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INFLUENCE OF LOCAL CONDITIONS UPON THE MORAL AIM DOMINANT IN THE STATE SCHOOLS.

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The moral aim in the state schools is not to be attained by teaching a system of ethics or a body of religious doctrine. It can be realized only through the personality of supervisors and teachers, who represent the standards of excellence which the community demands. For the people know how to secure what they want, and they will see that their agents, acting as members of boards of education, school superintendents, and teachers, carry out their aims and ideals. The source of the moral aim dominant in the state schools, therefore, is the people themselves.

A study of the race psychology of the American people shows that the national type of character is largely a product of frontier conditions. The struggle involved in subduing the continent, in the westward growth from the Atlantic to the Pacific, developed many pioneer traits, and produced men of masterful will and great inventive genius, quick to apply expedients, and eager to undertake great enterprises. Distinguished for their democratic feeling, their love of liberty, and their self-reliant spirit, they possess, with many fine qualities that need no mention here, warm enthusiasm, abounding vitality, and deep political sagacity.

This is a remarkable combination of traits, but there is another quality conspicuously present in the character of the Americans. This is individualism. For these men, lovers of public order and self-government though they are, have not as a whole a highly developed public spirit. They are tolerant of the political boss because they are too much absorbed in their personal affairs to give proper attention to civic duties. They are also intolerant of the expert, trained for public service, because their individualism leads them to believe that almost anybody, without special training, can do the work of the public position to which he may aspire. Individualism is an invaluable aid to success in private enterprise. But

it makes impossible the best results in great public undertakings on the part of the people.

Failure in this respect constitutes a serious flaw, for it involves the moral aim which, in any form of social endeavor, depends wholly upon the quality and character of the men and women working together. This is especially true when applied to that important social institution, the state school, in which the supervisory and teaching force is so keenly sensitive to the public will.

Moreover, the public school has become so large in its proportions and so elaborate in its organization that an enormous sum of money is required for its maintenance. Nearly one-third of the public taxes are used in the support of the schools. A proper management and financing of such a complex system calls for expert knowledge and administrative ability of the first quality. Assuming that the school superintendent possesses the knowledge and ability required, it is imperative that the official body which delegates to him his duties and powers should be properly constituted.

It is extremely important that the foremost citizens in the community should serve on the board of education. The members of this board should not only have an intelligent appreciation of what the schools are doing, but should also include prominent business men, who, by reason of their integrity, ability, and experience, will commend the confidence of the taxpayers.

There are good reasons why the board of education should be a small body of not more than three to nine members, and each member should represent the entire city. For this plan is likely to result in securing abler men and women who will take a large view of the educational interests of the municipality as a whole. A small body like this will feel the sense of responsibility that is difficult to secure in a large board, each of whose members represents a particular ward.

As a matter of fact, in some American cities the school board is large and contains in many cases men of little intelligence and less sense of moral responsibility. Such men often hamper the superintendent, who is the trained executive of the board, and make it impossible for him to do what the people have a right to expect of him as an expert authority in solving complicated educational problems.

These time-serving politicians seek popularity by making a pretense that they are watchdogs of the public treasury, and by vociferously calling for economy. Of course public money should be wisely expended, but a cheeseparing policy has its most disastrous effect

upon the quality of the teaching. For much the largest element in the current expenses of schools is that of teachers' salaries, and able teachers are expensive.

Furthermore, in working hand in hand with their political friends, such members dictate the appointment of teachers whom they and their friends approve. Their stock argument is that home teachers have been educated in the home schools at the expense of home taxpayers. By such a course of reasoning, the petty politician tries to prove that the community is benefited by confining the teaching force to local people, in so far as local people will supply the demand. But no greater mistake could be made. When this method of employing teachers is carried out, only a small part of the community receives the benefit, and that part consists of the appointees and their friends. The people as a whole suffer a distinct and emphatic loss, because they do not get the best teachers available for the salaries offered. Where such a policy prevails, where free competition on the basis of merit gives place to a system of political pulls, the schools are certain to be inferior. It is nothing short of pitiable to see how slipshod and slovenly has become the educational work in some of our American cities where the management of the schools is dominated by self-seeking politicians. The results are no less inevitable in the school, where the assets and liabilities are moral and intellectual as well as material.

For these unfortunate conditions the people are responsible. It is because they think that almost anybody who has been graduated from a local high school can teach—or, as they understand it, can go through the routine of hearing lessons—that they allow such things to be. This fact illustrates the general principle that the people are impatient of expert training. And this is especially true of their attitude toward teaching. They are slow to believe that professional training is really necessary for work in the schoolroom.

I hasten to add, however, that the conditions I have described are not general. I have personal knowledge of cities where public opinion is far more enlightened. These cities insist upon educational efficiency of the first order, and in so doing they elect to their boards of education men and women who are honest and intelligent, and who are so public spirited that they give freely of their time and strength in managing and directing the schools. They elect as superintendent an educational expert, well trained for administration and supervision. They delegate to him large responsibility, and hold him to a strict account for the way in which he meets this

responsibility. They give him cordial support, so long as they believe he is worthy of it. Like a board of directors of a business corporation, they look to him for intimate knowledge of conditions and problems, and expect from him his best efforts in securing skillful workmanship for the extremely intricate and expert service that is indispensable. This kind of school board carries out the moral aim, for its members heartily co-operate in putting strong personalities into the school-rooms. Their urgent plea is that nothing is too good for the children, who are the embryonic citizens of the commonwealth.

