

Public Opinion May Hold A Nation's Or An Individual's Ideals, Says Supt. B. D. Bunn In Address At Rotary Club

(B. D. Bunn, Supt. of Schools.) Superintendent B. D. Bunn read the following paper before the local Rotary Club on Friday.

The paper was so impressive that Rotary Club officials wanted the public to have the opportunity to read it.

Years ago, when whiskers and pepper-toed boots were in style, the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers were the frontier of America. Today there is a frontier. We can circle the globe in ten minutes.

In the neighborhood of these great rivers lived a hearty and adventurous people. Few educated; all were hardy. They had no acquaintance with money, and little contact with the formalities of law.

Among them were many men who had no acquaintance with common decency. These used foul language, boasted at book learning, boasted of their toughness. They fought among themselves, rough and tumble, gouging out eyes, biting thumbs. Descendants of this same tribe are numerous today.

A man's standing in a community depended somewhat upon the strength he could lift. Muscle ruled. Local heroes were good wrestlers.

There were horse thieves in the land. Men taking pork and corn down the river in flat boats were considered and their cargo stolen. There were fights with knives and agricultural implements; and when a fight was over, one of the combatants had to be buried. 165 years ago there was no church or schoolhouse.

Then conditions changed and new standards appeared. Homes began to acquire comforts. The people went to school and learned to read. They built churches and learned to keep clean, mentally, physically and morally.

They learned to rank honor above muscle, learning above physical prowess. The toughs disappeared. Manslaughter became an uncommon occurrence. Can that be said of us in a world of progress in 1926? There was somewhat an advancement in liv-

ing conditions and the frontier had only moved out a little.

This did not mark the end of frontier life, however. A new frontier had appeared out in the short grass country, and here again life was raw, hard and uncertain.

The toughs were of a new kind, but no less tough. They did not boast of their muscle, but of their quickness with a gun. The man who could "draw" more quickly than his neighbors was a prominent citizen.

There were few women at this new frontier, no school houses, no churches. There were many saloons, many gambling places, many fights, frequent funerals.

Bandits were romantic figures, clothed in myth. They were hunted, perhaps, but they were respected by their hunters. There was no law except public opinion and expediency, and these were tolerant to the point of indifference.

III. And then here, on this last frontier of all, the story of reform was repeated. School, church, and court house became centers of community character. And the toughs disappeared.

Now what was it that effected the change on these frontiers? Was it hangings? No; criminals were caught and hanged, but the hanging was a result, not a cause. There were at one time a great number of "hanging crimes" in England; but hanging served only to make an end of individual criminals, not of crime.

The fear of punishment operates but seldom to deter one who is bent on crime. The promise of profit and the hope of escape combine to offset fear. Death only ends the one who participates. The crime wave keeps rolling unless the individual is educated to a higher plane of living, and to higher ideals of thinking.

What, then, worked the miracle? Nothing more than public opinion. While public opinion tolerated brutality the brutal flourished. While public opinion gave to the bandit a halo of romance, a young man might hold up a stage and rob its passen-

ger without loss of self-respect.

IV. But when the public learned to scorn dirt and foul language, and to voice a wholesome contempt of thieves and murderers, the toughs found themselves out of harmony with their environment, and those that survived either reformed or scattered. You can be assured that the two will not mix today. Crows and blackbirds may fly together, but pigeons and blackbirds will not live together. Man always changes his environment or his environment changes him, this either for good or for bad.

There are few greater forces than scorn. The fear of it drives the soldier forward when he lunge desperately to retreat. The fear of it gives men strength to overcome temptations that otherwise would break them. The fear of it encourages fair play, cleanliness, study, and graces to which mortals may aspire.

Is there a "crime wave"? Then it exists because public opinion does not, for any small reward, deliberately invite the contempt of his class and his associates. The man who does not cater to public opinion will have to (1) change public opinion, or (2) allow public opinion to change him, or (3) he had as well move out. If you don't watch, public opinion will rule your community; whether that opinion be right or wrong. It is your duty as a Christian leader to educate public opinion.

The man who will not wear a red tie with a dinner coat, or lift food on his knife, or strike a woman, or wear a dress and take in washing, will not in any other particular invite public derision, ridicule, contempt, or scorn.

Public opinion has in times past cleaned up America, and human nature has not changed. If you want public opinion to clean up your town, county, or state, then educate public opinion.

When those who are not criminals feel and express a sincere and unbounded scorn for those who are, instead of vesting them with glamour and romance, and playing them up as "super-men" in the newspapers and through public opinion, none but those whose minds are warped will remain in the criminal class. Is it criminal on your part and mine to allow the following conditions to exist in the educational world today? When you have an idea that would help public opinion, why swallow it and allow it to give you the indiges-

tion the remainder of your earthly days?

1. Allow ourselves to become victims of pessimistic influences and waves of educational depressions.

2. Allow propoganda to gain wide circulation that will impede the progress of Christian citizenship.

3. Debaring our young leaders from thinking straight, acting wisely and speaking courageously.

4. Propaganda to defeat the democratic principles of a democratic republic.

Public opinion can mould the destiny of a nation for many generations to come. According to our opinion, yours and mine, what will the ideas of the next generation be?

Are we victims of circumstances and powerless to change our environment or are we creators and change our environment as well as being changed by environment? God is not a God of stone, a statue or an immovable being. He is creator, a being of service. Man was created in the image of this creator, therefore we become creators and not doomed by environment or circumstances. We are both potter and clay. We plan our own destinies and dwell therein. The man of vision and leadership refuses to be overcome by conditions, circumstances and environment, but leads out and transforms the undesirable to the desirable.

The scientist speaks and the universe moves at his biddings. Your success or failure depends upon you and your convictions and not upon things and circumstances. If one never climbs higher than his present status its his fault and not mine or yours. Why worry about things that cannot help or hinder? Some people worry about how long they will live and allow their thoughts to circumscribe a life of service and then clam circumstances keep them from doing their greatest work. Some people worry about eternity and wonder what they can do to change the hereafter. Personally I think everyone has all he can do here without trying to help run eternity. Life is not a gambling board for everyone to try to understand, but a channel of service, an opportunity for us to do what we choose and the choice made altogether on our own volition.

Full many a gem, its purest ray serene
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear;
Full many a flower is born to blush

unseen
And wastes its sweetness on the desert air.

The kerfew tolls the knell of a parting day

The lowing herd winds slowly
the lea,
The plowman homeward plods
weary way
And leaves the world to darkness
to me.

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