

# Dr. Robertson's Address At P. W. C. Closing

The following is the report of the year's work given by Dr. S.N. Robertson at the Prince of Wales commencement exercises Friday.

Mr. Premier, the Hon. Minister of Public Works, the Hon. Minister of Agriculture, His Worship the Mayor of Charlottetown, the Honorary President of the Alumni Association of this Institution, the parents and friends of the students that have come out this morning to our closing exercises, we bid you all a very hearty welcome. We feel that the effort you are making this morning is well worthy of the life that you have lived and the assistance and guidance that you have given your children up to this point, and we hope that the encouragement you will receive today from their performance will merit continuance of all that you can do to give your students a proper beginning or entrance into life.

As the Premier has said, we are met here this morning in the annual closing exercises of this institution for the 77th time. It is a long period of history. As we look around and see the prominence of the persons that were formerly students of this institution, we feel that the institution is well worth while, and the teachers that are connected with it at present will be much encouraged to continue their good work.

### Come as Relief

But of course, the closing exercises come both to the teachers and to the students as a great relief. There is now to be no more of this enforced preparation for tomorrow's lessons extending so far into the night while the others were sleeping; there is to be no more hurried getting up in the morning and hurrying off to the 6:15 bell, and no more long, tedious, and almost to the point of exhaustion. Everyone is now relaxed, and the spirit of "do nothing forever and ever" is going to continue on for the holidays, at any rate. Life is lived in that fashion anyway. Life is a climb, and "climb" is the proper word, because the pathway of life doesn't run along on a level and it certainly doesn't follow in an easy, downward, descending climb. Rather, do we reach the heights of life by short, sharp, steep efforts followed by a period of relaxation on the levels that we thereby attain. There is no doubt that we this morning, then, are entitled to look with considerable relief to the arrival of today's exercises.

### Rhythm of Nature

Our life is, as we said, just to follow what you might call the rhythm of nature. We have to have our winter preceding the summer, we have to have our day following the night, and we came here last September girded and prepared for a nine-months' struggle. We have put forth effort day by day continuously. We have spurned the self-indulgence that was always demanding its own attention. We have come now by a tremendous effort. We have toiled up to the 65 per cent level, and this morning with that satisfaction, we are laying down our work and going to have a holiday.

In our working during the season we have had a large body. We had some 450 or more students that have come and gone. All have been busy. We have had very considerable health for the performance of our duties. No epidemic of disease has troubled us—no serious one—but we have had very many individual cases of illness; in some, continued illness. In fact, death came to two of our number when a promising young man and a promising young woman were removed during the session. But we have done a very satisfactory quantity of work. The students have acquitted themselves with satisfaction to their teachers—and the teachers in Prince of Wales College, they say, are exacting. I think it is perhaps an unfounded report—I was going to say "accusation"—but work is supposed to go on apace in the institution, and certainly the students have responded to all the requests of their teachers, and they are going out from us this morning, a large body of students that have given their teachers a large amount of pleasure in their daily performances; and the teachers will follow them out and wish that the world may early find out just what the real worth of these individual students really is, and that they will welcome them and appreciate them.

I could talk more lengthily on just what the magnificent attitude and varied conduct of the student body of this institution really is, but I think perhaps it is better left to the imagination than to any few words that might fail to express it.

Not All Successful  
Now, of course, in a body of

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students so large as this body is, not all have been successful. It couldn't be expected that all would. Among our number are some that, for some reason or another, have not used their opportunities to the full. We must remember that the occasion, the situation, is a trying one. Our students, especially the country ones, have left home for the first time for any lengthy stay. They have got away from the parental care and solitudes that watched over them all their earlier days. They have come into a town, and I might tell His Worship the Mayor that it is not, by any means, a slow town. There are so many distractions—so many novelties, if we do not call them distractions—that have been to the students, and every one of them is good in its place. But they appeal to the student so that very frequently they get a precedence over the duties of the institution, with the result that here in this town, with no person very closely in contact with them, no single teacher ministering to them in their daily school work, but rather a varying succession of teachers hour by hour in our class system. From all various causes, you can see it is quite possible that quite a number of these young people should forget themselves.

### Acute and Chronic

Now, these are, I suppose, what you might call the acute cases. The doctor goes over his patients and he classifies them as acute and chronic cases. These are the acute cases, for up until their experience in Prince of Wales last September they had a good healthy history, they were always able to take their educational meals and digestion and assimilation up to that time; but things went wrong with them. As I say, other factors came into their life, and the result is just what I have described—failure where success might naturally have been expected.

