

Adult Education in Prince Edward Island*Alumni Prize Essay*

read by

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Not since the mediaeval world was broken up has western civilization faced such a crisis as that which confronts it today. When the great industrial change occurred about a century and a half ago, it came so quickly that people did not know how to adapt themselves to the new conditions. Every one talked about freedom, yet very few knew what it actually meant to be free; every one talked about democracy, but very few knew even its fundamental principles. Lulled into complacency, and worse still, into inertia, by a continual harping on the greatness of democracy and of so-called progress, people had allowed themselves to drift so perilously near the rocks that the economic structure of the world was greatly endangered and our very civilization almost destroyed. The fate of civilization is still trembling in the balance, for the causes which brought it to the brink of the abyss are still at work. "Starvation in the midst of plenty" is a hackneyed phrase; but it may well be applied to modern conditions; and starvation not of the body only, but of the mind and soul as well. Seldom are the hewers of wood and the drawers of water freed from a life of slavery or given an entrance into the field of education and of culture. Rarely has an attempt been made to give to ordinary people the means whereby they may develop themselves and thus live their lives more fully in the service of God and of their fellow-men. An appeal has gone up from suffering humanity to put an end to these conditions, to save the world from the ruin that threatens it and to restore it to a healthy condition. Re-adjustment — economic, intellectual and spiritual—is necessary; re-adjustment for the individual as well as for society at large. Changes must be made; the old order must be renovated and adapted to meet the changed and changing conditions of society.

It is an undeniable fact that the minds of our people are not able to wrestle with the problems that confront

them. Several causes are at the root of this evil; but it is not intended to deal with them all in this paper. We would signalize one, however, which seems of paramount importance and for which a remedy seems to lie within our grasp; it is the lack of education of the adult population.

When we state that our adult population is not educated, we do not mean to imply that our people are illiterate; on the contrary, our percentage of literacy is very high and the fame of our scholarship, widespread. In this day, however, when our boys and girls leave school, they rarely have any opportunity for further study and hence cannot develop the latent talents which they may possess. Leisure time they have in abundance; but without direction, this leisure, instead of being an asset, can become a distinct draw-back. This is all the more apparent when we consider that in recent years the school has failed to fit pupils to take their part in the life of the community. During the past few generations the predominant error in the educational world has been to substitute a smattering in many branches for depth in a few and to call it education; in too many cases "learning has been without grounding, without advance, without finishing." Education, therefore, or better still, re-education of the adult is a problem of actual and practical necessity.

Adult Education, in some form or other, is doubtless as old as the human race itself; but in the form under which we know it today, it is a new departure in the sphere of education. It is a broader field of voluntary study, dissociated from honors, marks or credits, undertaken "to encourage and assist toward a better use of leisure among adults." One of the best definitions given is that put forth by Dr. Keppel, the head of the Carnegie Corporation, who says that "it is the process of learning, on the initiative of the individual, seriously and consecutively undertaken as a supplement to some primary occupation."

Despite the well-known proverb to the contrary, "you can teach an old dog new tricks." Professor Thorndike of Columbia University in his book "Adult Learning" proves by an actual survey that in many cases mature persons learn more easily than school children. The reason is that mature people have keener motives: they have real want and must grapple with problems which are urgent and immediate. In practical matters affecting their own welfare, farmers, day-laborers and fishermen, as well as

women—the builders of the home, have genuine motives for learning. The common bond of want helps to draw people together into study groups where they may work out co-operatively the solution of their difficulties. In their book "Rural Adult Education," Landis and Willard tell us that "possibly the richest learning abilities come when experience has given maturity to judgment, and when values become definable. The need for Adult Education grows with every addition to our source of knowledge, with every new force harnessed for the use of man, with every new aspiration for a finer social order, with every mal-adjustment that comes in a changing society." Another writer has stressed "need and desire, not age, as fundamental in education."

Adult Education has advanced through the stages of possibility, plausibility and theory to insure its recognition and to claim a place in history. We have experience now to fall back on while urging its adoption in Prince Edward Island. Evidences of the success of the movement are seen in many European and Asiatic countries as well as in the United States and in Canada. In those areas where Adult Education has flourished, the people have studied and practised co-operation—our chief interest in the subject in this province, and have greatly enriched their lives both materially and intellectually. In Denmark, within two or three generations, the national spirit has literally been made over, partly through the adoption of the principles of co-operation and marketing, but primarily through a system of folk-schools originating among the people themselves. These schools are an outstanding example of the power of organized Adult Education.

But we need not go so far away for concrete evidences of the utility of this project. Let us briefly review the now famous experiment in the near-by province of Nova Scotia. A few years ago, a number of Professors of the Staff of St. Francis Xavier University at Antigonish felt that the benefits resulting from a college education should not be restricted to a few privileged young men and women, but that it should be extended to the ordinary individual. Putting their plan into execution, they made contacts with farmers and fishermen among whom they advocated education as a practical necessity, showing them that it may be the means of procuring not only a livelihood but recreation and culture as well. "The educational program

itself was definitely organized around economic study and co-operative building, and theory and practice were identified." The movement is not run on sectarian lines, and religious leaders of all denominations have been most enthusiastic in its promotion. Thus did they accomplish the great achievement of making a passive people active.

