

TOPICS OF THE DAY

“FAILING SCHOOLS”: EDUCATION: REFORM NEEDED: “PEACEFUL PENETRATION”: OUR ONLY BULWARK: VATICINATION.

A RECENT provincial report contains the statement that “the schools are failing completely in the development of rural life”. Such an assertion should not be permitted to pass unconsidered. It manifestly implies censure of the schools. Is that censure justified or justifiable? Before this question can be properly answered, another must be asked and answered. What is the purpose of our common schools? Were they established, are they maintained, for the immediate benefit of the community, or was and is their primary object the good of the individual and only ultimately, through the individual, the advancement of the welfare of the community? Let us try to be perfectly frank in considering and answering.

Historically, it is indisputable that the main plea of the earlier advocates of free common schools was the personal right of all citizens to participation in the advantages of at least a degree of the mental enlightenment and elevation which education alone can supply. It was denounced as unfair and unjust that only those whom fortune specially favoured should enjoy school privileges. The principal argument for them was that the community alone could equalize, to a certain extent, the educational privileges of its members, and that as it did so its compensation would be not only a happier and more contented citizenry, but the development of better and more competent citizens. The State was urged, in the first place, to do its duty by its citizens and, as an incentive to action, it was promised that they would be fitted to do their duty by it. But the fundamental idea was justice for the individual by affording an opportunity to all for improvement in life. This will hardly be gainsaid.

Must it not be concluded, then, that the schools were founded and are being maintained primarily for the individual, and only secondarily for the community? The Dominion, as the super-State in Canada, has nothing to do with education under the terms of the British North America Act, Canada’s written constitution. Education has been committed exclusively to the care of the prov-

inces, separately. Does this not afford striking if not conclusive evidence that it was regarded as concerning the individual rather than the nation? And does it not suggest pointedly that a provincial committee, in reporting that "the schools are failing completely in the development of rural life", mistook the main aim not only of rural schools but of all education?

The specific aim of anything worthy of the name of education is or should be to make better, happier and more capable men and women. It should not be to prejudice youthful minds or warp them in any particular direction, but to fit them as completely as possible to judge and act for themselves, and to steer their future course free from premature bias and probable misguidance. Regarded and directed in this way, the schools would not be mere purveyors of more or less doubtful "facts" labelled information, as there is too much reason to fear that they are becoming or have become,—not merely an artificial means of preparing boys and girls for still more artificial written examinations, but sources of mental energy, exercise and development, from which the community as well as the individual could not help but ultimately benefit?

The thought of the committee which made the report alluded to appears to have been that the rural schools should be concerned in, and devoted to, inducing the children of farmers to devote themselves to farming. No idea could be more erroneous. Its only excuse is that it is "popular" at present, and is becoming more so. Its cause is inadequate popular education, and wrong conceptions of education. It is a grotesque putting of the plough before the horse. The education given by the schools is intended to be a breaking and preparing of mental soil that it may bear the practical fruits of later specialized sowing. It is intended to fit the mind of the individual for the special instruction and training which he is later to receive in his chosen calling. Different degrees of preliminary education are demanded for different vocations. The more of general education one has, in preparation for any of them, the better and the more quickly and easily will the individual master and become expert in the one to be followed. The notion that children can be better fitted for their life-work by distracting their attention to it from their proper work in school, while it is of necessity still more or less uncertain, is one of those crude fancies to which the failure of real education gives natural rise. So-called business men are so rudimentary in their conceptions as not to be ashamed of being heard clamouring that the schools should devote themselves to turning out assistants for their shops or accountants for their offices. They do not even pause to ask themselves what

would be the inevitable result of such an attempt. It is the failure of real education in the schools which is making the young people, whom business men are forced to receive from them into their employment, often so incapable of acquiring and profiting by the special training which will always be necessary there, no matter how ridiculously the schools may attempt to specialize in their teaching of as many individuals as they have pupils.

