

Address by Henry F. Hall, Principal
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Matt. Am'le
Peterborough
W. Harris

O U T L I N E

It is with pleasure that I come to Peterborough to be with you tonight and to share the sense of achievement as well as the sense of vision of this annual meeting. I congratulate you most heartily on the work of your Association and I am especially pleased to see my good friend Cam Gorrie. We miss him in Montreal, but we know that our loss is your gain.

As we are all well aware, the Y.M.C.A. movement was started in London, England, 117 years ago. Its early work was focussed on the individual and its attention to the individual has generally been characteristic of its chief concern.

One of the problems to our day is the danger of the individual being lost in the mass. Many people tend to become mere names or even mere numbers. In my opinion, the Y.M.C.A. has been, and is, a great influence in the direction of preserving the personality of the individual.

Many of you have heard the small boy's definition of a mother as a person who knows all about you but who likes you just the same. I am not suggesting that even the Y.M.C.A. can take the place of mothers, but as small boys grow into big boys and big boys into men, they need other people who know all about them but like them just the same.

Friendly counselling, sometimes on a most informal basis, has always been a leading characteristic of the Association. When well done, this

requires a certain type of personality not too easily found, but I know that you here have your share of such people whose devotion and whose influence ~~are~~^{is} not reducible to the statistics of an annual report, but the quality of whose work is the over-plus, the qualitative unseen (if you like, ^{the} spiritual) which cannot be counted or measured but which makes all the difference in the end.

I make no apology for putting individual work first in the Y.M.C.A.'s program. This is partially because of my fear already indicated that it is in danger of being neglected and lost. The quantitative increase in numbers of people and size of program is no substitute for influence on individual people. The world is still filled with lonely souls whose greatest need is a kindly word, a friendly hand and a patient understanding.

I am more and more convinced of the fundamental validity of the great principle of individual differences. Each one of us is a unique creation. This to me is not only a scientific truth, it is a primary Christian doctrine related to the fatherhood of God and the sonship of His children.

The second great area of your work in the community is with the mass.

By "mass work" I do not mean to imply any deprecation. Many of the most important functions of life are carried on in masses; that is in groups without specific group organization. Transportation, nutrition, and even much of our education and our religious activities may be classified under this heading. Years ago, I used to resent hearing people say that the Y.M.C.A. is a good thing because it "Keeps boys off

the street." Moving pictures and other even less desirable activities may keep the boys off the street. Now, however, I am not so sure that this is not a good and desirable function especially if it is combined with healthy and wholesome activities such as you can see any day at the Y.M.C.A. Many of our leading citizens are worried about our youth becoming a generation of spectators. Those who are active in the Y.M.C.A. never will be. *out of the mass — (T. Statter)*

The center of gravity, however, of a modern Y.M.C.A. program is in the group. It is in group work that the Association movement has pioneered and in which it is still highly effective.

This, of course, is an educational process, although many who are engaged in it do not look upon it as such. The outcomes which we seek and can, I believe, demonstrate are changes in attitudes and a growth of abilities. These together are the building of character. I wish that every boy and girl in Canada had the opportunity to belong to such a group, for if they did, Canada would be a better country.

There are certain principles which, it seems to me, are basic to group work in the Y.M.C.A. These, I think, are so important that I might be excused for enlarging upon them in a few words.

In the first place, good groups at any age are in the best sense an educational experience. We may acquire knowledge in isolation and this I would not deprecate, for knowledge is important. However, a large area of the achievement and the problems of life is related to other people. Our social adjustments are among the most fundamental

of our learnings whether we recognize this or not.

In the second place, a group experience involves a measure of freedom. How much freedom ^{they should have} is a matter of opinion and a matter of every individual situation. Some of us older people find it difficult, too, to allow the younger generation freedom to make obvious mistakes. This is one of the difficulties concerning which we have examples around us all the time. It is my conviction that those who make no mistakes achieve very little and this is particularly true of a group experience.

