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PHILOSOPHIZING ABOUT THE NATURE AND THE PRODUCTS OF EDUCATION ALSO SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR SECURING BETTER RESULTS IN SCHOOLS

This sixth article is to be devoted to a few suggestions for improving the work of the schools. Yet the whole question of schools hinges upon what is desirable or essential. Recall that, in the first article of this series, I stated that the difference in the products of the Rolls-Royce plant and of the Ford plant is due, not to the amount of investment, the skill of workmen, wages, or any other thing of the kind but to the difference in the conceptions of the manufacturers as to what is desirable on the part of their clients or profitable to themselves. Ford has consistently chosen a utility design and one measurably within the purchasing power of the average man. Comforts and luxuries are only incidentals.

Utility the Desideratum of the Schools.

Such an educational design is manifestly the desirable for the state. But in determining the most useful or practical design lies the chief difficulty. A few minutes ago I read a statement ascribed to Dean R. B. House of the State University to the effect that "Socrates was more reliable in the fundamentals of living than you or I." Knowledge of and wisdom in applying "the fundamentals of living" is no poor definition of the utilitarian conception of education. Yet Socrates and hosts of the world's wisest, best, and most useful citizens lived before more than a modicum of the facts and theories taught in our public schools were promulgated.

It has become the vogue in North Carolina to eliminate this or that subject on the ground of impracticability. Latin, Greek, higher algebra, geometry, formal grammar, and other formerly esteemed studies seem on their way out—the first two already beyond the portals.

But elimination of the "impractical" carried to its logical conclusion would leave us with a mere skeleton curriculum, or necessitate almost as many distinct courses as there are students in a school. For instance, I myself took an extensive course in mathematics; yet I actually need only to know how to add, subtract, multiply, and divide, and use even that limited knowledge only occasionally. Modern scales will tell you the value of any number of pounds of meat at any price per pound. Interest tables answer interest problems at a glance. I have been able to locate any more notable geographical feature—river, mountain, gulf, state, city, on a map in a twinkling—and carried that map in my mind. I now see the map of Siberia with its three great rivers flowing toward the Arctic Ocean—the Yenesei, the Obi, and the Lena, if the mental map is not too faded—but this is the first time I have ever had use for the knowledge of them, and Socrates, St. Paul, Plato, and other worthies got along finely without knowing there was a Siberia with its three great northern-bound streams. They didn't even know that the Americas existed; they had no conception of our solar system.

I have read much history, but the historical facts for the most part have come to be such since Socrates' day. Even Columbus didn't know that a Washington would liberate the country which he had discovered. Here in America itself Jonathan Edwards was ignorant of all those exceedingly "important" matters that clog the greater part of American histories. Yet Jonathan Edwards seems to have been quite an educated gentleman. And thus one subject after another may be eliminated from the standpoint of practicality.

The "Residuum" the Important Thing.

"I don't believe I will ever be able to retain the argument," I remarked to the late President C. E. Taylor of Wake Forest College after an examination on *Butler's Analogy*. "True, you cannot," replied the philosopher: "it is the residuum that is important."

That word *residuum* was illuminating, but only because of the blending or commingling of the residua from other studies and boyhood observation. Instantly there flashed before my mind's eye the lowish fertile dark spots in the fields, and visions of how water bringing silt from the higher grounds had left their residua.

The fertile valley of the Nile, the creation of residua from the annual floods, came before me. The waters pass away, but the residuum abides. But the word *residuum* itself meant something to me only because of the deposit from the study of Latin. I dare aver that the very word would be Greek to hundreds of college graduates of recent years. Verily, it is a problem to trace back to their sources the various concepts and pregnant ideas we possess.

Not All Residua Fertile Silt.

Unfortunately, not all residua are fertile silt. Too often have I observed once fertile piedmont creek valleys become quagmires of squashy sands because of the residua of floods destructive of higher terrain and of the fertile valleys as well. And if it were only the beneficent silt-bearing waters we had to deal with in the educational fields, the task of present-day education would be much simplified. But the denuding of great sections of the press, of the cinema, of radio waves, and of social strata of the protecting sheathe of conscience and a sense of decency has subjected the fertile soils of youthful minds and morals to an avalanche of smothering slush. Where those devastating influences are operating in full force the little fertilizing silt brought down by the gentle waters of school and healthful home influences becomes of no real effect, for despite the tiny dark streaks of fertility the minds are waste lands, fit only for the growth of bullrushes, watertags, and as a breeding place for vermin. Verily, it were better that a youth be unable to read than to spend his time reading much of the poisonous stuff that floods the news stands and the mails. Only a day or two ago I picked up a copy of the *Red Book* for one of the fall months and read a few of the stories therein, not one of which but featured lying or deception and drinking as not only excusable but approvable.