The cry for special agricultural instruction in rural schools is surely the most absurd, as well as the most shrill, in all the clamour. In Canada our whole public policy for years past has been directed to building up urban centres of population, at the expense of the rural districts, by the attractions which they offer to country-dwellers. Yet there are those who now want farmers not only to be content with the station in which it has pleased Fate to place them, but to have their children taught to do likewise, and thereby unfitted for occupying desirable positions elsewhere. It is a well-known fact that the ordinary Canadian farmer can seldom make provision at home for more than one of his sons. What is to become of the others of his family, if compelled or even encouraged to specialize in agricultural subjects during their school days instead of brightening and improving their minds by means of general education? And what would the practical farmers of any imaginable rural district in Canada be likely to think of the ministrations in agricultural education, to their intended farmer-son or sons, of almost any one of our young-women teachers? There are few but such now left. The ordinary rural-school boy or girl is usually more able, because better and more practically qualified, to give the average rural-school teacher lessons in country lore than is she to impart such instruction to her pupils, much less to their parents.

If these are the actual facts of the case, would not persons disposed to deplore publicly that "the schools are failing completely in the development of rural life", do much better to shed their tears elsewhere, and to more useful purpose?

IF our Canadian free-school system is failing, as there is too much reason to believe that it is, to a regrettable extent, this is not because it is not specializing more in vocational teaching, but because it is mistaking information for education. It cannot be repeated too often, or too deeply impressed on the public mind, that knowledge—even useful knowledge—is not education. The acquisition of knowledge is of course an essential part of education, but it is only a part. One may have stores of information, and yet be not

only practically uneducated, but really ignorant as well as incapable. It is this fact that our schools and those responsible for them either do not comprehend or are disregarding. Education is the "leading out" and development of mental and physical faculties. How is that to be effected by schools which address their efforts mainly to the memories of pupils? From the day most children enter the common schools until they leave, their time is devoted almost exclusively to "learning lessons" from prescribed books. The very word "teacher", which we have substituted for the good old word "master", is definitely significant of the misunderstanding which has arisen with regard to the proper functions of an educator. A *teacher* is an impartor of information. A *master* is a ruler, a guide, a director, to whom his disciples or pupils look for much more than mere instruction. A certain amount of information must always go with education, but only as a means, not as an end.

This is what our common schools have apparently forgotten, or are losing sight of. A child must be taught to read and count. It must be shown how to write. After that, it must educate itself, if it is ever to be educated—under direction and with necessary help, it goes without saying. Of how much value is the mere ability to read a few prescribed text-books, to write a more or less legible hand, to make simple computations, apart from the self-exercise and self-development which the constant and varied use of these accomplishments alone can give? Yet the ordinary child is dragged, not led, through the years of the common school course, ever "learning" to read, to write and to compute, mostly without a hint as to how this knowledge, in school or elsewhere, is to be put to use for its own mental progress. A few additional facts concerning what are called history and geography are usually added, and there is some "learning about" grammar. This is usually all, except in rare cases. There is no reading for the ordinary pupil other than the prescribed "readers", and very little of that. Only a few sentences a day for each pupil.

Notwithstanding the present cheapness and abundance of books, no unprescribed book is put in their hands or discussed with the individual or the class. It would probably be a shock to most communities if a newspaper were introduced and read in school. It seldom dawns even on teachers that a pupil who can read fairly well in the set "reader" may be, and often is, quite incapable of reading intelligently or intelligibly a simple newspaper paragraph. The ordinary child knows only the language of the "readers", and is lost amid the printed words of everyday life. If a pupil of exceptionally enquiring mind happens to want to know the meaning

or the pronunciation of a word, he "asks teacher". The dictionary is a sealed book to most schools. The pupils usually do not even know how to find a word in it. They have not the remotest idea of how to ascertain from it the pronunciation of words. It is the same with other facts. It is always "ask teacher", never, "find out for yourself". How many schools are equipped with either dictionaries of value or encyclopaedias? How many pupils are taught the habit, and shown how to go to the printed sources of information to acquire knowledge for themselves?

