this same paternalism, still further encourage and stimulate him by classifying schools, and granting government aid very largely on the basis of this classification. Should the so-called objection be urged that the poor boy or girl would be shut out from this means of earning a living, I only reply that it is a question of brains and of energy, and not one of poverty, and, moreover, the profession is not for the individual, but for the people. Should it be objected that many of our rural schools are so backward that the engagement of such an expert as I have outlined would be superfluous, I reply that, while the well-taught, forward school creates a necessity for its own existence, the poorly taught, backward one never did, never will, create anything higher than the necessity for its existence. Should it be claimed that the responsibility of making such eliminations and classifications is too great for one poor inspector (do not understand me to mean either inefficient or poverty-stricken), I answer, let him have help if he cannot do it alone. The truth is that the great objection to these proposals is their excessive radicalism. Were it not for this, these changes, or changes analogous to them, would have little difficulty in obtaining adoption. It is difficult to realize an ideal, but a system fashioned more or less closely after the model thus roughly traced would, I believe, contain the elements of success, and go far to rescue our rural school pupils from present inertia and impending danger.

NO book in any literature can be for one moment compared with the Bible in its completeness, as a means either of ethical or spiritual culture.—*Jan Maclaren.*

\*A paper read before the Public School section of the Ontario Educational Association, April, 1896.