

Widening Educational Horizons

This is the first issue of Widening Educational Horizons for the year 1954. The General-Secretary takes this opportunity to convey to all who read this page—the teachers of Prince Edward Island, the parents of the children whom we teach, and all others who are interested in the education of our youth. We wish that the year may be one of health, happiness and prosperity for all and that peace on earth may be a reality.

Our feature this week is a criticism of Dr. Hilda Neatby's book "So Little for the Mind" by Mr. Bramwell Chandler, M.A., B.L.S., Mr. Chandler is superintendent of libraries and director of adult education in Prince Edward Island and is one well qualified to deal with the criticism of our education in Canada as set forth by Dr. Neatby in "So Little for the Mind".

So Little For The Mind by Miss Hilda Neatby (B.A., Sask.; Ph.D. Minn.; LL.D. Toronto; Professor of History at the University of Saskatchewan). Published by Clarke, Irwin, Toronto, pp. 355, \$3.00. Reviewed by H. B. Chandler.

Professor Hilda Neatby, known to the general public in Eastern Canada as "the only woman member of the Massey Commission", presents to us in a book with the title noted above a very strong criticism of Canadian education in our elementary and high schools. Education is of course a matter of concern to every citizen; some three million young Canadians are involved in the process, and hundreds of millions of dollars are spent yearly in maintaining our schools. Because of the wide publicity given her book and the seriousness of her charges it is necessary to outline Miss Neatby's ideas in some detail.

Education in Canada, she says is largely in the control of "progressivists", slavish followers of the teaching theories of the American philosopher, psychologist and educator John Dewey (1859-1952). Briefly, Dewey's aim was to combine instruction with insight, to provide it with meaning. His theories on teaching emphasized "learning by doing", the creation of "life situations" in the school. The theme of her book is that progressive teaching fails to educate. She places herself on the side of the "traditionalists".

In an introductory chapter she lists what she generally admitted to be the virtues of progressive teaching: the progressive school gives children sympathy, understanding and encouragement; learning is free and unforced; the school is child centred; the school and its surroundings are pleasant and healthful; school activities are related to life outside the school; and finally, the child is led by natural means to self-discipline. She comments, "the educational system which undertakes to care adequately for all the dull, the lazy and the misfits as well as the bright and the industrious is indeed a new and notable achievement".

The reader might at this point wonder what all the fuss is about. However, the statement is then made that children are not enthusiastic about the new teaching; they do not care to learn, they lack an object in life, they come to consider happiness a goal, not a by-product. Furthermore, university teachers claim that students cannot read, write or think. Not, she says, that they are incapable of so doing, but they emerge from high school ignorant, lazy, and unaware of the exacting demands of the society from which they have been sheltered. "The hard world of today demands a hard and selective discipline that will fit every individual to make his utmost contribution to society".

Miss Neatby then sets forth the tasks of the 20th century school: it must accept and afford some training for every child above a very low intellectual level; it must provide a great new mass of information to the modern child, for example, traffic laws, rules of health, principles of balanced diet, etc.; and it must convey the intellectual, cultural and moral training which represents the best in a long and honorable tradition of Western civilization.

Progressivists, she says, have not met the challenge of imparting an ever increasing mass of useful, practical information nor of offering mental discipline and intellectual and moral enrichment. They have frittered away their opportunities by making school life easy and pleasant, concentrating on the obvious, the practical, and the immediate, and have produced a uniform low standard. They give "special attention to all physical, emotional and mental abnormalities" but neglect "the old-fashioned things called the mind, the imagination and the conscience of the average and of the better than average child".

In sum, the new education is anti-intellectual—there is no attempt to exercise, train and discipline the mind. It is anti-cultural—there is no encouragement of the notion that "the achievements and values of the past are a trust to be preserved and enriched for the future". It is amoral—"the general tendency... has been to weaken respect for law and authority as such, and to dull discrimination between right and wrong". The schools in brief, are not giving students sufficient general educational background, nor inspiring them with the desire to work hard and to struggle for the good life.

