

(March 12, 1934)

## Recent Developments in Education

BY PRESIDENT HENRY N. MACCRACKEN, PH.D.

PRESIDENT ARSCOTT:—Gentlemen, we have as our guest today, Dr. Henry N. MacCracken, a very well known and outstanding educationist. Since 1915 he has been President of Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, the oldest and one of the largest women's colleges in the United States. He has devoted his life to education and it is a great pleasure to welcome him here today. He is in Toronto, in Canada, visiting some of the branches of the Alumnae Association, and we are very fortunate to have him with us and we appreciate very much that he made arrangements so as to pay us this visit. The subject of his address today is, "Recent Developments in Education." I am sure his message will be of intense interest. I have very much pleasure in introducing Dr. MacCracken.

DR. MACCRACKEN:—Mr. Chairman and members of the Canadian Club, I deeply appreciate the honor you have done me in inviting me as President of Vassar, that small American College, to speak before this body and, particularly, on a subject like education, because we in the States know that the system of early and university education throughout Canada is one of the highest in the world. I personally wish to acknowledge today a guest who is sitting at the table of honor—Professor William H. Clawson, Ph.D., a former room-mate, now at the University of Toronto. It is a great pleasure to chum with him again.

As the Chairman said, I have been asked to speak on "Recent Developments in Education." And while what I shall say applies chiefly to the education of women, as naturally it would, it also applies somewhat to the education of men. There have been great doings in the world

and, in the press of political action and economic crisis, the little educational world has been going on by itself, somewhat apart, and at times, unable to bring its doings before such a body as this, representative of commerce, industry and finance. It is a little like the Scotchman of whom I heard the other day at a dinner on the anniversary of Robert Burns' birthday. An English traveller was visiting the Hebrides and landing on a rather remote isle, he found a fisherman reading a newspaper four months old. On enquiry he learned from the fisherman that the mail boat visited the isle once every four months. He said to the fisherman, "How is it possible for you to live like this, without getting any news of the world for four months at a time?" The Scotsman said, with the true temper of the Scot. "A' weel, they only get news of us every four months." That is the way it has been in education. Great things have been happening in finance and industry and great things have been happening in education and in the few minutes I shall speak to you I shall restrict myself to two topics among many that might be chosen. These are the study of youth and the study by youth. In general, the impact upon education by youth itself within the past generation.

A few years ago at Vassar College, a young woman, Frances Skinner by name, who was studying zoology, was at a table dissecting a frog. She said to her seatmate. "You know I would rather know what goes on inside of the child than what is going on just at this moment inside the body of this frog." That remark was remembered by the seatmate and years later Frances Skinner married and, unfortunately died, and the remark was repeated to her father. And the remark bore fruit in the foundation by Mr. Skinner of the first professorship for the study of children in an American undergraduate college. That professorship still exists, though no longer by that name. It has blossomed into a department of child study. It may be taken as typical of what has been happening during the past generation.

When Vassar College was founded in 1861 there was no social study in the whole curriculum, not even history

was recognized as a study worthy of recognition for an academic degree. But since that time, one by one—since 1895 to be exact—the departments of history, economics, sociology, political science, psychology, geography and child study have been founded, doubling the whole group of social studies. Now with the child the difficulty was to know which of these studies contributed most. It was, therefore, only the first study that attacked the problem of the child on a scientific basis or a psychological basis.

When I went to Vassar College in 1915, the only mention of the child in the curriculum of the college was in genetic psychology and the line in the statement on the curriculum was something about a study of the behavior of the lower animals and the child. Today in the curriculum at Vassar College, you find the child writ large not only in psychology but in physiology, in sanitation, in political science, early history, economics and sociology. There are courses dealing with the child in every aspect that can be studied by social science. The work is not elementary. It is preceded by careful grounding in these studies. No permission is given to attend these courses until prerequisites have been met—the foundation courses in such subjects as sociology, physiology and the rest. A special laboratory has been built in the department—this grant was given by a father of a student who had studied there. It is a nursery school with thirty-five little children from the age of eighteen months to four years and these children are studied, observed, guided, taught and, I might say, loved by the students. In their courses for the full recognition for the academic degree, some of the most careful and scientific work is done on the campus by these students who are working in observing the behavior of children, their nutrition, their hours of sleep and play, their methods of thought and ways in which they learn. Because more and more, gentlemen, we realize that the future of education rests in the integration of the whole individual, from early childhood on through to manhood. It is not a process that is limited to the years in a single elementary or high school or college or university, but a product of these and, particularly, of the years of infancy.