Now, these cases, I am glad to say, are not many, but we would like if the number could be reduced to the disappearance point if possible.

### Tracing the History

Then, there are others that the medical doctor sets down as chronic cases. The trouble, while it may have broken out in the first year of Prince of Wales College, perhaps they have shown itself more or less definitely at the time of the entrance examinations to the Prince of Wales College. At any rate, the medical doctor investigates the history of the case, and he finds on tracing back that there were times in the 8th grade and in the 8th grade and in the 7th grade, when the paper was marked by more lassitude and listlessness, and he might go tracing back further.

### The Primary Grade

I believe the difficulty goes back perhaps to the primary grade. That is the place where I think most young minds are derailed and go astray, in the primary school, the primary grades. There has been an old decision that the place for the good teacher is in the senior grade because the work is more or less difficult and the assistance of capable teachers is required. But I think that perhaps, while that may be true in some measure, the good teacher properly belongs in the primary school, especially in Grade One and Grade Two and Grade Three and Grade Four, where there is practical general helplessness on the part of the pupil.

There is a great energy and native curiosity in the child seeking to know and anxious to find out. That natural curiosity, that native curiosity, is very strongly marked. The energy is there. If you only had a proper person at the wheel of the machine going in the right direction, you would attain tremendous distances in a very, very short time, and we wouldn't have appearing in the Prince of Wales College these persons that have been pressed along, rather than passed along to their class rooms, these persons who have been so much deprived of the natural advantages that the community should have provided for them.

### Overhauling Needed

We certainly need a tremendous overhauling of our educational machinery. We have got to bear in mind that education and the development of the native, inborn abilities of the child, that education runs contrary to nature. We must bear in mind that the human being is just a human animal getting his pleasure, his enjoyment, in this nature round about him. Effort and sacrifice and modification of plan and method, these are all demanding work on his part; and if we read the story aright, work, you know, was imposed as a penalty. Employment is the line of natural development.

### Contrary to Disposition

Now, if education runs contrary to natural disposition and inclination, isn't school teaching, then, a difficult task? This is the most important work this world knows—getting those young people started right, keeping them engaged while their curiosity is still active, and easily molded, and directed through proper channels. Isn't the school teacher's business the most important business that we know of? What is the good of attempting to do something with a crop that is half grown? You can't bring in the process of treatment that is going to give you a

reasonable and proper crop. What is the good of attempting to do anything with an animal that is already spoiled by early neglect and early training? All that can be done is only to make passable effort of it. But if we could keep the process going at the properly seasonal time, for tillage and all the operations of the farm are done in due season, what a magnificent crop, not a weed, not a seed that would fail to reproduce itself and reach its full and proper development.

That would sound very much to our clergy like universalism, but certainly we could bring through a great many more students, I should not use the word "students" but bring through a much larger number of men and women. We could reduce the number of failures that life is filled with if we had a proper way to reform our system.

### Preparation Necessary

The medical profession—look at the long term of preparation that is required if a person is going to satisfy the demands of the profession, and look after graduation at the tremendous amount of post-graduate work that has to be done if the medical man is to satisfy the demands of the individual patients that may seek his services. And what is true of the medical profession, and it is true in the agricultural profession, and it is true in the clerical profession. The only place I know of where youth and immaturity are no barriers to work is in the school room—perhaps I should say the school room of Prince Edward Island, as that would be more definite. You say our schools are doing good work. Those young teachers are doing marvellous work.

### Credit to Parents

I don't believe you are giving proper credit to the parents when you are estimating the amount of work the school performs and who is the agent that does it? It is the parent at home that studies the child, that sees that that child has the environment that school work demands. The parent at home is the greatest assistance to the young teacher in the school; and were it not for that parent at home, I believe we would have a much larger failure to report in our public school system of Prince Edward Island.

### Teachers of the Past

Now, that naturally goes on becoming worse and worse. I think any person that looks at the educational system at the present time must realize the last twenty, thirty and forty years have produced a tremendous change. I wouldn't like to increase the number of years in case the audience might feel I was reminiscent; but years ago we had in our schools, in the teaching profession, a large number of choice, experienced persons. Every village school and many of the strictly rural districts had teachers of maturity in the school, as well as teachers of native and natural ability to develop greatly. These persons not only ministered to the school and to the children that came to their schools, but they were the standards to which all younger teachers joining the profession looked, and they were the ideals by which every young teacher sought to improve himself. The doctor's methods—attend our Teachers' Convention, get assistance from them in private conversation or in public discussion.