The remaining chapters of *So Little for the Mind* attempt to examine in detail the basic elements in the indictment. Chapter Two, *Experts in Education*, states that the educational policies determined by about 150 senior officials and 400 elementary and high school inspectors in departments of education in the ten provinces. Most of the 150 senior officials, she says, hold university degrees but few have achieved a reputation for scholarship in any other field than education. In other words they are "experts" rather than scholars. Their intellects are less than brilliant. She criticises their jargon, poor writing, copying of U.S. ideas, and their views on democracy, their spiritual values. They conduct educational research on relatively minor matters such as school administration and finance, curriculum problems, problems of evaluation and testing, school health, practical education, teacher status and future school enrollment, but have initiated no research on vital topics such as the aims of education, the nature of character, the qualities of citizenship, or the history and nature of democracy.

Chapter Three deals with *The Training School*. She notes that educational standards for teachers vary provincially and that the minimum requirement is a high-school leaving certificate plus a year in training school. Her chief criticisms are that normal school courses are not long enough, have too much methodology, the instructors are too specialized and too often trained in the United States. Teachers suffer from a lack of content in their studies.

Chapter Four and Five discuss *What Goes On in the School*. The are of communication, English, suffers from the claims of "interest" and a passion for the modern. There is too much emphasis on "moral composition" though here Miss Neatby admits that one of the finest contributions of progressivists to the training of children is to speak naturally and spontaneously, to listen as well as to speak, to argue without quarrelling, and to conclude a discussion. There is a neglect of written composition and there should be a return to teaching grammar by rules. In the social studies she is critical of elaborate and time-consuming subjects, and the general depreciation of the use of textbooks.

Chapter Six, entitled *The Democratic Nemesis: Anarchy*, criticises guidance procedures as tending to usurp the role of the parent. Examinations should be standard; the child should know whether he has succeeded or failed. The new teaching is at fault in stressing positive achievements and ignoring or playing down the child's failures. Finally, the educators by trying to be all things to all men, "by taking the whole of life for their parish have made two grave mistakes". They have assumed an impossible burden, and they have not realised how little schooling time is available in the life of the individual. The result is anarchy. The solution is realising that the task is "intellectual training, cultural enlightenment and moral instruction through a direct and logical process".

Chapter Seven, *Comment and Criticism*, consists of quotations from T. S. Elliot, R. M. Hutchins, Sir Richard Livingstone and others who are concerned about the materialism of modern life. In Chapter Eight, *Conclusion*, the author states that really the ills of education are the ills of modern society. Her remedies are specifically laid down as *A Revival of Civilization* which may be achieved by: 1. a renewal of faith—to give discipline and direction to life; 2. a re-definition of democracy; 3. a just appreciation of the uses and abuses of material comfort and well-being. The second cure is a *Re-direction of Education*: 1. Teachers should be scholars—teaching methods are secondary. 2. Teaching should primarily convey facts, ideas, theories. 3. High school students incapable of studying should be compelled to quit.

A final suggestion is that education is too important a matter to be left to the experts. A national body should be formed to make a thorough study of Canadian education.

All this is very harsh criticism and to the present reviewer much of it is unjust. Miss Neatby somewhere apologises for her harshness on the grounds that she prefers to be honest. However that may be, a minor defect in the book is a rather heavy-handed sarcasm which accumulates to the point where the reader out of sympathy tends to side with the attacked. As a duellist she lacks finesse. Not content with pinking an opponent she has a distinct relish for impaling her victim. Only a person remote from the give and take of practical affairs could imagine that such treatment would persuade those whom she feels to be in error. Her book is not well written: it is diffuse, repetitious, and at times exasperatingly unclear. She writes in the style of the hasty pamphleteer.