If such splendid work can be done in the neighboring province why can we not expect greater, or at least as great, results in Prince Edward Island? We are naturally affected by the success of their movement and it is a much discussed subject with our people among whom interest has been stimulated by the exhaustive and untiring work of Dr. Croteau and the Reverend Dr. Murphy, President of this institution. Under the auspices of St. Dunstan's, programs have been broadcast over C. F. C. Y. and pamphlets explaining the movement, distributed throughout the Island. The work has been going on for only a few months, but a recent comprehensive survey shows a keen interest on the part of the people and predicts a bright future for Adult Education in this province. Since last autumn many study groups have been formed with a membership extending from one end of the Island to the other. At these study groups a variety of subjects is discussed, such as adult education, credit unions, co-operation, agriculture, fishing, economic and social problems, religious subjects and other topics. We already have in the province some organizations, such as the Farmers' Institute, the Women's Institute and other co-operative societies which, unconsciously perhaps, were the fore-runners of Adult Education, and whose accomplishments have prepared the ground for further work in this matter. Furthermore, our Island is a close-knit unit of people having keen, progressive minds and should thus prove an ideal location for an effort of this nature.

A few years ago, the Carnegie Corporation endowed us with a library system which is the admiration, and perhaps the envy, of the other provinces. With its centre at Charlottetown and branches throughout the country, this library is a vital contribution to the success of the movement. Under the direction of an experienced and socially-minded directress, it provides our study groups with a wealth of material within the reach of few such clubs elsewhere. This excellent source of study-material provides us with an exceptionally solid foundation for systematized Adult

Education. Conversely, Adult Education is necessary in order that the full benefits of the Library may be realized. The effectiveness of education by radio is also greatly increased by this opportunity of follow-up reading.

Radio is generally looked upon by the directors of this movement as an effective means of reaching the people. Unfortunately, in too many cases education had been unfairly treated by commercial broadcasters; it is only fair to state, however, that Station C. F. C. Y., under the efficient and sympathetic management of Colonel K. S. Rogers, has been of invaluable service to the movement in this province. With the co-operation of men such as he, regular programs could be broadcast and thus unite study groups all over the Island with head quarters by supplementing and directing the study-material of all Clubs.

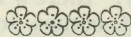
Before proceeding further it is well to consider an aspect which is too often overlooked or undervalued—women's part in Adult Education. Within the province we already have the Women's Institute, which has been doing such splendid social work, as well as other women's societies which have grown up about our churches. In Nova Scotia women have been very active in the movement, having a large number of study groups and a special page in the bi-monthly Extension Bulletin. Of course, as in other sections where the movement is flourishing, the subjects studied are almost entirely different from those of the men, as their motives and interests are also different. The following are some of the objectives outlined by Miss Price of the Extension service in the State of Ohio: the improvement of health; the development of attitudes, desires, appreciation; the development of lay leadership; the improvement of social and group relationships; child welfare; beautification; improvement of standards of living. One can hardly doubt that a program such as this, combining a study of the skill of housekeeping with the broader interests of homemaking and citizenship, would be heartily welcomed by the women of our province.

Perhaps the most important step in developing Adult Education is the establishment of an efficient centre. Charlottetown would be the obvious one for the Island. Besides being the geographical centre, it contains our colleges, radio facilities, libraries, and the offices of the Department of Education—all the essentials for the establishment of an adequate clearing-house. This organized clearing-

house or extension department, sending out pamphlets, reports and bulletins, could direct all Adult Education activities. From this centre trained men could go out all over the Island to conduct meetings and encourage the organization of study groups, which are the sinews of the whole movement.

From the study clubs, in which members have threshed out their difficulties, concrete results are bound to come. After a sufficient study of credit unions, for example, a branch could be organized in accordance with the law recently placed on the statutes of this province. Similarly, various co-operative societies may be formed from study clubs, and market commodities handled with better advantage to the members. A study of these subjects will do a great deal for the material welfare of our province and for this reason will doubtless be the first to be considered by the study groups. Recreational and cultural subjects will also be studied and will become more popular as their advantages become better known by the people.

In conclusion, after viewing the need and possibility of Adult Education in Prince Edward Island, its history elsewhere and auspicious beginnings here, we feel safe in stating that the movement now in its infancy is assured of a steady growth. This brief essay does not attempt to forecast definitely the procedure which will be followed in this province, but is based on the experiences of the movement elsewhere and on an estimate of its future here, judging from existing conditions and the enthusiasm of the present study groups. The task has only begun. Stagnation, complacency and unsound dogmatism must be overcome. Thought, aspiration and healthy growth must be stimulated. Practical results may be seen in our lifetime, but the full harvest of our efforts will be reaped only by succeeding generations; not the least among these beneficent results will be the strengthening of the foundations of our social and economic order, by equipping the average man with sound Christian principles, a solid education, and a sane outlook on life.



Knowledge by suffering entereth,
And life is perfected by death.

—E. B. Browning.