We are just beginning in the world of science, a study of the emotions. Last year the American Council of Education, that co-ordinating body of educators throughout the United States with headquarters at Washington, initiated, with substantial grants of money from foundations, a study of human emotions, particularly with relation to the process of learning. The work undertaken shows how little we know as yet about the emotions. And yet we see on every hand about us the results of maladjustment that has been forced upon us by a civilization that takes no account of the emotions in its development.

I do not know what conditions are on this side of the Lake, but I do know that in New York State there are enough people in the State, in insane asylums alone, to more than fill the City of Poughkeepsie, the city of my own residence with over fifty-five thousand of a population. That is an extraordinary number for a single State to have to support and pay for, as a price for the inadequate preparation for the life in an industrial civilization; and the cost is growing heavier every year and the psychiatrists and psychoanalysts are telling us that, unless we can perform the task of adjustment in early life, this trend is going to increase to a tremendous cost in human life, not to speak of economic costs. In the United States administration three years ago a single bill carried \$500,000,000 for the erection of additional buildings for this work. That gives some impression of the taxation load alone.

In the experimental child laboratory, such as they have at Vassar College, there can be the most careful and scientific survey of the emotions of the child and of their judgments. Even in this little group of thirty-five the child's point of view can be determined and psychiatrists recognize as significant that they can diagnose any behavior that will likely lead to emotional difficulty. One young woman graduate who made her home in Dallas, Texas—her husband is an engineer and she has children of her own—because of her knowledge in the work of this course, has opened up a clinic in the City of Dallas, because there was no clinic in this City before she went there. Her

clinic deals with the correction of stammering. It has been shown that stammering is not an organic effect of the tongue or mouth but a product of embarrassments, emotional difficulties and conflicts within the child, and when these have been removed, speech naturally corrects itself. In other words, it is just a warning signal but not itself fundamental. And if these difficulties are removed in early childhood, all these embarrassments, shynesses and difficulties with stammering will be avoided and emotional conflicts that result from them will not make a deep impression on the mental capacity.

The great advantage of this programme, therefore, is really preventive work, although at such a college as Vassar this study is primarily from a thoroughly scientific viewpoint and the medical schools and the psychological clinics are left the results of its public researches. Seventy-five per cent. of the young people are going to marry and have children. There have been many misstatements. I regret to say, by men who are acknowledged authorities about tendencies of the American College women in their attitude to marrying or bearing children. So I give you this information as the latest careful survey that has been made of the subject. The American College women, as illustrated by the classes from 1916 to 1920 inclusive, is marrying in the ratio of 75%. The same percentage was shown in the United States census of 1930. In other words, the American College woman is marrying almost in the same proposition as the woman who does not go to college. As for the number of children, statistically speaking, every woman has two and two-tenths children—but only statistically speaking!

Largely as a result of this study of youth, the American College woman has resumed her place in general society. She is not discernible from the other women of her age and from her social group, except by her intense interest in youth itself.

Now, what is true of the study of the child is also true of the adolescent, of the young man and young women. So we have courses in adolescent psychology. We are interested—definitely so—in the relations between boys

and girls, between boys and boys, between girls and girls, between children and their parents, between husbands and wives—especially between young husbands and young wives. We are rushing into this field—not blindly, but we are treating it cautiously, carefully and sympathetically. This very week at Vassar College, a distinguished physician, Dr. Robert Dickenson, will come to the College for the week-end to advise and have a conference with the members of the graduating class of Vassar College. He is well known in the field of maternal health and he is a scientist. Anyone present interested in this subject would do well to read his book published last year, called, "A Case Study of a Thousand Marriages." Dr. Dickenson, for many years, has given free clinical advice to any married couple, making as the sole condition that after five years of married life they would return to him and tell him the clinical results of their experiences. Thus this careful clinical study was compiled by this physician who is now seventy years of age. A visit by such a scholar to any young woman engaged to be married or expecting to be married and in a few months to bear children is of the highest social and scientific value to them. You can be very sure it has nothing to do with any triviality or any vicarious curiosity but, on the contrary it is serious and frank and gratuitously undertaken. The result of that has been in years past that many of our graduates have gone out into the world converted by such a man as Dr. Dickenson. What a crusade—reducing the mortality in childbirth of young American mothers!

