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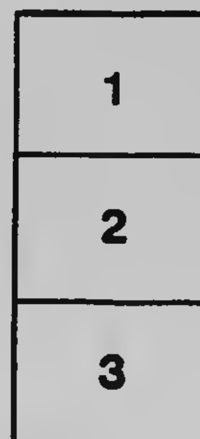

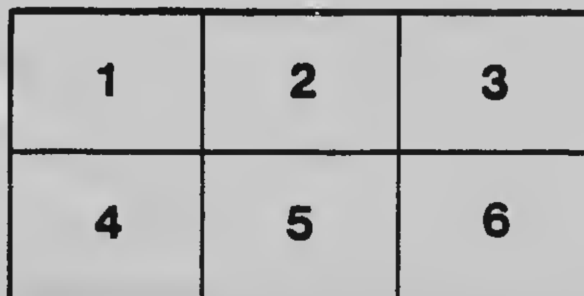

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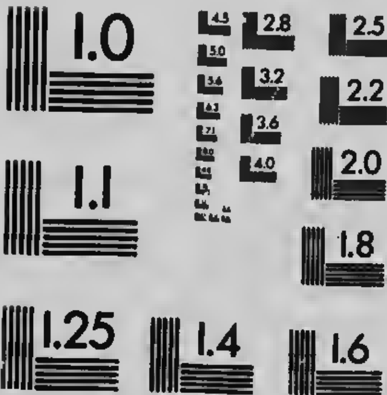

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The Education of a People

The Inaugural Lecture delivered at
Macdonald College

BY

GEORGE HERBERT LOCKE
Professor of the History and Theory of Education
and Dean of the School for Teachers

"The circumstances of a country, the possibilities under ordinary circumstances, and not the theories of writers, must be regarded in ordering the education of a people."—*Richard Mulcaster.*

MONTREAL
The Witness Press
1908

The Education of a People

In the dawning of England's greatness, in the reign of "good Queen Bess," there was a schoolmaster of national repute from whose words of educational wisdom I am taking the text of this inaugural address. Richard Mulcaster, Head Master of tho School of the Guild of the Merchant Taylors, said:—"The circumstances of a country, the possibilities under ordinary circumstances, and not the theories of writers, must be regarded in ordering tho education of a people." In a poetic form, and enlarged in its application, Robert Browning voiced the same sentiments when he said:

> "The common problem, yours, mine, everyone's
> Is not to fancy what were fair in life,
> Provided it could be—but finding first
> What may be, then find out how to make it fair
> Up to our means; a very different question."

The education of a people—What is the full significance of that phrase? Were I to address such a question to this audience, even though it be fair to surmise that all present have some interest in the subject and some ideas upon it, I doubt not I should receive widely divergent answers. The reason for this disagreement lies in the fact that education, like religion, is a peculiarly individual possession, and is therefore subject to individual opinion and even caprice. There was a time when so individual was the responsibility for education that men declined to recognise any obligation upon them for providing education for any but their own immediate family. But this century does not take kindly to such doctrine, and therefore for the protection of individuals in their social relationship and to provide for the solidarity of the State, it has been deemed wise among all civilised nations to insist upon a minimum of education (which in

this sense is synonymous with instruction) for those who are to be eligible for citizenship in the democracy. As it was among the Athenians, even so it is with us to-day in the insistence upon certain subjects being pursued for a certain length of time, that there be not only protection for society, but encouragement for the individual, and increased wealth and productiveness for the State. Our progress over that of ancient nations consists in the provision, at public expense, of the material equipment necessary for carrying out the desirable educational programme and the extension of the privileges of education to the female sex. In defence of this latter aspect of our progress I cannot do better than quote the quaint phraseology of Mulcaster where he says:

"Our country doth allow it, our duetie doth enforce it, their aptness calls for it, their excellencie demands it, and how dare private conceit once seem to withstand where so great and so rare circumstances do so earnestly commende!"

There are still those among us to whom the connotation of education is the three R's, that familiar trio, Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic, and who look askance at what they call the introduction of new subjects into the curriculum. They ask for the perfection of the means, for expertness in handling the tools. Their attitude reminds one of the man who, having a field, ploughed it, ploughed it again, and yet again; and on being asked if he meant to plant anything said, "No, I am cultivating it." As if planting were not as much cultivation as ploughing, and as if raising a crop were not of much more social value than mere exercise. I am taking for granted that in this day and generation there is no person who would deny to any of his fellow beings the minimum of education comprised within the limits of what we term "elementary," even though he may once in a while grumble at the school tax and may sometimes feel at heart like the old ladies of the Cranford type, to whom Archbishop Benson, when Chancellor of Lincoln, applied for a subscription to aid the night schools he was establishing for men and lads. They

said, "We give this to you, Mr. Chancellor, to show our regard for you, but for our own parts Patty and I prefer an ignorant poor."

