PUBLIC EDUCATION¹

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Since our panel of speakers will deal with the more specific elements inherent in the subject of public education this morning, I have chosen, in the brief time at my disposal, to deal with the broader and less technical aspects of the subject.

Gathered here is a group of men whose lives have been, and are, devoted to the conservation of Canada's natural resources. In many instances, the word dedicated might more properly be used.

History reveals that men dedicated to any worthwhile cause—whether it be in medicine, education, art or science, have frequently met with public ignorance and its offshoot, lethargy; with closed minds, with the will to power, and with opposition.

At this meeting, we are concerned with the sincerity of our purpose and devotion, and what it should produce in those other returns without which our work will reap no harvest: I speak of enlightened public opinion, and its by-products, curiosity and interest. Awakened, alert, progressive minds, creating active cooperation can and will dissolve any degree of entrenched opposition.

The only bridge spanning the gap between our endeavour and our objective is that of education. And in my opinion the most fertile soil for education, and that which will offer the richest harvest, is youth. I do not think this can be questioned.

But it seems to me we are apt to look upon educationists as the school teacher, the professor, the specialist—and leave it at that. This is wrong. Qualified specialists today are widely distributed through society. The concentrated, coordinated, inspired individual is rare.

Any man with a belief and purpose in life is, potentially, an educationist. Whether he knows it or not, the quality and measure of his belief and purpose will affect everyone with whom he comes in contact; and foresters are no exception.

As an example: at the beginning of the war, Churchill did more than any living man to steer Britain through a period that might have proved the end of civilisation for all of us. Churchill is not an educationist in the specialised sense. Yet he inspired and *educated* the men and women of Britain to the point where they produced the tools and did the job. He did this, first through a universal and sincere appeal to ideals (which are the most forceful and practical weapons on earth) and through utilising his incomparable sense of poetry and drama.

Foresters, particularly, cannot succeed in what their Forest Policy states is their first aim, if they remain factual specialists. This, because they are dealing with the most diversified and creative force on earth—that of

1. Paper presented at the 41st annual meeting of the Canadian Society of Forest Engineers, Toronto, October 24-26, 1949.

Nature herself. In Nature, while there is perfection of specialisation on one plane, there is also a vast, unifying interdependence on another.

In our role of educationists, we must deal with this interdependent aspect of our natural resource, and with the essential oneness of that resource and the human beings it supports. Only in this way shall we engage the imagination and ideals of youth, without which we shall not enlist their lasting interest.

Facts unrelated to life as a whole, may be *taught* the child—they will not *educate* him in the true sense of the word. Uninspired living ceases to be life and becomes existence. Uninspired teaching, by the same token, does not educate, it merely offers a series of facts. An accumulation of facts, without the transposition of those facts into an integral and creative whole, has as little meaning as an accumulation of musical notes written down on a score sheet, without the transposition of those notes into a harmonious composition.

Let us give our youngsters a *reason* for forest fire prevention, for conservation of our natural resources. This we may do—not with statistics unrelated to anything that is vital to them—but by revealing to them the poetry, drama, struggle, the mystery and the beauty inherent in the life of a forest.

Man's imagination—not his mental dictionary of facts—has been the stepping stone through history to all human achievement. Facts—offered to youth as *ends* in themselves—become dead ends! Facts—given as *an avenue of approach to the high purpose of living*—become the coloured, meaningful blocks out of which the child may build that life.

The suggestion that all foresters should apply what sense of poetry they possess in putting over their message in the field of youth education may invite some satire—but the thought is worthy of attention. Nature herself has been an inspiration to all the greatest poets, and it is my thought that to leave the element of poetry—vision—out of our public education in conservation is like leaving the plot out of the novel, the yeast out of the loaf, the musical theme out of the symphony.

The attitude of the teacher is vitally important. To quote Sir Richard Livingstone when President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford . . . He stated. "If you want a description of our age, here is one: the civilisation of means without ends; rich in means beyond any other epoch—squandering and misusing them because it has no overruling ideal: an ample body with a meagre soul.

"What kind of teaching will change this?

"It is more a matter of the teacher's attitude than of the subjects taught . . . Always, in the true educator's mind is the sense that everything is there in order to contribute to the making of human beings, developed in body, mind and character, equipped for the business of living, and

ruled in their aims and actions by the vision of what Plato called the Idea of Good.

"Where that spirit is present, education will succeed; where it is absent, it can never have more than partial success. The mere existence in the teacher of such a view of education—and therefore of life—will communicate itself to the pupil, though the teacher may never mention it nor the child consciously realise it until long after; for a teacher's outlook educates more than anything that he says."

I agree with Livingstone. I personally believe that the mere existence in foresters—in their role of educationists—of such a view of education and of life, will communicate itself to their key public, the youth within the schools. Moreover, I believe that such a view is the only solid foundation upon which the more specialised and technical methods of public education can safely and successfully be erected.

Public education is the responsibility of foresters. Are we going to accept that responsibility?