

A TRIBUTE TO A. A. O'BRIEN

"And in his quiet way he does a wonderful job."
—Archbishop O'Leary

Today thirty-three percent of Edmonton's schools give a Catholic education to twenty-one percent of the city's youngsters on seventeen percent of the taxes.

The credit for this "wonderful job" in large measure belongs to Austin A. O'Brien, Superintendent of Edmonton Separate Schools for the past thirty-seven years.

Born in Alma Prince Edward Island, sixty-five years ago, the young Austin O'Brien undoubtedly inherited his wit from his father, Thomas O'Brien and his thrift from his mother, a member of the Morrison clan.

After teaching in Prince Edward Island rural schools and proceeding to St. Dunstan's University where he was class valedictorian, Austin O'Brien accepted a teaching position in Calgary. There he met the gracious and charming lady whom he married in 1923.

In January 1924, A. A. O'Brien was appointed Superintendent of Edmonton Separate Schools. Many thousands of former pupils well remember the knock on the classroom door and their rising briskly to say: "Good morning, Mr. O'Brien" as this unassuming man entered their classroom. Etched in their minds are the memories of him standing at the front of the classroom and characteristically placing his hand over his heart as he talked quietly and earnestly.

Under his guidance the Edmonton Separate School System has survived and thrived through the years and through difficult times. High staff morale and intense loyalty to Catholic education have been built up — the morale and loyalty which made possible the financial sacrifices needed to preserve Edmonton Separate Schools during the depression years. This morale and loyalty is still in evidence even though the school system has re-doubled in size since the close of the Second World War.

Through the years A. A. O'Brien's example has inspired all those associated with him to pursue excellence with vigor. His is the rare ability to bring forth the best of the traditional and to blend with it the finest of the new. The result has been the creation of a school system characterized on the one hand by traditional respect for high academic standards, and on the other

by modern regard for better methods of teaching.

His prudence is the fountainhead from which stream other excellences that have made him an outstanding business administrator and educational supervisor. Prudence as defined in the Catholic Dictionary is an intellectual and cardinal virtue "pointing out the golden mean between excellence and defect . . . enabling the intellect to see what is virtuous and what is not. Prudence as well "implies memory of the past, understanding of the present and finally foresight, circumspection and precaution." A. A. O'Brien is prudence personified.

Never one to make hasty decisions he is noted for making the right decisions. His acumen, astuteness and foresight have enabled the Edmonton Separate Schools' building program to keep pace with rapidly rising enrolments to a degree equalled by few city school systems on the continent.

His talents and energies have helped secure and retain the kind of teachers so necessary to attain the goal for which a Catholic school system exists — the educational and spiritual welfare of the children. On January 24, 1957 when the problem of teacher shortage seemed insurmountable, he wrote to the Sister Principals and the Superiors of Convents. "One further request! I have always felt that many of our school problems would not have been solved, and many of the blessings with which our schools have been favored, would not have been received, had it not been for the fact that we had on our staff a group of Sisters and priests who offered up daily their prayers for the welfare of the schools. Would your Sisters now be kind enough to include among their prayers a petition that, when September 1957 comes around, an adequate staff of competent Catholic teachers may be available to look after the interests of the Catholic children of this city?"

This prayer was answered for September 1957 and for the Septembers since then. May the prayers of Mr. and Mrs. O'Brien's very many friends be granted that happy years lay ahead for both of them and for the school system he served with such distinction!

It is indeed fitting that near the occasion of his retirement, Pope John bestowed upon this man of deep faith and lofty accomplishment the Knighthood of St. Gregory the Great of the Civil Class.

To Mr. A. O'Brien

Sir Austin A. O'Brien, B.A., K.E.G. (Civil Class) was honored publicly Sunday evening, at the Jubilee Auditorium in Edmonton prior to his retiring after 37 years with the Edmonton Separate School Board.

On Sunday morning the Knighthood was conferred on Mr. O'Brien by Archbishop MacDonald at a pontifical Mass offered by Archbishop Jordan at St. Anthony's Church. Rev. F. Otterson and Rev. J. Clancy of Calgary assisted Archbishop MacDonald. Archbishop Jordan was assisted by Rev. B. Gorman of Lloydminster (nephew of Mr. O'Brien). Present in the church were Monsignor Carleton, Monsignor Griffin, Monsignor Malone, Monsignor Ketcher, Monsignor O'Gorman and Monsignor Lyons and representatives from the various convents in the city and many of the priests. The choir was under the direction of Mr. Paul Bourret. Monsignor Foran read the papal citation and offered congratulations from the parish in which Mr. O'Brien was a trustee for 15 years.

Mr. O. N. Demco was master of ceremonies at the evening reception sponsored by the Edmonton Separate School Board. Among the speakers were Hon. J. Percy Page, Lieutenant Governor; Hon. A. O. Aalberg, Minister of Education; Alderman W. Henning, representing the City of Edmonton; Monsignor C. J. Foran, Professor A. Ryan, representing the University of Alberta; Miss Annie Fitzgerald, representing the Separate School Teachers and Mr. Edward D. Stack, chairman of the Edmonton Separate School Board. The four grandchildren of Mr. and Mrs. O'Brien, Timothy, Peter, Sheila and Margaret O'Brien offered a pleasant surprise in their delightful presentation and recitations. Musical selections by choirs and bands from several of the schools were under the direction of Rev. G. L. Green and Mr. Paul Bourret with Miss J. Olsen at the piano.

Mr. Austin very warmly thanked everyone for the many tributes and following the reception the numerous presenters came to personally congratulate him and Mrs. O'Brien in the home of the host.

SEPARATE SCHOOL TEACHERS HONOR MR. O'BRIEN

Mr. Austin A. O'Brien, retiring superintendent of the Edmonton Separate School Board, was honored on Saturday at a reception sponsored by the Edmonton Separate School Teachers' Local of the ATA, to mark the completion of his 37 years' service. Mr. F. E. Donnelly presented two tickets for an air trip to Prince Edward Island to Mr. and Mrs. O'Brien.

Prior to the reception a Solemn High Mass was offered at St. Joseph's Cathedral by Rev. Mark Murphy of St. Andrew's

parish, assisted by Rev. Paul Connelly and Rev. W. P. Fitzgerald. Mr. and Mrs. O'Brien and many of the teachers who served under him attended this Mass. The choir was under the direction of Rev. G. L. Green, music supervisor for the Edmonton Separate Schools.

At the reception a spiritual bouquet was presented to Mr. O'Brien by his grandson, Timmy O'Brien, on behalf of the separate school children. A bouquet of roses was presented to Mrs.

O'Brien by Sister Frederick who has been on the teaching staff the longest as a Sister. Miss Ann Fitzgerald presented Mr. O'Brien with an album of all the separate schools.

Mr. O'Brien will be created a Knight of St. Gregory (Civil Order) by Archbishop MacDonald at a Pontifical High Mass at St. Anthony's Church on Sunday, June 11 at 12:15 noon. A public reception will be held in the Jubilee Auditorium in the evening at 8:00 o'clock.

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