To-day in this land we are fortunate in facing the problem of the education of a people, in being able to proceed on the assumption that it is agreed that education is for all the people. Lest there be those who may think that this came without a struggle and from any sentimental consideration instead of being a definitely political, practical, economic problem, let me call to mind the struggle in England not forty years since. The growth of democratic sentiment, the breaking down of class distinctions, arising in part from the development of manufactures, the growth of cities and the depopulation of the rural districts, brought about an agitation in England for government that would be more representative of the people. This resulted in the passage of the Reform Bill extending the franchise to hundreds of thousands who up to this time had had no voice in the affairs of the land. John Morley, in commenting on this and its effect on English life, said:—"After the extension of the franchise to the workmen everybody felt, in a happy phrase of that time, that 'we must educate our masters.'" Therefore hard upon the Reform Bill of 1867 came the Education Bill of 1870 to relieve the ignominy that attached to English education of that day, when over two millions of children were denied the benefits of any education. From this, and many other such illustrations that might be cited, it can be clearly proved that Aristotle was right when he said that education was after all the fundamental problem of politics; that Fichte was a true prophet when, in his address to the German nation during the winter of 1807-8, the darkest Germany had ever seen, he said, "It is education alone, the education of a worthy posterity, that can save us from the evils by which we are oppressed"; and that President Roosevelt was right when, in addressing the Moseley Commission on education in the United States, he said: "While education cannot of itself make a nation great,

no nation can be great without it." The ballot has brought a responsibility that can be met only by education. Therefore it is a State problem, and should be recognised in our government as far transcending in importance the departments of Railways, Public Works, Finance, Militia, or Trade and Commerce.

Politically it seems like a settled question, but individually and socially the problem is but beginning. Assuming that our belief is that education for all means equal opportunities for education for all our people, we are face to face with the problem of providing that the boy be not handicapped in his endeavour to become an efficient member of society by having been born in a certain part of the land where educational privileges are too meagre to give him a fair chance. The solution of this problem involves either the moving of the boy into more favourable surroundings or improving his present environment so that his opportunities will be improved. These are two of the methods now being employed in our land to aid in bringing about this desirable equalization of opportunity. This is that for which, as I understand it, the Macdonald Movement was begun and which has culminated in the founding of this College, whither come those who having exhausted the resources of their educational environment wish to develop and extend their opportunities for social service; and whence will depart those who will help to extend the gospel of equal opportunities for all. William Graham Sumner might be speaking for us when he says:

> "Rights should be equal because they pertain to chances, and all ought to have equal chances so far as chances are provided or limited by the action of society. The only help which is generally expedient, even within the limits of the private and personal relations of two persons to each other, is that which consists in helping a man to help himself. This always consists in opening his chances. *If* we help a man to help himself we*

* The italics are mine.

put him in a position to add to the wealth of the community by putting new powers in operation to produce. Instead of endeavouring to redistribute the acquisitions which have been made, among the existing classes, our aim should be to increase, multiply, and extend the chances."

Education is an affair which works itself out between the individual and his opportunities. Our mission as a College is to increase, multiply, and extend these opportunities for education among those whose situation prevents them from coming in contact with what are usually termed opportunities, and whose vocation has not had the advantage of the application of science to its socialization and advancement. The cities have been the centres of opportunity, and though we read much in current literature of the great men who came from the country, we must remember that it was in the city they became great—where the opportunities abounded. It is as a land of opportunity that the city appeals to the ambitious youth. The task for the educator who would see an education for all the people is to so increase the opportunities in the country that we may see in actual practice what Paulsen, one of Germany's greatest scholars, said would be the pride of his country:

"The right kind of village, the right kind of farm home, and the right kind of rural school unite to form the most perfect place of education to be found on God's earth for the years of childhood and boyhood. This rural domain offers all the possibilities of culture in the form in which the child needs them and can use them for the development of its bodily and mental powers. I do not hesitate to assert that no University offers to its students in greater perfection what they need than do a village and a good village school offer to the growing boy what he needs and what he can master and turn into real power of knowledge and action."

Man is in many respects a creature of circumstance, and environment does much to shape his future. To use all the forces of human intelligence to develop the circumstances and the environment of the great class of our people who live in the rural districts, so that these circumstances and this environment may present to them increased opportunities for work and for enjoyment—such is the problem in Canada for the education of our people, and such is the peculiar, particular mission of Macdonald College.