The other day, I attended an impressive Hi-Y induction ceremony. This was carried out by the clubs involved themselves. I am sure it could have been much better done by hiring professional actors to take the leading roles supported by professional musicians in the background. I am equally sure, however, that as a learning experience this was far better than any staged performance could have been.

In the third place, group work, or group education, is closely related to democracy. I like to think of groups as the grass roots of democracy, because this is the soil in which democracy grows.

We are apt to think of democracy as a system of government, and so it is, but it is much more than that. It is a way of life; and ways of life have to be learned - particularly democratic ways.

Among the most disturbing spectacles which we have observed in our time is that of the training of a whole generation of Nazi youth within a few years. This was done by the efficient application of psychological principles and educational method in the most dramatic and startling fashion. An examination of this shows that it was the direct negation of democracy, and it is my conviction that we cannot teach democracy by the contradictory processes of undemocratic method.

Democracy at this level is very expensive. It requires patience and time. Of both of these commodities, the modern world seems to believe that it is somewhat short, and so dictators, with no patience and little time, offer a substitute system of training.

Many years ago (in 1936 to be exact) I heard Lyman Bryson give a striking address which I have never forgotten. In speaking of the basic role of democracy, Dr. Bryson said:

During the nineteenth century we had a persistent conflict between two ideals in America. One was the ideal of mechanical efficiency and discipline, which naturally develops in a mechanical industrial order. The other was the ideal of free government. I would not say that these two things are necessarily incompatible, but each should be kept in its own realm. I am not sure that mechanical efficiency is the best thing, even in business. We can let that pass. But I am sure that the efficient discharge of public business is not the main purpose of government, and that governments are not properly judged by this standard alone. It is a waste of time to argue with someone who says that dictatorships are preferable to democracies because they get their business done more quickly and more effectively. I am not sure that they do, but it really doesn't matter. We want public business to be done as well as may be, but governments which make that a chief aim begin by sacrificing the citizen to the state. It is absolutely fundamental to the idea of democracy that the state exists for the sake of its citizens. The basic standard by which a government is to be judged, if one holds to this idea, is the degree in which the powers and possibilities of the average man and woman are developed. Self-government is not easy or comfortable. That is why it is desirable. It would be much easier to surrender all responsibility to a benevolent tyrant and let him run the state's business for us. Of course, if we did that, we could always expect that he would soon be running the state for the benefit of himself and in order to keep himself in power. That always happens and it is reasonable to suppose that it always will. But, to the man who accepts the idea of democracy, a tyranny would be unsatisfactory no matter how benevolent it might be. We need self-government because when we cannot escape taking some share in the affairs of our country we are ourselves stretched to the limits of our powers and roused to whatever greatness there may be in us. We believe in democracy, not because it makes better governments but because it makes for better men and women.

This is exactly the point, but how does democracy make better men and women? I know of no other way than by practice and living, working

and playing together; and please note, by doing these things in a democratic atmosphere and with a fundamental sense of responsibility. Some people say that freedom in education merely gives youth a chance to "Raise the devil and smash up the world." This to me is stuff and nonsense. There are always exceptions, and human nature is very complex and people are all different, but my experience leads me to the belief that, by and large, youth itself respond to responsibility; and that is what the small, self-governing group provides. In addition, it also provides leadership - not in the form of a dictator or a boss - but in the form of a constant example and a positive influence in the direction of a good life and a recognition of the essential dignity and worth of every human soul.

Perhaps you think I have idealized the situation, but I tell you frankly that this is my faith, that democracy can only grow and survive and character in the true sense can only develop in our modern world by the provision of opportunities for groups to work and live together as I have tried to suggest. This, I suggest, your Association does to the limit of its capacity and for this reason it deserves your loyalty, your active interest and your wholehearted support.

Build the road of peace before us,
Build it wide and deep and long,
Speed the slow, check the eager,
Help the weak and curb the strong.

None shall push aside another,
None shall let another fall;
March beside me, o my brother,
All for one and one for all.

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A.Y.