Facts are infinitely less important than words for mental development. Old-time grammars asserted that "a word is the sign of an idea". That may or may not have been an adequate definition. One thing is certain; every significant word expresses an idea. Another equally certain thing is that the more words one really knows, the more ideas one is likely to have. It is definitely known that without words there can be no intelligent thought, except of the kind of which dumb animals are as capable as we. A very distinguished and observant business man has said: "The standard of intelligence in any business office may be gauged by the quality and quantity of the vocabulary used by the office and administration forces." These are true as well as suggestive words. Yet our schools are conducted in total disregard of the practical wisdom which they express. Pupils leave them with only the few half-understood or wholly misunderstood *literary* words to be found in the more advanced "readers", in addition to the usually narrow vocabulary of their own home and surroundings. Their time in school has been spent in "learning things", to pass written "grading examinations". Written grading examinations are the curse of our Canadian schools, and the inexpugnable enemies of education. They afford a plenary excuse for incapable teachers; and they utterly misdirect and hopelessly handicap both teachers and pupils.

Rural schools, of the failure of which with regard to the community bitter complaint is made, are the special victims of written examinations and the grading system of which they are the exponents. In earlier times, that is, until a generation ago, rural schools were free from these depressing restrictions. The children attending them were advanced mainly on their reading ability, which was exactly as it should be. Intelligent reading opens wide the gateways of knowledge to the individual, and makes progress in any direction possible to personal effort. The Bible, that "well of English undefiled", made an important part of the reading of pupils, and gave them command of a vocabulary unexampled in breadth and worth. The pupils could go and come to school in

accordance with the season and the requirements of the farm or home, without disturbing the school economy in any way. The older pupils remained at home to help when active farm work was in progress and to supplement, by practical manual training and nature lessons in the fields, the knowledge gained in school. The younger children, debarred from school by winter conditions, could then attend and receive special attention from the teacher. There were periods in every season when all or nearly all could be present without embarrassment to one another or the teacher, for there was no rigid classification, no fixed "course" to which all had to conform regardless of educational consequences. Young people long past school age were often to be found in attendance to take up special subjects in accordance with ascertained personal needs or wishes.

Now, the rural school has become a machine, to the requirements of which all must bow. The pupils must be in regular attendance throughout a whole year, regardless of home requirements, or they must lose place in their "classes". An older pupil, by private work really far better educated than the teacher, may be relegated to a primary class because of not being "up", that is, unable to pass written examinations, in some one of the "prescribed" but absolutely unimportant subjects of the "course". Pupils must be classified, and must "take" all the subjects prescribed or none.

Those who hold, and hold justly, that the rural schools—and they might include all the common schools—are proving a disappointment in community development might look for—with a certainty of finding—the cause in irrational grading, destructive written examinations, cramping rules of attendance, too long terms, and incompetent "teachers" themselves the victims of the system under which they work and by which the path to education is barred and diverted to "learning things", that examinations may be "passed".

THE reform urgently demanded by the school situation is not more vocational teaching, not the prejudicing of young minds in one direction or another, but a return to real educative means and methods. Such means are the teaching of pupils to read, to enquire, to investigate, to think and to act for themselves. The methods must vary with the school and the teacher. There is scarcely any conceivable situation in which right methods are impossible. Scotland in other days, it is generally admitted, had its national educational character, so much admired, mainly formed by its "dame schools". Those schools were conducted with few

appliances other than "horn-books", slates and pencils, and the Bible. But the "dame" was usually a woman of character and experience with children. The very limitation of means prevented her straying far from the right path. The Bible is not a mere book, but a library, a whole national literature of the most wonderful kind. It contains history, geography, law, sociology, descriptive writing, poetry, legend, everything to interest, arouse and instruct the young mind. No one who has learned to read it aright can be pronounced uneducated.

The earlier school "readers" which superseded the Bible had at least the merit of containing little but the best English literature. We have changed all that of late in Canada. Our "readers" are now largely composed of selections from so-called Canadian literature, much of it crude in style and uninteresting in matter. To this uninspiring when not actually narrowing or repellent mental pabulum our school-children are rigidly restricted by regulation and custom. Instead of being encouraged or tempted to go elsewhere for their reading, they are repelled from all good reading. They either do not read at all after leaving school, or else seek a change in cheap and not infrequently nasty novels, to the exclusion of more desirable books. However, even such reading would be greatly preferable to no reading at all, because it extends knowledge of words, if only those who resort to it had acquired in school the habit of informing themselves concerning each new or unknown word that they encounter. So long as a satisfactory knowledge of words, their origin and use, is obtained, the means matters less than the end.