Another way of looking at this same mission is to recognize that nurture, which Plato tells us is the essence of education, should act upon and develop nature. Mr. Lester Ward, the eminent sociologist, gives an interesting example from his own experience which may illustrate my point in a manner that will be eminently suitable in a College of this kind. He says:

"There is a certain rather large monoecious grass native of the warmer parts of America, attaining a height of about two feet, and bearing at its summit a handsome panicle of male flowers, and on the culm below one or two fertile spikes three inches long and half an inch in diameter, having the seeds arranged around the elongated rachis. Its botanical name is *Zea Mays,* and the aborigines of tropical America used these seeds for food and cultivated the plant in their imperfect way. The Europeans, after the discovery of America, carried this process of cultivation much farther, accustomed the plant to more northern regions, to which it readily adapted itself, and at length, and on the principle which I have been explaining, enabled it to develop into our maize, or Indian corn. The grass I have described represented all that nature could do. The vast cornfields of the West, the stalks fifteen feet in height, loaded with three or four ears, each nearly a foot in length and two or three inches in diameter, represent what nurture has done, and this is a fair example of the relative influence of nature and nurture in all departments of life.

"Many years ago when I was an enthusiastic amateur

botanist," Mr. Ward goes on to say, "I was out on one of my rambles herborizing in a rather solitary and neglected spot not many miles from the National Capital, and I passed over a little area that was made green and striking by the presence of a peculiar and, to me, wholly unfamiliar grass. I examined it attentively, and though tolerably well acquainted with the native grasses of that vicinity, I was altogether puzzled with this little stranger. It was very green, and well in flower and fruit, but it had a certain unnatural and dishevelled appearance indicative of hard times and a severe struggle for existence. I gathered a goodly quantity of it, carefully placed it in my portfolio, and carried it home with my other trophies. At my leisure, and with all needful appliances, I proceeded to analyze it. I was then skilled in plant dissection, and in a moment I compelled my little grass to reveal its name. To my astonishment it announced tself as *Triticum aestivum.* As most of you know *Triticum aestivum* is that noble cereal which furnishes the larger part of the breadstuff of the world. Can this be wheat? I said half doubting my accuracy. Again I put it to the test, and again the answer was *Triticum aestivum.* Yet a third time I interrogated it, but like some stubborn spirit-rapping, it still spelled out the same words. There was no mistake. This poor degenerate little grass had sprung from grains of wheat that had by some unexplained accident been sown or spilled in the midst of the native vegetation. There it had sprouted and grown, and sought to rise into that majesty and beauty that is seen in a field of waving grain. But alas! it could not. At every step it felt the combined resistance of an environment no longer regulated by intelligence. It missed the fostering care of man, who removes competition, destroys enemies, and creates conditions favourable to the highest development. Man gives to the cultivated plant an opportunity to progress, and the difference between my little starveling grass and the wheat of the well-tilled field is a difference of cultivation only, and not at all of native capacity. In short, it is the difference between nature and nurture."

Nurture does not mean, as is often suggested, the coddling of the weak, but it provides an opportunity for the emergence of the strong. It is the gospel of the liberation of the powers upon something worth accomplishing. This something that is worth accomplishing is the social ideal of education, with certain great common fundamental principles, but differing in its applications according to the circumstances of the particular part of the country, and the possibilities under ordinary circumstances. For instance, one of the strongest reasons for the introduction of manual training into the schools of our cities is, because it supplies to the city boy a training in independent workmanship and ocular demonstration of efficiency or inefficiency which the boy in rural communities obtains as the result of part of the routine of home duties.

The danger in all our social institutions, and especially in those conservative institutions known as the Church and the School, is that the marvellous changes in our environment, in the conditions under which we live and work, whether in the field, the factory, or the office, may not be taken cognisance of by these institutions, and so their usefulness as guides and social counsellors may be impaired. We too often hesitate to face the newly arisen circumstances, and it seems an almost impossible task to ask that we adapt our educational work to the altered conditions of modern life. To some of our people it seems insulting that life should have dared to change. They believe, or say they believe, in the old-time education, but it is interesting to notice that they are willing to follow the fashion in everything else from millinery to self-binders.

We have been so accustomed to speak of the school as reflecting civilization that we have come to look upon it as a species of proverb incontestably true. If, however, we examine the education of to-day and compare it with the social progress and the changes in our environment, we shall see that too often the school, which is, of course, the concrete embodiment of our educational theory, not only does not reflect the civilization of to-day, but reflects a civilization

that has long since passed away. History contains some glaring examples of this, and perchance in the minds of those gathered here to-day some applications of the truth of this statement may even now be on the threshold of consciousness. We all are ready to subscribe to the doctrine that "times change," but we seem to hesitate to acquiesce in the other part of the proverb, or at least in its application to life, viz., "We change with them." If we realized this we should more enthusiastically endorse the position of those educational prophets of to-day who are urging us to look to the occupations in which modern men are necessarily engaged, and who seem to see the possibilities of constructing on these subjects a curriculum with such additions and improvements as may be needed to make it definitely useful in promoting the social efficiency of the modern individual. Through the familiar and useful occupations, the intelligence may be as well trained as through the logic-grinding process of the antique curriculum, and, indeed, to more social purpose, by demonstrating how scientific method may be usefully employed in ordinary pursuits, and how valuable manipulative skill may be thus incidentally acquired.