I regret to say to an audience not in my own country but, nevertheless, it is true, the United States stands lowest in the civilized nations of the world in regard to safety of women who bear children. This is due to a great number of causes. Surveys which have been made recently indicate it is largely due, not speaking medically but from a social viewpoint, to the lack of interest of the young people themselves and the ignorance and inertia of women whose business it should be that this blight upon our civilization should be removed.

I will name a graduate of Vassar College who engaged

in such a crusade. She was Mrs. John W. Blodgett. She went to live in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and found the same terrible conditions that prevailed all over the country—the high percentage of mortality during childhood—the high percentage of deaths of children under one year. She made it her life work to make Grand Rapids, Mich., the safest City in the United States for a woman to bear children. After years of ceaseless efforts that has been the proud boast of that City. I was present at the funeral exercises held in her honor a year ago. I heard the Mayor of Grand Rapids and other citizens make the statement that this work was largely the work of a single woman—Mrs. Blodgett. She had brought into the high school system human hygiene and home nursing, so that there went out from these schools capable young women. She had also brought about the erection of two great hospitals in the City, and gradually trained nurses were in attendance at clinics for children, with maternal welfare, prenatal care, clinics in nutrition, tuberculosis, cancer, heart diseases and similar enterprises. The result of the devoted labor of a single woman. She was given an honorary degree from the State University in recognition of this great task. For my part, I am proud it is possible for a young graduate of the college to find in the curriculum which shelters the honorable classics of Greek, Latin, the modern languages, pure science, physics and chemistry and the rest of the studies, such a group of interests and studies that enables her to go out and see to it that some of the ills of our time are remedied.

I mention another young woman, Mrs. Adolphe Berle, wife of the City Chamberlain of New York City, a graduate of Vassar College, who has been for years making a careful study of the relations in courtship and early marriage of young men and women from a social and æsthetic point of view. She has asked herself the question, "What has become of the art of love? What has become of chivalry? What is to be the æsthetic phase of the relations between the sexes in the future?" It is perfectly obvious to all of us that the art of chivalry has largely disappeared. The chivalrous attitude still exists on the part of many

well-trained young men, but largely it has been forgotten and today these young people are groping towards a new æsthetic relationship. There was a time when there were separate colleges for young men and separate colleges for young women where they lived in almost complete isolation. A girl who went to a college for women was alluded to as strong-minded. The young man who went to college, when he went round with a young woman, had what was known today as a "line"—a method of talking. That was only a few years ago. Today this has been largely changed. These young people are meeting on a basis of common interests with mutual respect and with real equality. I have been at many of their conventions. I have a great interest in the National Student Federation of America, the International Federation and other organizations of this kind, so I can speak from experience. Young people are talking about politics, about citizenship and about subjects of the community. A whole new generation of young people, who have attained mutual respect for each other, is a result of the study of youth itself which is now coming to the fore in the United States. President Franklin Roosevelt, who has been a trustee of Vassar College for the last ten years, has recognized the existence of this group and he said not long ago, if he had the courage of his convictions he would have appointed young people to his cabinet not over forty years of age. He did so as you know. He has added to the cabinet membership a group of young men mostly under forty and young women who are now making history in Washington and throughout the country. It is one of the most inspiring things in the world to go to them, to sit and mingle with this group of younger people. They have faith in the future and they are not pessimistic. They are determined to give their lives to the enterprise in which they are engaged. I would predict that success will attend their efforts because many of them are the most brilliantly-trained minds we have.

The future is in the hands of this group. We have to recognize the importance of training youth all through this period of school and college that there is a chance today for bringing forth a new, highly-trained corps of shock

troops to meet the terrific problems that confront us at the present time. The Assistant Federal District Attorney of New York State is a young Vassar graduate who graduated only seven years ago—Miss Elizabeth Rogers. She is the only woman on the staff. It certainly showed the confidence that was placed in her powers that a young woman under thirty should be appointed to this, perhaps the most difficult Attorney's office in the United States. The Commissioner of Labor for the State of Pennsylvania under the direction of Governor Gifford Pinchot, is Miss Catherine Carr, who graduated about fifteen years ago from Vassar College, and specialized in labor conditions.