But the mere memorizing of words and their meanings is not sufficient in any case. Words are for use in speaking and writing as well as in thinking. Therein lies the great opportunity of the schools. What the pupils learn, even from their present "readers", can and should be made use of for their general education. It is not enough for children or adults to know, or think they know, what they have read. They need incessant practice both in speaking and in writing. Only in this way can they acquire the habit of thinking clearly and expressing their thoughts accurately, of forming opinions of their own, and stating these opinions so that others can comprehend them. That way, and that way only, lies mental development and rational independence of thought and action. While that way is persistently blocked or disregarded, in order that children may be "taught", much as parrots are, for examination purposes alone and not for their own improvement, happiness and usefulness to the community, why should we be surprised that our schools are not doing more valuable public work?

THE untimely and discouraging discussion of "Canada's Future", which has been going on in Great Britain of late, has had the effect which was to be expected. It has stirred up latent "annexationism" in the United States, and caused depression of national spirit in the Dominion. The American press is taking due notice, and the American press is becoming more and more the chief purveyor of opinion to Canadian readers. In the last number of *The Dalhousie Review* a talented Old Country writer, Mr. Hugh Martin of the London *Daily News*, gave sugar-coated, not to say surreptitious, expression to what would appear to be prevailing British ideas on this subject. It is not necessary to say that Mr. Martin's intentions were probably everything but unfriendly to Canada. From the very centre of the Dominion his view was obstructed, he intimates, if not obscured, by great American industrial and commercial monuments. "Chicago, Duluth, Minneapolis" constantly crossed his vision like spectres—spectres with portentous shadows "cast before". He names them twice in one paragraph. "Electricity", he writes, "makes the wheatpits (of these cities) one with that of Winnipeg", the seat of the Canadian grain trade—union already, in interest at least. Even as far west as Regina the scene does not materially change for him. "The first and the last and the middle thing that strikes one," he continues, "is that Canada is suffering from the malady known as arrested development, and is bitterly conscious of the fact." He adds: "There are other nations on the globe that are also suffering from the disease, but they are not conscious of it in the same way, because they are not next-door neighbours to the United States of America."

This is the key-note of Mr. Martin's article, and it is unmistakably a minor one. In the close proximity of "the alarmingly prosperous colossus of the New World" he sees at once "Canada's greatest blessing and deepest curse". He was struck by nothing more forcibly than by the fact that Canada "is trying to live up to a material standard which, at present, is not naturally hers"—a standard of capitalization appropriate enough to a highly developed nation of 115 million souls, but unsuitable to an immature one of nine millions, and therefore likely to produce a condition of overstrain in all departments of the body politic. Mr. Martin adds:

Canada and the United States are one, however rigidly they may draw their frontiers, however high they may pile their tariff walls. Yet at one and the same time they are distinct entities, with their own history and their own loyalties, and the stresses created by such a dual relationship bear heavily on the lesser of the two. A dozen years ago Canada was full of faith in her ability to live up

to her big neighbour, and laid plans accordingly—poured out money on railways and buildings and schemes of education, with an enthusiasm that may have been magnificent but was certainly not business. For world reasons, things have gone wrong, and the simple fact is that Canada can no longer—at any rate for a time—stand the American pace. That makes her “grumpy”, and no wonder. She is far more prosperous, far less heavily taxed, far more comfortable (within the limits of her youth and rawness) than any of the countries of the Old World, but she is less prosperous, more heavily taxed, less comfortable than America. Our neighbours, the people we move about among, invariably become our standard of comparison.

This is far from a hopeful statement of the situation, however much truth there may be in it; and there is little to question. But there is worse immediately to follow, for Mr. Martin proceeds to mention directly the one great and only real menace to the Dominion. He writes that in the meantime, while Canada is recuperating, “*American penetration* develops along all the lines of approach.” Every book-shop showed him that Canada’s reading was American. Canada bought literature, or “near literature”, from the United States last year to the amount of over four and a half million dollars. She bought only a little over thirty-three thousand dollars’ worth from Great Britain. Mr. Martin found American newspapers and periodicals, with enormous circulation in Canada, unanimously proclaiming the abounding prosperity of the United States and affecting to deplore the business depression of Great Britain. He gives figures from the Customs returns to prove the extent of American business penetration as compared with that of the Old Country. “Naturally”, he concludes, “these facts set me to asking myself how, if America has already permeated the Dominion so thoroughly, it can be held that there is no immediate prospect of the two nations coalescing through the absorption of the weaker by the more powerful.”