In all this discussion, of course, I assume that the school is, by its very nature, intimately related to the home. For the fundamental purpose of these two institutions is to train the rising generation for the duties of adult life, and their cordial co-operation in this most important of all social endeavor is absolutely essential to success. But their relations to each other have been revolutionized by the changes which science and invention have brought about in the industrial and economic world. Many of the home duties that used to devolve upon boys and girls in the old-time life on the farm furnished some of the best physical, mental, and moral training. The school confined its work to the side of education which has to do with books, but there was an industrial side which the everyday life of the home involved. When the boys helped their fathers on the farm, and the girls performed many kinds of useful service in the household, children learned many invaluable things about their relations to the family and to the community, and also developed a sense of responsibility and a spirit of co-operation. In a word, the conditions under which the boys and girls lived were in the truest sense educational. But to-day, in the well-to-do home in the city, there is almost nothing for children to do. This is extremely unfortunate. It means that some of the best educational opportunities that in the olden days of rural simplicity came to the children as a natural part of their everyday life must be furnished by the schools, if they are furnished at all.

Along with the spirit of self-reliance, a sense of moral obligation and a willingness to co-operate in various forms of useful service, the home of the "good old days" instilled in the young a spirit of obedience and a respect for authority. In these modern days, with the lax discipline which prevails in many American homes, children are deprived of opportunities for making the most of their moral possibilities.

If the home has given up some of the invaluable educational functions that it once assumed, the school must take on these functions or the manhood and womanhood of the future will be morally and intellectually weakened. But the school cannot meet the increased and pressing requirements of society in the interests of character development unless the mothers and fathers in the home give it earnest and cordial support. One of the subtle ways in which some of the parents unwittingly undermine the influence of teachers is by allowing children to talk of them with disrespect. A high-minded woman of worthy ideals—and there are many such in our schools to-day—been commissioned by society to supplement the work of parent in the upbringing of human souls has been well called a *psychic mother*. If it is her mission to play the part of sympathetic motherhood as well as that of instructor, parents may well guard her influence against all undue forces that may attack it, especially when they have their origin in the home.

Our boys and girls spend a good share of their lives in direct personal contact with public school teachers. Teachers, therefore, must have a very large influence in determining what kind of men and women these boys and girls shall become. It is pre-eminently true that buildings, equipment, organization, administration, and courses of study constitute only the body of any public school system. The soul is the personal power of the supervisors and teachers. They are the interpreters of life to the pupils, and every other part of the system merely helps to bring the pupils under their vitalizing influence. The broader and larger in mental and moral outlook these men and women are, therefore, the better for the future of American life and institutions. But we must remember that young teachers come directly from school or college after having been, by the necessities of the situation, largely segregated from the great life of the world. No matter how well equipped they may be in the knowledge of books and in professional skill, their normal growth calls for something more than reading, study, and school-room associations. And what is the actual situation? A refined and cultured young woman comes into a strange community to take up a work imposing a serious strain upon her physical and nervous energies. In no true sense has she even a home to which she can return at the end of a day of arduous labor. There is, therefore, a special need of sympathetic consideration from the people with whom her lot is cast. She certainly can never render to those people the most effective service without understanding the home life

of her pupils. For the mother and the teacher are co-workers, and should clearly understand each other. But mothers often make no advances, and sometimes have no knowledge of the teachers except what they get through the thoughtless comments of the children, or through interviews resulting from friction in the school-room.

Now if the teachers have few social contacts outside of their work; and if, as in many cities, while they are held in the highest esteem by the community, they are in reality obliged to live in comparative social isolation, the most precious assets of the commonwealth, the children, will be the main sufferers. For men and women of breadth of view, of fine culture, and of such knowledge of the world as can come only from associating with those of different social experience and different intellectual viewpoints, are imperatively needed in the schools if children are to get from their schooling what they deserve.

Among other local conditions which powerfully affect the trend of educational thought and effort are the newspapers. When they give an enlightened interpretation of the work of the schools and a cordial support to those who are responsible for their management, both the schools and the community are immeasurably benefited. It is my good fortune to be in a city where the press works in friendly alliance with the school authorities. Any movement that looks toward the betterment of public education is certain to receive the endorsement of the newspapers of that city. In such ways do local conditions influence the moral aim dominant in the state schools.

I have very briefly called attention to social and moral conditions in American life that should be rectified. But I believe we are rapidly moving toward better things. The American people have larger faith in their public schools than they have ever had before, and they will in the end make them what they should be. We are in the midst of a great moral and social revolution.

The spirit of competition will not pass away, but we may confidently hope that the spirit of co-operation will constantly gain in power over all classes and conditions of society. The moral aims and ideals of the American people are steadily rising to higher standards, and we may with good reason look forward to splendid ethical achievements in business, in politics, and in education.