### Unsuitable Exercise

Now, any person looking over our present school teacher body will see that a tremendous change has been wrought, and the consequence is that we have got a large body of children that ought to be in school, that have lost interest in the school exercises because the school exercises are not directed by proper pedagogic development in the teacher, exercises that were altogether unsuitable for the child at that particular grade. Now, as that goes on, it naturally becomes worse, and I think that if we look about us and see our countryside and our town streets filled with persons that are really unprepared to live their life, we ought to feel forced to consider some change and see if something more could not be done for the ordinary child. I am not afraid for the millionaire's child, I am not afraid for the child of the educated parent. The wealthy man is going to see that his child gets a proper education. The educated parent is going to see to that, too. He is going to increase his ministrations at home. He is going to see that despite all handicaps, his child is going to be properly prepared to live a useful and enjoyable life.

### Overcoming Environment

You have just to look over, as we look over, the history of the students that come to this institution year by year, to notice how they trace back to certain antecedents, the son or daughter of a former student. Much more often it was the mother that was the student and that looked to the proper education and development of the child, and kept it interested by the success that attended the child's effort in Grade One, Grade Two, and saw to it that the child's curiosity travelled along good and proper lines, and so brought the child, despite all difficulties of environment, along to the time when after passing at every grade, he would come to Prince of Wales College and pass all his examinations readily and easily, because the success in Prince of Wales College is directed and measured by persons of experience, by teachers of experience; and every parent, I think, has to bear support to our statement that are at present appealing to it that their own children are getting proper advantages—if these parents would only take a wider view and would look onto a

larger horizon and set about doing something for the other person's children, seeing to it that the school would provide the opportunities that the day labourer could not provide in his own home for the education and development of his children, so that a labourer's child—and I use the term respectfully—would have a fighting chance to grow up into a reasonable man or woman. That is what we require in Prince Edward Island, and we require it at once.

### Community Falling Down

And so, the fact that tracing back our student body year after year we get back to certain families, shows how far the community is falling down in doing its proper work educationally in this province.

Now, I know that the members of the Government are anxious to make all the changes that can be suggested in looking towards the betterment of our educational system. All that they need is the voiced demands and requests of the parents that conditions should be improved, that children should have a proper chance, that they should not be condemned while they are still infants or children to an unsatisfactory living and life. They should not be on the outskirts of civilization and on the edge of privation and starvation all their lifetime body and soul.

Now, if our parents throughout this province—and you can't appeal to all the parents, but you can appeal to the educated parents, the parents that are at present seeing to it that their own children are getting proper advantages—if these parents would only take a wider view and would look onto a

same thing in the financial world. Things are wrong there and there are all sorts of remedies. We get perhaps one extreme remedy in Alberta, and we get another one applied by the financiers that are trying to hold onto the gold standard. Everything is wrong, and it is wonderful that things should be wrong educationally, and that remedies just as wild should be suggested as the cure?

I cannot believe that in Prince Edward Island, that a small province as we are, that we are to be the persons that are going to bring in the changes that the other parts of the larger world do not really support. So remembering that in Prince Edward Island we are just part of that story of man's progress, and man's elevation has been a continuous one, that it has gone along by the easy changes such as we find in life, we ought to feel that when revolutionary methods and suggestions are made, that a question mark certainly should be placed and a pause be made before we make any great serious change.

### Life Varies Slowly

Life, you know, varies very slowly in that life is only possible in that variation, not the extreme. So we must bear in mind that education needs its changes, but that they should not be revolutionary or extreme. It may be the subjects of our curriculum are not

just what they ought to be, or it may be that the emphasis that is put upon certain subjects may not be the proper emphasis; but I can't believe that in 1937, where we have a continuous story of the world's doings and of the human race's attainments away back in the early stone ages, I may say I can't believe that we have absolutely failed.

I think if we measure up the situation and bear in mind that this human nature of ours is pretty much the same in 1937 as it was in 1837, and every time we go to church we find that the human nature that is described there in the characters that are discussed, is pretty much the same nature we find within our own communities in 1937. So that the education and development of that human nature could not vary by revolution. I would not like to use the term evolution, but it should be the change that life produces.

### Proper Fitting Necessary

I just wish to say that as I talk along in this fashion, our students that are leaving us this morning may feel that perhaps the whole thing is a great large mistake. They read the story of the troubled condition of the world and the

buyer and seller, this section of the daily newspapers is one of the greatest aids to the economical and efficient operation of household and business alike.