The only satisfactory answer which he could find was in the old saying that “man does not live by bread alone”; in other words, that only sentiment stands between us and annexation. Mr. Martin adds many kind and complimentary words with regard to Canada and her opportunities as a field for British settlement, but the significant and impressive part of his article is outlined by the foregoing quotations. His conclusions are practically those which have been finding expression in the home press. Those conclusions are now being re-echoed, with suggestive unanimity, by United States publications which, for a long time past, have been silent on the subject.

IN the light of known facts, and the expressed opinions of on-lookers, it would be false patriotism on the part of Canadians to close their eyes to their own situation and that of their country. It is obvious that the Dominion is in a "parlous state", which threatens to become worse, unless we take prompt thought for the morrow, and, having definitely made up our minds, fortify our wills and govern our actions in accordance with our decision. Is it or is it not true, as Mr. Martin and many other writers, both English and American, believe, that sentiment is our only bulwark against annexation? If so, it cannot be too speedily buttressed and reinforced. It is now being, and long has been, sapped and weakened from day to day, under our very eyes, without resistance or protest.

Mr. Martin points directly to one of the most damaging of all the engines of assault, the American press, which is not merely enfranchised but welcomed everywhere in Canada, and is in constant operation. It is it which is rapidly Americanizing the Dominion, and will soon have made our people as American as those of the United States. It has introduced or is introducing every absurdity of American social and public life. It is broadcasting "the American language". It has been the means of flooding Canada with every vulgar or grotesque organization, notion or custom to which the United States has given birth—even the Ku-Klux-Klan. Many, if not most, of our publications have abandoned their dignified habits and customs, to crawl in the slimy wake of the American sensational newspaper. They feed their readers, young and old, on monstrous American caricatures of humanity and repulsive American slang, fitted if not deliberately intended to bring into derision and degrade all that should be held sacred and decently preserved.

That Canada is being steadily and rapidly Americanized is neither to be disputed nor doubted. And the most threatening feature of the process is the cult of the Almighty American dollar which has been so thoroughly established. It is with money in the end that our neighbours hope and expect to entice us into political union with them. It is by means of it alone that they will succeed, if and when they do. Mr. Martin pointed straight at the real danger when he wrote, "American penetration develops along all the lines of approach". The Germans, before the war, had reduced "peaceful penetration" to a science. The Americans have thoroughly mastered that science. Loyalty alone will never enable us to withstand its insidious advances. What country in the world was more patriotic than Scotland, or had people more loyal to their

own institutions than were the Scottish? What country ever cherished more cordial dislike of a neighboring country than had Scotland for England, just before the parliamentary union? But Scotland had been "peacefully penetrated" after the union of the Crowns, and she dropped into the arms of her stronger southern neighbour like ripe fruit from a tree in its season. So, if the "peaceful penetration" of Canada from the south continues unchecked and without counter movement, it needs no prophet to foretell what the result must and will be.

A recent American writer in *The Atlantic Monthly* sets the end of the process as "probably within the next ten years, and certainly in the next twenty-five." "Within that time," he predicts, "one of the following things *must* happen: 1. Canada will become an integral part of the United States. 2. Canada will remain politically British, but will have complete economic union with the United States. 3. Canada will become more firmly attached to the British Empire by new ties of sentiment—the result of British settlement in Canada on a great and organized scale—and by new economic ties in the form of a very substantial measure of intra-Imperial free trade.

The time set by this writer for the fulfilment of his first and favourite prediction, or either of its alternatives, may be and probably is too short, but one may reasonably conclude that the *denouement*, whatever it may disclose, will come in the life-time of another generation. If the end is annexation, as it now undeniably threatens to be, Canadians in accepting it peaceably, as of course they will have to do, will find that they have "bunkoed" themselves far worse than ever rustic was "done" by a circus "pea and shell" manipulator. The determining factor in their decision could only be expectation of material gain, and that is exactly what they would not realize. No notion could be more chimerical than that "the Americans, if they *owned* Canada, *would make it*, economically, *as they have made the United States.*" In the first place, the Americans have not made the United States as a country. The great and diversified natural endowments of the country have made them an exceptionally populous and wealthy nation.

