

Delivered before ^{Parents' & Teachers' Club of the} the public school at
Mt. Washington, Md. April 16, 1909.

I have been asked by your President to come here this afternoon and talk to you. In answer to my query as to what she would like for me to talk about, she was kind enough to say that she did not wish to make any suggestions, knowing whatever subject I should select would please you far better than any she could suggest.

I know nothing about the objects of your club and less about its workings, so whatever I say this afternoon is utterly void of local flavor.

In recent years, these clubs have had almost a phenomenal growth. Why is this? Is it only one form of expressing the present day tendency in American life to organize? We, as a nation, are the most individualistic people now inhabiting the earth, and yet there seems to be at present a mania for organizing. Churches have clubs, schools have a multitude of clubs, business is forming into vast combinations, political parties into clubs, labor into organizations. Every community has a number of clubs, such as book clubs, sewing circles, whist clubs and every other conceivable kind of organization. In short, the individualism of our nation is clustering itself into a myriad of organizations. Is the formation of parents' and teachers' clubs only one in this vast array of organizations? I am not able to say. But I do believe this form of organization has a good reason for its existence - surely a much better reason for existence than many of the organizations that I sometimes call gossiping societies.

America, as a nation, stands for but one idea, government of a Republican or Democratic nature. If we look back into the life of the great nations of the world, we will see each one stood primarily for some one ideal. The Jews for religion - at one time their government was a form of theism. Their laws were supposed to be of divine origin.

The Greeks stood for the beautiful, in architecture, mental, moral and physical life. The beautiful in everything. It was a puzzle to the Greek how Socrates could be so good and yet be so ugly.

The Romans stood for law, the English for individual liberty, and do not the French of to-day stand for fashion. From the English idea there sprang up upon American soil the idea of "equal rights to all and special privileges to none." This expressed itself in our present form of Democracy. This is our national idea. This is what we stand for. We have no national religion, no national idea of art, or architecture nor of any other one thing save government. We are the most diversified, the most individualistic people in the world. The only thing common to us is our form of government. It is for us to demonstrate to the world that there can be a government of the people, for the people, and yet by the people. This is a stupendous task; for there is constantly flowing into our midst a vast army of peoples from every conceivable form of government. America is to demonstrate to the world that she can take people with all kinds of political, social and religious beliefs and mould them into a democratic people politically. In this attempt we find the justification for our public schools.

Under existing ideals in our country, we find the justification for the expenditure of public funds for education and books only on the basis that those taught may become better citizens. A republic can exist only when its citizenship is of a high order of intelligence. With schools organized around the norm of civic functions, of what use is an organization of parents and teachers. Such a club can serve two purposes.

A. It brings the parents together and thus has a tendency to democratize them. Here in your school you have something in common. Employer and employee, rich and poor meet here on equal terms. Your

children are in this school and you all have a common interest here. In religion, you may be in different churches, in your purely social organizations, you are in different environments, but here you all meet with a common interest. In other words, from our national idea, these clubs are of invaluable service to you as individual members of a common government.

B. They bring the homes into closer touch with the schools. In this way, they may become of inestimable value to you in the things the schools teach you, the parents, and also they may make a more intelligent co-operation between the home and the school.

Let me explain what I mean. We Americans are not given to looking up the events of the past. We pass judgment upon the things of the present in the light of our own times only. For example, we find our children with many things to do for school and we say at once, "They are crowding the curriculum and introducing all kinds of fads and fancies". This we say without ever looking to see what was done in former years. Not long since, I looked up the record of a person who graduated from the Eastern High School eighteen years ago and I found that she had eleven studies her first year and thirteen each year for the three subsequent years. Pursuing the corresponding course of work now, the school board law allows only eight and with the exceptionally bright pupil, nine studies. In our school, we are not comparatively speaking, crowding the curriculum, and yet I have received anonymous letters telling me that ^{*We are and*} if we would drop some of our fads and give more time to the real work of the school, as was done in former days, we'd get better results, that the parents are getting tired of these new-fangled notions. Many parents need to be taught as well as the children.

Parents realize that the schools of to-day are quite different from the schools of their youth, but what they do not realize is that

these changes are brought about after much study, thought, and discussion on the part of those responsible for these changes. Often the one in charge of the classes does not realize this.

Some parents accept these changes as good, others reject them as bad, while many honestly seek to understand what they mean. The first class of people are those who accept all new things as good simply because they are new. They do not think. The second class are confusionists, i.e., nothing new is good just because it is new. They do not think. The third class is the salvation of our school systems. They are willing to weigh matters and see what of good there is. They think. As a result, they get some light on educational questions.

Education is fast becoming a profession. Ten years now is a generation in school teaching. Never before have we advanced so rapidly as at present in matters educational, and as a result, it is practically impossible for the parent with the many home or office duties to keep apace with the rapid advance of educational ideals. If these clubs serve their purpose, they will help the parents to see the good in our systems. They will help you to realize that we are really doing things with more intelligence and therefore better than ever before. They will help parents and teachers to a better understanding. They will help you to take to your home a little sweeter spirit. They will help you to co-operate with the school people in furthering the interest of your local school. The best interest of such clubs can be served only when we all realize that these organizations are purely educational. If they lead to a better understanding between teachers and parents, resulting in a more hearty co-operation on the part of both, they will then subserve their best ends; for the teacher can teach better when he feels that he and the parents understand each other and are working for the same end.

Let us view these clubs from the standpoint of the teacher.

Every community has its traditions, its standards, its ideals.

A person may be a successful teacher in one community and a failure in another. Why? In the one, he has adjusted himself to the demands of the people, in the other, he has failed to read aright the signs of the times, as it were, i.e., he is not in touch with the thoughts and traditions of his people. The conscientious person, and no other kind can make a real teacher, will endeavor to adjust himself to the needs of his patrons. When he has the standards and ideals of the home, the teacher can handle his pupil with much more intelligence. In other words, we, the teachers, must learn from you, the patrons, many more things than you can ever learn from us. You must teach us, in many ways, how to teach your children. For these clubs to become the most efficient, they must become in a measure "mutual understanding societies".

This leads me naturally to the spirit that should dominate such an organization. Let me say just here, to be of much real and lasting benefit, you must remain a parents and teachers club. Whenever parents or teachers are either eliminated, then at least one half of your usefulness as an organization is at an end. In fact, as such an organization your entire usefulness is ended.

Good healthy criticism is always helpful. But there is a great deal of difference between criticism and faultfinding. If your association becomes a body of grumblers, faultfinders, or kickers, again your usefulness is at an end.

*Criticism is life giving, elevating
Conducive of growth; faultfinding*

*is blighting, destructive and produces
stagnation and death.*

The children the teacher has to handle are the children from the homes of you parents. The work then must be co-operative. It is co-operative. Teacher and parent are working for the same end, the moral as well as intellectual uplift of the children of a given community, and this can be done best only when the child feels that the school and the home

are in accord. We wish to make this generation of boys and girls better citizens than any generation previous. Let us therefore get together and stay together for the betterment of humanity, that the march of civilization may ever be upward as well as onward. Then generations yet to come will look back upon us and say we did well.