Educators, including parents, now have the same problem and on the same immense scale that this country has in trying to correct the evils of not merely uncontrolled but encouraged erosion of the soils. It is the teacher's task not merely to cultivate a virgin soil but to undertake to save that soil from the devastating influences beyond the school room doors, if not to redeem it from prior harmful floodings and deposits of encumbering debris. Pity the school teachers so largely responsible for the mental and moral salvation of the rising generation!

Preparation for Planting.

Above, the mentalities of children have been likened to soils. Continuing the analogy a little further, let us consider that even many formerly cultivated fields must be rid of briars and shrubs before preparation for planting begins. Many of the days of my boyhood were spent shrubbing the fields of their sassafras and persimmon sprouts and clearing the ditchbanks and fence jams of reeds, briars and bushes in readiness for the plow.

Corn does not thrive among sassafras bushes or catclaw briars, nor can the ploughman accomplish his task in a field in which those weed shrubs prevail. Similarly, a part of the work of every teacher is to rid the premises of his students of the hindering shrubs before he can begin his real task of mental development as outlined in the course of study. Furthermore some soils are lacking the life-giving bacteria that are essential to such plants as lespedeza and other legumes—the real soil builders. I mean that some children come to school altogether unprepared to assimilate the mental and moral food so liberally provided.

Need for Kindergartens.

A year in a good kindergarten would be worth more to such children than several years in school without the orientation the kindergarten affords. Unfortunately, it is only the more favored children, the ones who need the kindergarten least, who have the benefit of them in North Carolina. I have already suggested that learning to read is not in itself educational—at least not more so than learning how to play a childish game or to

make doll clothes. Only when the text consists of mental, esthetic, moral, or spiritual food does the child attain toward the goal of the school in reading courses. But beware lest you minimize the value of the inculcation of the most homely truths, or the fixing of the attention upon the simplest processes of nature. As indicated above, I should not have secured the volume of truth in Dr. Taylor's one word *residuum* if I had never observed the silt left on the evaporation of water in low spots in the fields. There is no fact that may not become of value in the interwoven texture called culture. Yet facts and truths exist therein in only ghostly forms of themselves—as invisible to the probing eye as were the silks and gold woven so diligently into the royal robe by the three rogues in Hans Christian Andersen's story of the *Royal Weavers*. The honest eye of the lad broke the charm when he wonderingly cried out that the king was dressed in only his underclothes.

Take the most thoroughly educated man in North Carolina and look him up and down thoroughly and one sees him naked of text book lore and dressed in only the most rudimentary facts pertaining to many things. Yet in the course of years something has happened to him that has dressed his mentality as magnificently as each of the stultified lords and the king himself in Anderson's illuminating story supposed the royal personage to appear in the eyes of all his companions. It is an ethereal adornment, woven of a thousand efflorescences from conceived facts, pondered theories, practiced arts, corrected relations and attitudes, and humble tasks seen in the light of their multitude of vital relations.

The Place of Knowledge in Education.

The possession of knowledge does not make an educated man any more than the possession of a carload of bricks would make you or me a mason. Yet the mason must have his bricks and the educated man his knowledge or facts to accomplish his tasks. But the ordinary hod carrier can supply the bricks for the most skillful mason, and meaner minds the facts for the master mind.

The architect knows not only forms and processes but how to co-ordinate and correlate. The actual structure only perpetuates the conceptions of a creative brain. You or I could have the same materials and achieve nothing of worth or beauty. "I am a carpenter," said Hauptman when asked if he built the famous ladder of the Lindbergh kidnaping. The materials of the ladder might have been used by a master builder to create something that would have produced something else than scorn from all observers.

Some of the Components of an Education.

A man may be a "walking encyclopedia," yet uneducated in the effective sense of the word. I read some weeks ago of a European who has volumes of minutiae prepared with a view to authorship but who is described by the brilliant woman whose story I read as one who knows every individual tree in the woods yet cannot conceive a forest. She expects no book.

A bride may be conceived as having at hand all the constituents of the flakiest biscuits but not knowing how to combine them. She is uneducated. Tens of thousands study the various subjects of the school curricula yet never attain the ability to relate them. They are as uneducated as the suggested bride.

Characteristics of the educated person are the ability to give attention, to observe closely, to correlate or co-ordinate facts, to infer effectually, to think consecutively, to reach definite conclusions based upon the foregoing processes. The builders of the temple stumbled over and threw about the keystone of the arch, but when they reached the place where it was needed they knew it, and where to find the stone. No bit of knowledge has not its place in the educated man's mind, but it is useless unless he recognizes its place when he comes to it.

Never Too Early to Begin.

As the unread man who has attained the abilities mentioned above and is able to reason wisely,

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