There would be less inducement for Americans or American capital to come to Canada after annexation than there is now. A broad trans-continental belt of American States, similar in resources and climate to those of Canada's provinces, would still lie between us and the important bases of American capital. If it were so highly profitable as supposed to cross that belt, it would have been crossed long ago. Where is it being crossed, except in Ontario,

which is much nearer than any of the other provinces to the centres of American wealth? British Columbia is as prosperous to-day as the neighboring state of Washington to her south—and far more progressive. The same is true of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba with reference to the States of Montana, Dakota and Minnesota. Ontario compares favourably in development, and in all respects, with Wisconsin, Michigan and Ohio, her neighbours across the Great Lakes. Quebec has no reason to be ashamed of comparison with New England. Montreal is fast outstripping Boston in population, industry and commerce. The three Maritime Provinces are in every way as fortunate and progressive as their nearest New England neighbours, Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont. Why have not the Americans made their northern row of States great in comparison with Canada, as it is fancied they would “make Canada” were she politically united with them?

There is no analogy between the development of Scotland after the parliamentary union and what would be the circumstances of Canada after annexation. Scotland and England were and are complementary countries. Canada is permanently elbowed out of touch with the main body of the United States by a wide stretch of directly and actively rival territory. She has nothing to hope from political union which she is not more likely to gain by maintaining her independence.

The second alternative of the *Atlantic Monthly* writer—“Commercial Union”—is entirely out of the question. Canada has already spoken definitely, at the polls, on that question, and has never shown any indication of a disposition to change her mind. This, then, leaves for her, according to the American writer, only a choice between annexation and closer economic and social relations with the Empire in general and the mother land in particular. What her present choice would be, were it directly expressible, there need be no doubt. What it may be a generation hence if American “peaceful penetration”, British economic aloofness and Canadian apathy continue, it is difficult to foretell, if not to conjecture. The main hope for the future is that Canadians will soon arouse themselves, and stand up in manly and determined defence of their great national birthright, in the closest possible co-operation with Great Britain.

WHILE by way of prophesying—and the function of true prophecy, be it noted, is to warn and advise as to the natural consequences of existing conditions and tendencies rather than directly to foretell—it may be as well to go a little further. Any

possible popular movement in Canada for annexation will originate in Ontario, probably in Toronto, and spread thence to the West. There is a continuing possibility that the West may break away from the Dominion at some unforeseeable time, for some unanticipated cause. The breaking away of the West would be tantamount to its annexation, which would, inevitably, almost immediately, if not directly, follow. If the West were to go, Ontario would speedily take the same course, since she is economically dependent on the West, which has been developed largely in her interests. Force will never be resorted to, for it would be worse than useless to restrain any considerable section of the Dominion really bent on secession.

Quebec, it is safe to presage, will not voluntarily join the United States, and therefore will stand indefinitely by herself, for the reason that her conquest by force would be too costly for all concerned, and she would ever after be too troublesome a possession for the United States, whose people would regard even her willing adherence to their government as a doubtful gain in view of its disturbing influence on their politics. The Maritime Provinces will never willingly sever their British connection. It is too precious to them historically, racially, and economically. They, like Great Britain, are, and are destined to be, if left to themselves, world-traders rather than the annex of any isolated country. They love, as much as they need, the flag which their trade follows. Canada could not entice them into annexation. The United States would never dream of forcing them into it. Therefore, whatever may happen, sooner or later, to the greater part, *in size*, of the Dominion, the Maritime Provinces will be separate and apart from it. Quebec, for different reasons, would be as unlikely as the Maritime Provinces to cut adrift from the Empire.

Consequently, it is safe to predict, whatever else may come to pass, that there will continue indefinitely to be a British North America as well as a United States of the same continent, and that four of the nine provinces of the Dominion will be permanent members of it, whether or not in union with one another.

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