

A Brief Outline of the Work of the Parent-Teacher Movement

(By Mrs. A. T. Fuller, Corresponding Secretary, Provincial Parent-Teacher Federation of British Columbia.)

Eight years ago Parent-Teacher Associations were practically unknown in British Columbia. Now almost every school in the city of Vancouver has a Parent-Teacher organization. These are united by a central association known as the "Vancouver Federation." South Vancouver, North Vancouver, Point Grey, Richmond, and New Westminster each have a sufficient number of associations to have a local Federation. In other parts of the province there are separate or isolated associations, thirty or more (besides those in Victoria); these, with the city Federations, are joined to form a Provincial Parent-Teacher Federation.

When we remember that this movement was started in British Columbia during the Great War, and that it has continued to expand under the adverse conditions following it, this seems a remarkable growth. In its early history there were those who were unsympathetic—who felt that already there were plenty of organizations. But wiser folk said: "Don't discourage them. If there is no need for this P.T. Association it will die of itself." The fact that it has grown so steadily indicates that the need for the P.T. A. was there.

One factor which helped this growth was the realization, during the war, that our children are just about the most important possession, not only of every home, but of our province, our Dominion, and our Empire—that the future depends largely on the training and discipline, on the facilities for self-development which we ensure our children. In all this movement there is one underlying thought—we might almost call it an instinct, for it may be seen in some of the lowest forms of animal life—the instinct to care for and protect the young. In the lower animals the time during which the young need care and protection is comparatively short, but in the human race that time tends to be prolonged as a higher stage of civilization is reached. A High School Parent-Teacher Association is a highly specialized manifestation of this instinct.

Although so comparatively recent in British Columbia, this movement is not in itself new. Twenty-five years ago there were attempts to establish something along these lines in England, but they met with small success. In the United States, however, where free schools are universal, the seed fell upon suitable ground, so that for some years now they have been holding National Parent-Teacher Conventions every year. These are attended by representatives from almost every State in the Union. Australia has been doing good work, too, although the growth has been slow in that country. In Canada a similar movement was inaugurated several years ago in Ontario, and the expansion has been sufficient for that province to hold its "Fourth Annual Convention of Home and School Associations," as they are called there.

To some of those who first encouraged the formation of these associations in Vancouver, it seemed that they would fill a greater need in the city than in rural districts, but time has shown that this is not the case. Parent-Teacher Associations seem to be equally necessary and successful in the country as in the city, perhaps more so. They provide a central meeting place for all nationalities and creeds who come together on the common basis of their desire for the welfare of their children.

In some districts it has been found that the social diversion afforded by these meetings was very welcome. There soon followed a wish to better conditions in and about the local school. Some parents are dissatisfied with the conditions under which their children must spend their play hours. When they realize how important play is in the development of the child, and how much character may be affected by

rightly directed play, they look about for ways to improve the period of recreation. One association, at its second meeting, decided to erect a play shed, so that the children might play in the open air in all weathers. Other associations are providing balls, bats, playground equipment of every sort, and are encouraging sport by donating prizes for the annual sports day.

One association on Vancouver Island provided prizes in each class in the school for the child ranking first in the final examinations, and for the child making the highest percentage of improvement. The same P.T. A. was the means of obtaining a gold medal to be presented annually to the pupil making the highest marks in the matriculation examinations. The object in this case was to encourage boys and girls to remain in the high school to the end of their course.

In rural associations usually one of the first subjects to be considered is how to provide hot lunches for the children who must come a long distance. In some districts a committee of mothers take turns in making and serving hot soup or cocoa at noon, but this entails a great deal of work for busy women.

In many city schools children who show signs of malnutrition are served with milk once or twice a day, and those in charge believe that the results justify the labour. The milk is delivered in half-pint bottles, and each child is given a clean straw like those served with soda water. If rural districts could adopt some similar plan, and if some way could be devised for taking the chill off the milk, or even of serving it hot, the children might receive great benefit.

Every P.T. A. realizes the value of placing good books in the hands of growing children, and wherever an organization has been formed the school library has received early consideration. In some instances a separate collection has been compiled, consisting of books pertaining to health and child psychology, standard tests and similar subjects, for the use of parents and teachers of the school.

Many schools, helped out by a grant from the school board, have purchased pianos. Some have a gramophone, which is used to acquaint the children with all kinds of good music, besides being valuable in the teaching of folk-dancing and languages.

During the summer months a reading class among the parents might be successful. In one district the mothers met at different homes in turn and listened to resums of portions of some helpful book, while their children played on the lawns nearby. A reading from some entertaining work of fiction, and musical selections made these meetings more enjoyable.

A magic-lantern or moving-picture machine, secured by some schools, has been very helpful in teaching history, geography, nature study and other subjects.

The improvement and beautifying of school grounds is an important activity of P.T. A.'s, and it does not seem to be generally known that any school applying to the Government Nurseries at Essondale will be supplied with trees and shrubs for this purpose.

These are only a few of the ways in which each association can meet the needs in its own district. The great outcome of all these efforts of parents and teachers has been the awakening of the community conscience to problems of child welfare, and the preparation of the minds of the general public for the educational reforms which are bound to come.