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CHANGING CONCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Experience and progress

THE proper means for reconstructing our social institutions are best suggested by a careful accumulation and analysis of our institutional experiences. In every work of political and social reform, we are more or less conscious of the past failures and successes of our instruments. But such consciousness is not altogether deliberate and thorough. With communities, as with individuals, much is forgotten or neglected; while other fragments of our past, emphasized beyond their true importance, influence us unduly. Thus many of our social advances are gained through a radicalism that has finally to be tempered by the work of the reactionary. Such progress, the product of conflict and partisanship, is costly. It arises out of an imperfect mode of bringing our experiences to bear upon our problems. In the reconstruction of states, schools, vocations, and other social instruments, we need a wider ac-

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cumulation and a saner interpretation of the facts of our educational history.

Experience and school reform

The institution of education does not escape the full force of the principle suggested. Indeed, educational conditions are such in America to-day that one might be disposed to say that this principle has a special and peculiar applicability to the problem of school reform; at least, there is no institution where a rational use of institutional experience could effect more good.

A static view of education

We have among us those who have become keenly sensitive to the evils of the many changes in the methods of our schools. They have perhaps been over-sensitive to the very necessity of rightful change. Seeing that our schools have been alternately pulled and hauled by radical and reactionary, and failing to perceive the slow but certain progress that has taken place, they have wearied of change in educational theory and practice. Impatient of the hasty wrangling and contention, these sigh for a peaceful and fixed

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programme in education. As temperament or rearing dictates, they offer one of two modes for its achievement: (1) the return to the educational system of some past century, or (2) the solution of the entire matter once and for all by some council of wise and agreeable experts. Nothing save educational history alone can well reveal the naïve futility of such notions of what is best in education.

An unstable view of education

There are those, too, among us whose error is quite the reverse of these we have just mentioned. They are impressed by the panorama of the decades, by the changing nature of man's economic and spiritual surroundings. They perceive life as ever new, calling for some modern virtue or skill in man, and for a new training which will provide it. Each change in life must be met, and the school must be quick to provide the power. The new necessities dominate; the old and the eternal are forgotten. So the school, disregarding the value of stability, must flit from one purpose to another. It is civic training to-day, moral training to-morrow, and industrial training the day

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after. For these, too, educational experience has its message, — the lesson of poise and permanence, — its revelation of the abiding powers in men and the continuing necessities in all ages.

A preliminary historical interpretation

It would be impossible to offer in a small volume any complete answer to the tendencies of unrest in our educational thought. But it is possible to present a preliminary interpretation of American educational history which will suggest the fundamental nature of many of our present problems. Even the cursory reader of the essay here presented must perceive that ours cannot be a static system of education. Change is the inevitable accompaniment of schools which are the defense and the support of a progressive democratic society. But change need not be whimsical and irrational, the fruit of mere radicalism or mere reaction. A deliberate and thorough consciousness of our educational past with all its lessons for the present and future will reveal the stable relations that exist between the school organization and social conditions.

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In these days when some of our educational workers are doubting the power of educational history to give practical guidance to the teacher, it is a particular pleasure to offer this illuminating historical treatment of the problem of educational reconstruction.

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I

CHANGES IN THE NATURE OF OUR LIFE

THE first half-century of our national life was a period of intense struggle. It was essentially a pioneer period. Conditions everywhere were rural and agricultural. Means of communication were few and difficult. There were many difficulties to be met and overcome, many dangers to be encountered, many privations to be borne, and the pressing demand for food and shelter for family and stock was one that needed to be satisfied before all else. On all sides the life of the people was one of unrelenting toil. There were forests to be cut, land to be cleared, swamps to be drained, and the wilderness to be tamed and reduced to civilization. The physical conquest of nature, carried on by the primitive methods of the time, largely absorbed the energies and the earnings of the people. We of to-

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day who can call to our aid the labor-saving devices, the inventions, the discoveries, and the accumulated knowledge of a century, can scarcely realize the difficulties which confronted a pioneer people a century ago, or the primitive conditions of their pioneer life.