Now it must be admitted these newer studies have taken away from the older studies some of their prominence. It is for the students to give their views as to whether they will study the classics, mathematics or even literature. She may select a set of studies that meet her needs and include none of these. It would be far from the truth to imply that these subjects have really suffered from the fact that they have to yield some of their prominence. They themselves have been revived by the introduction of these subjects. One of the most delightful essays I saw recently was written by a young woman who was taking Greek aside from her main study and who wrote an essay on cats in ancient Greek sculpture. I had no knowledge, until I read that essay, that the Greeks were so fond of their cats. It was a most charmingly written essay.

I can name many other instances, not perhaps so amazing, to show these students are having that new point of view. The most popular course in the Greek Department, for example, is the course in Greek civilization. The most popular course in the Latin Department is the course in Roman life. I submit there are questions which are not important for graduates—for instance, the question whether Julius Caesar's Gallic wars are true or a piece of military propoganda, that the question as to whether Nero really had fiddled while Rome burned is important, is something I take leave to doubt.

Now, the other angle has already been covered by some of the things I have said—to approach the subject from

the point of view of the study. In the first place they have insisted upon contemporary courses in the history department, in the department of literature, in the department of philosophy. We have their own demands which are given consideration. You will find courses dealing with contemporary life and courses dealing with the past. Today we have large classes running up to one hundred and fifty students in a course on contemporary Russia. The students no longer merely study these courses in the classroom, in the archives and the library. They must visit the country. There are organized trips to Russia under the Professor of Russian history. Again groups of students are taken every year to visit the great art centres of Europe. The professor of geology visits the Rockies and other centres, taking young women with him to study the subject at first hand. The same all through the curriculum, and the laboratory with its hot and cold water. A.C., and D.C. current, is not the only place where a subject is studied. This, I believe, is as it should be.

It was Amos Eaton in our part of the world who over a hundred years ago founded the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, the first college for science in the whole of the English-speaking world. It was organized only a short time before the Polytechnische Hochschule, Berlin. He initiated the laboratory notebook. He said your quality as a student depends on what you are able to set down of the workings of your own mind. He initiated field trips as opposed to scientific observations. He said to every student, "Go out into the fields and come back and tell me what you have seen." These fundamental principles are seen everywhere today in the field of biology, geology and other sciences, but only in the past generation have these principles been extended to social studies, and students are investigating at first hand the workings of enterprises at their very doors. For instance, in Vassar College our students in sociology have been investigating the process and organization and results, so far as they can be seen, of the various relief projects of President Roosevelt's civil works administration—called the W.A.—public works called P.W. Today there had indeed been a great change and the young men and young women are insisting upon

essentials. In great institutions like the University of Chicago the curriculum has been radically reconstructed under four or five great heads. These courses include modern civilization, history, problems of citizenship, the principles of literature instead of consideration of the merits of a single branch of literature and giving to the people who study it a survey of literature as a whole. This system may not be as scholarly as the old system, but it brings the student in contact with life and immediate needs. Another result of centering education upon youth rather than subject matter is that it is a qualitative rather than a quantitative process. It is not the test of a well-educated man today how many subjects he has studied, how many hours per week in the classroom, how many papers he has written. In the old days, when I taught at Yale, essays of one thousand five hundred words used to be given students to write. There was one young man who was extremely irritated. He used to count the words in his essays very carefully. If it contained one thousand five hundred and one words he would go over the last sentence and scratch out a word and give me the exact number. That kind of education produces that kind of response from young people today. Modern youth can be trusted and, under supervision of a tutor or advisor or whatever you care to call him, he goes on in preparation for the struggle of life and looks forward to the general examinations to test his knowledge. He approaches each subject, not as a little boy sitting down to a lesson but as a man using all his capacities and experience in tackling the problem of the present moment.

I think this method of education is much more thrilling. In response to this recognition of youth as an individual, there has come to the individual recognition of his obligation to the community. It is in this new spirit of social idealism that the modern curriculum has been organized.

MR. ARSCOTT:—Dr. MacCracken, we have thoroughly enjoyed your address today. You have given us a very interesting account of the development which is going on in education and also the activities of your own college. We have enjoyed having you with us. We hope you will come and visit us again. We thank you.