But even were it true that education in the school reflects the civilization of to-day, would that be desirable? It means that civilization has to go ahead in some blind empirical manner, and after, perchance, many failures, establishes another outpost. Then comes the school and tries to adapt itself to these new surroundings. But I have suggested in a preceding sentence that civilization needs guidance. Is it not reasonable for us to expect that the one institution upon which all can unite should show us the way to a greater and better civilization? To show the way, education must provide a new and ever progressing environment; the school must be the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, at all times the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual reality that urges forward and points the way towards greater possibilities for usefulness, and for enjoyment through that usefulness.

And where are we standing to-day in Canada? Notwithstanding the sectarian clouds that from time to time seemed to darken the skies, it is manifest that education with us is a State function, on account of its social and political significance, and that the only debatable question is the limit beyond which the State does not need protection, and therefore hesitates to furnish compulsory laws or free material. In our country, owing to its synthetic origin, it is but natural to expect that the conduct of education should be reserved by the province, and that each province should develop some characteristics peculiar to its climate, soil, and social conditions and traditions. This has been the case, and each of the older provinces of the Dominion shows certain peculiarities that distinguish it from all others. The vast stretch of country across a great continent, and the sparseness of the population, have conduced towards the isolation of the province and the perpetuation of these peculiarities until our school systems have in truth become provincial, and a national ideal is but a dim prophecy. Social and religious traditions have added to the complications, and to-day we stand facing the problem of developing a national spirit out of these more or less similar provincial ideals. Forbidden to raise a customs tariff against one another, the provinces have raised what is virtually an educational protective tariff wall, and in some of our provinces we have had the anomalous condition of a democracy supporting what seems to be an autocratic educational machine for the repression of individuality, and for the conformation of the population to the standard of the average man. While in politics there may be some ground for holding strongly to the doctrine of provincial rights, it seems little conducive to national life to have this doctrine applied to education. Why not apply it to the Church, a social organization with a similar unifying ideal, and allow no migration of clergymen from one province to another without the passing of a provincial examination!

It would seem that our phrase, "the education of a

people," has a different connotation in different localities, be those small or large, and that migration from one to the other is, for the teacher, attended with obvious disadvantages. The just inference from this state of affairs, and, indeed, the stumbling block to progress, is the idea that the possession of certain facts, or the acquisition of certain powers by the methods laid down by certain regulations and in a certain atmosphere, is calculated to bring about the education of a people. Is it possible, then, by adding together these various provincial ideals, to bring about a national ideal? or is it something that comes not by addition nor accretion nor averages, not by might nor by power, but by the spirit moving in the hearts of men, independent of locality? If it is the latter, then the method of developing a national idea for Canada must be through the inspiration of men and women, rather than through the enactment of laws.

For this purpose was Macdonald College founded, and from her walls are to go forth those who will proclaim the gospel of equal opportunities for education for all the youth of Canada, who will urge that the spirit of education is of vastly greater importance than the letter, and who will consider the practicability, the suitability, and the value of the education for the people, to the end that the circumstances of the people and the possibilities under ordinary circumstances may prevail in the ordering of education. Here in Canada, and especially in this College to-day, as we gather in this first public assembly, can we not recognise the picture that Mr. Wells draws for us in his address on "The Discovery of the Future," delivered before the Royal Institution some five years ago, when he said:

"Everything seems pointing to the belief that we are entering upon a progress that will go on forever with an ever widening and ever more confident stride. The reorganization of society that is going on now beneath the traditional appearances of things is a kinetic reorganization. We are getting into marching order. We have struck our camp for ever, and we are out upon the roads—there is no shock, no

epoch-making incident; but then there is no shock at a cloudy daybreak. Insensibly we are in the day."

Even so do we stand to-day, having emerged into the daylight, the dawning of a new day for many in our country. Macdonald College stands to-day a living monument, and if the founder would permit a reference to the ancient classics, I should be tempted to say that Horace's oft-quoted ode, "Exegi monumentum aere perennius," never had a better application, for this is not a static monument, but a dynamic agency for efficient citizenship which will live in the hearts of the men and women of Canada whose lives have been made more efficient and more happy through its influence.

Let me adapt the words of George William Curtis at the founding of Cornell, that great University for the people, from which in spirit and breadth of conception we may claim descent, and say, "Macdonald College starts out to-day with all its sails set, its rigging full and complete from stem to stern, its crew embarked, its passengers on board, and even while I speak to you the ship begins to glide over the waves; it goes forth rejoicing, every stitch of canvas spread, all the colors flying, its bells ringing, its heartstrings beating with hope and joy; and I say—God bless the ship, God bless the founder, God bless the crew and undergraduates. May God bless all the passengers!"