In spite of an occasional good thing in it, the book indeed can be considered little more than a

tendentious pamphlet. For one thing it lacks background of genuine knowledge. There is no evidence at any point that Miss Neatby is a first-hand witness of the classroom chaos she describes or that she has discussed education with administrators to whom she is so unnecessarily churlish. The first and last chapters give her opinions. Everything in between is deduced from courses of study and other publications of the departments of education. There is ample indication also that her approach to the subject was to formulate opinions first and then to seek out evidence to back them up. One would have thought that an able scholar would make more use of scientific method. It is singular too that an historian would not have given a fair account of the historical background of the great educational debate. There was a time in Western civilisation when theology alone was the subject matter of schools. There was a time, and not too long ago, when mathematics was not considered a fit subject for university study. In fact the first school of mathematics in England was established by Charles II in order to train youth in the ignoble trades of navigation, surveying and engineering.

The liberalising of Western education has been going on a long time and Miss Neatby's particular devil, John Dewey, is but a descendant of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Spencer, Herbart and Ruskin. There will be others after Dewey, for the tradition of education she so deprecates is not a static thing. Dewey's outlook on education reflects his time, the industrial revolution, the development of democracy, the colossal educational problem of the United States in absorbing into the pattern of American life the millions of immigrant children pouring into the country fifty years ago. Even Dewey's ideas in some respect are being replaced today. Many of the more progressive teaching theories in use in the United States and Canada originated in British schools, a fact the author does not appear to be aware of. This would not be worth mentioning if it were not to note her rather provincial anti-American bias. Her implication is that we would do much better to observe British elementary and high school practice. As a matter of cold fact our Canadian schools are models of old-fashioned traditionalism in comparison.

Miss Neatby has unfortunately assumed general knowledge of the context of her argument. For this reason her pamphlet is next thing to useless for the layman. He may be aware from reading it that a serious quarrel is in progress but will be unable to form a considered opinion. It could have been useful to the general reader and of very great value to home and school groups particularly if she had given at least half the space to an honest outline of the historical, sociological and economic background of our educational problem, for we all admit that there is a very real one. I have yet to meet an educational administrator who felt complacent about his responsibilities, or who incidentally considered education as the naively simple black-and-white affair Miss Neatby makes it out to be.

What may be said about her charges against modern education? I would imagine that most administrators of education in Canada will shrug off her attack as an unformed, prejudiced, and cloudy bit of writing. They can retort with fair measure of justice that at the moment Canadian literature, music, drama, Canadian technology, science, public service, and public life generally are at a much higher and more competent level than they were a generation or two ago. In other words the new education is producing trained top level minds as well as the skilled technicians and tradesmen for an expanding industrial society.

Her initial charges that children do not like the new schools and that high school graduates cannot read, write or think, are unsupported by a shred of valid evidence. Such trite and gross generalisations make a very weak starting point.

Her sarcastic comments on professionalism in education could apply to any specialised occupation her own mind included. We are all poor, harassed creatures who lapse under pressure into jargon or gobbledegook. It is bad, it is reprehensible, and doubtless her book will compel curriculum compilers to sharpen their pens in the future. Her criticisms of training schools for teachers have some point, but here again she is not alone. Educational authorities have been trying for years and years to lengthen the teacher training course and put more content in it. It might be useful at this stage to mention a curious notion of the author's. She assumes that educational administrators are entirely free agents. Her authoritarian approach to life overlooks the fact that the guilty men are public servants not public masters. There is often a considerable gap between the theoretically good idea and what is socially and politically practical. It is a pity that university people live such a sheltered life.

Of her specific criticisms of the teaching of various subjects and of the attitude towards the development of the child's personality it is useless to argue in detail. She implicitly rejects psychology, psychiatry, and the whole body of their work, measurements of intelligence and aptitude, as so much nonsense. It is her opinion against the scientifically proven work of generations.

What Miss Neatby is demanding is this: The schools should teach history, geography, citizenship, morals, literature, grammar, mathematics in a wide yet detailed

sweep. The method of teaching is unimportant if the teachers are scholarly people. This liberal education would be basic learning for the future physicist, carpenter, doctor, airplane mechanic, housewife, stenographer, engineer, plumber, politician or educator. Those unable or unwilling to take the 12-year course should be dropped off along the way. This is a beautifully simple solution and an absolutely unworkable one. It is as a matter of fact usually the solution of the uneducated and untrained primary teacher, "open your books at page —". Again, one is never quite clear whether Miss Neatby is talking about instruction procedures in grades one and two or grades eleven and twelve. One is forced to the conclusion that she has never visualized the actual problem teachers face in the thousands of small schools across the country.