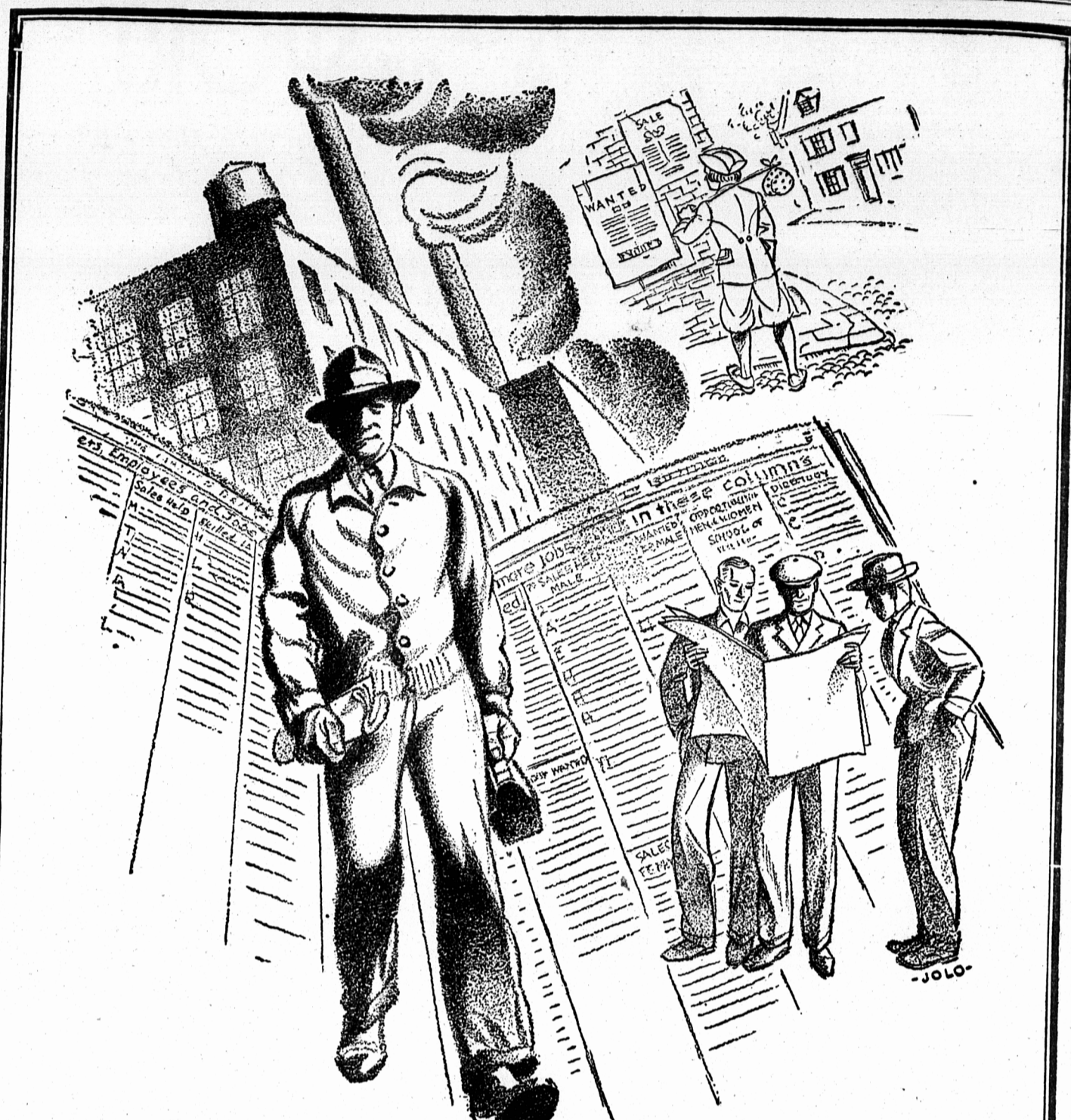
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unemployment that reigns here and there, and they wonder just where they are going to fit in, and we have no doubt that a great many of them are filled with discouragement as they look around about them. I was much struck by a statement that I saw attributed to a very prominent man, that there never was a time in the world when a man properly fit had a better chance for advancement than at the present time. I believe it is true. As I look over the unemployed as they come beneath my inspection, I find that nine times out of ten an easy explanation can be given that the person has not been properly trained or developed for employment, that he is largely, nine times out of ten, irresponsible.

### Question of Livelihood

And so I would say to the students that are going out today, you have not made a mistake in developing yourself through your own intellectual development. You must bear in mind that you are going out into a world that is social, to mingle with human beings, friends and enemies too, and you have got to play your part. You will not find the physical part such a great one as is the moral and the



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