On the whole this is an unfortunate book. Miss Neatby is obviously a well-intentioned, sincere woman and one cannot believe that this strangely illogical and intemperate exercise is her definitive thought on education. Her present pessimism about life may

be justified. She takes a very poor view of modern Western society. It is "an age without standards", and it is "a rootless as well as a faithless society." Such clichés of sophomoric cynicism ill become the scholar.

One could wish as much conviction claim that we are living in one of the world's great ages, an age of daring and stimulating experiment, and in a society with greater coherence and loyal responsibility for even the least of its members than ever existed before.

(This department is conducted by the Prince Edward Island Teachers' Federation. Contributions are welcomed and should be sent to Estelle Bowness, General Secretary, 98 Prince St., Charlottetown.)

St. Georges And Vicinity

St. George's Junior Farmers' held their annual meeting at the home of the Sommers' brothers on December 28. The officers for

the new year are the following:—president, Leo Morrison; vice-president, J. D. Sommers; secretary-treasurer, Helen Johnston.

A successful card party was held Dec. 31 at the home of John L. MacPherson. Eleven tables were in play. The ladies prize was won by Mrs. Aeneas MacDonald and the gentlemen's prize by George MacPhee.

The Misses Helen and Emily Johnston, accompanied by Lawrence Johnston attended the recent card party at the home of Mr. Adolphus MacPhee.

Mr. Lawrence Johnston recently returned to his home in St. George's, after spending nine months in Labrador, where he was employed on a construction project. His many friends are welcoming him home again.

On December 31 the following made up a motor party which travelled to Tracadie and attended a Junior Farmers' meeting: Felix Walker, Leo Morrison, George C. MacDonald, Anne Keefe and Helen Johnston.

Mr. Freddy Morrison, accompanied by Mr. George Walker and Mr. Victor MacCormack, left recently for Nova Scotia after spending the Christmas holidays in Lunenburg.

Miss Georgia Morrison spent her Christmas holidays with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Morrison.

Mr. Harold Campbell recently returned to his home in Newport after spending some time in Toronto.

Mr. and Mrs. Charles MacDonald, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. J. Duncan and Reggie Mooney recently motored to Roseneath where they visited at the home of Mrs. John Donohoe.

Mr. Aeneas Morrison left a few days ago for Halifax, N. S., where he has been posted for training and duty, after having enlisted with the Canadian army.—A.C.

GEORGETOWN SUB - DIVISION
C. W. L.

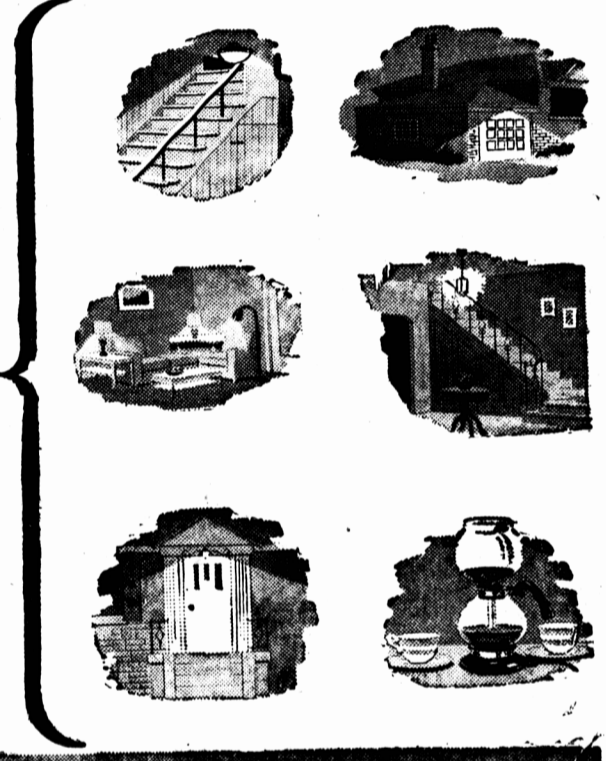
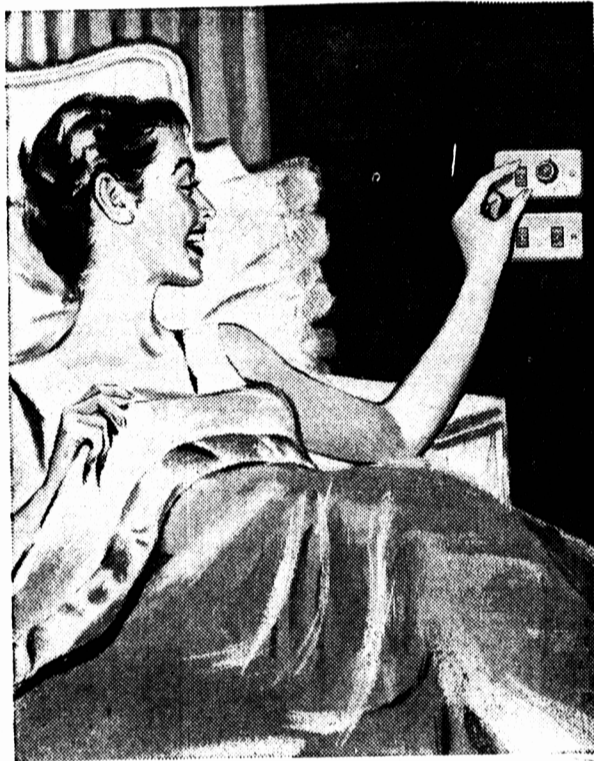
The regular meeting of the Georgetown Sub-division of the Catholic Women's League was held in the Parish Hall on December 1, with 11 members an-

swering roll call.

The meeting opened with prayer by Rev. Director, O. Kiggins. The president, Mrs. P. L. Boudreau occupied the chair. The financial report was presented by the treasurer and showed a creditable balance on hand. The social service convener, Mrs. W. J. Fitzgerald, reported five visits to sick and shut-ins during the month. Two visits were made to mothers with infants. Mrs. C. MacDonald reported assistance was received in sitting with the sick. First aid was reported as having been administered in an emergency, by Mrs. W. Murphy.

The quilting committee reported making a quilt for a needy family. Five letters were read by the secretary and the sum of \$5 was forwarded to the T.B. League in Charlottetown, in answer to an appeal for assistance. It was agreed that Christmas cards be sold among the members to aid our ladies' missionaries. It was decided, following a discussion to leave the matter of Christmas treats in the hands of the social service committee. A letter dealing with the importance of good reading in the home, was read by the president.—A.C.

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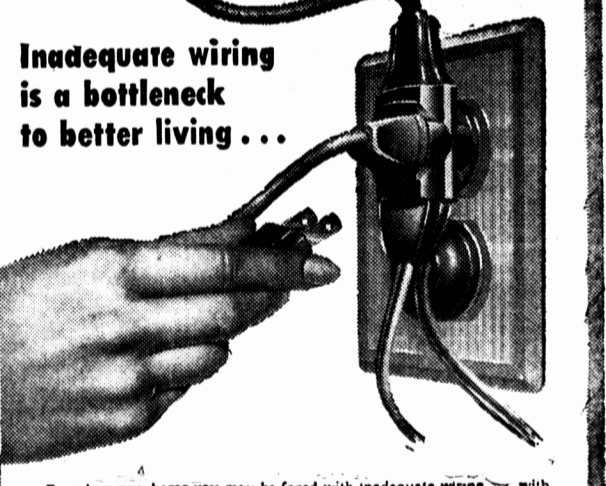
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