Experience everywhere was the great teacher. What was demanded on all sides was the man who could meet the exacting conditions of his rude environment and make a living for himself and family. To be able to do was the real test, and both boy and girl were trained to accomplishment. In the dozens of different kinds of work on the farm or in the village home, the boy learned much that to-day he has little chance of learning. He learned to make and repair wagons and harness; to build and repair buildings; to take care of animals; to sow and to reap; to read the signs of the weather; to know the trees, the plants and the animals about his home and their habits; and to know how to act when emergencies arose which called for action. He was educated in the school of experience, and it developed in particular his judgment and his skill in

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doing things with his fingers. The girl, too, received an analogous training in the daily duties about the home.

In this early period, almost everything used was made by hand. The factory system had not as yet destroyed domestic industry, and everywhere the home was a workshop as well as a dwelling. Most of the common articles now sold in the stores — clothing, shoes, preserved foods, smoked meats, lard, soap, candles, butter, furniture — were made in the homes. On the farm almost all the common industries of life were practised. Town life did not differ materially from that in the country. Life in the days of our forefathers was indeed intense, and every one found plenty to do as soon as able to work. The different industrial processes, which to children to-day are closed books, not only stood revealed to every youngster, but also called for the initiation of the youngster into the work of manufacture as soon as he was able to put his hand to the task. The conditions of life were largely static. The apprentice system was everywhere in vogue, and experience was the chief means of

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education. The provision of food, clothing, and the necessities of existence for the family, with all the steps in the industrial processes which these involved, made heavy demands on the time and the energy of all.

Since this earlier time steam, electricity, and machinery have wrought a tremendous change in our national life. Old occupations and methods are gone. One man with a machine to-day can do the work formerly done by fifty or a hundred men. The people of Massachusetts have a greater productive capacity now than had the entire English-speaking race a century ago. So great have been the changes wrought that agriculture, commerce, and manufacturing have been more profoundly modified during the past hundred years than they had been before since the days of the Crusades. Manners, customs, religious observances, political ideas, and views of life, as well as the ways of living, have been almost equally transformed. Business knowledge, industrial skill, executive capacity and personal efficiency have been emphasized; peace and industrial welfare have been substituted in large

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part for the wastefulness of war; and leisure, culture, and education have come to be regarded as the birthrights of all. The human race as a whole has been relieved from the constant and pressing struggle for the necessities of existence, and lifted to a higher plane of material comfort and industrial welfare. An increasing proportion of our population have been freed from the mere drudgery of life and have been permitted to devote themselves to the work of extending culture and advancing the art and the science for the race.

A people with little material wealth at the beginning, the War of the Revolution left us impoverished. It was not until the third decade of our national existence that evidences of prosperity began to be manifest. Up to 1807, the development of our country was almost wholly agricultural. This meant a scattered and an isolated population, with few common ideas, common interests, or common needs. Nearly all of the manufactured articles in use were made in Great Britain. The Embargo of 1807 gave rise to "infant industries," and many of the legislative acts

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of the next five years had to do with the granting of charters and privileges to various kinds of manufactories. The War of 1812, the shipping regulations of foreign nations adopted at the close of this and the Napoleonic Wars, and the general westward movement of population all tended to build up manufacturing faster than agriculture.

The period from 1810 to 1850 was a period of great national expansion and great industrial development. The introduction of the steamboat and the railroad, together with the digging of many canals, opened up the possibility of doing business on a scale before unthought of, and led to a great demand for labor-saving machinery of every sort. The inventive genius of our people was called into play, and Yankee ingenuity manifested itself in every direction. After 1825, the threshing machine began to supplant the flail and the roller; after 1826, edge tools began to be made in this country; and shortly after this time the Fairbanks platform scale, the reaper, and the lock-stitch sewing machine were invented.

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Since that time, the whole aspect of our life has been changed. The railroad has made communication easy and cheap. It is five hours from Boston to New York now, instead of five days. The telegraph and the submarine cable have annihilated time and space. It no longer takes four weeks to get news from England, or three months from Manila or Hong Kong. The telephone has made us all neighbors, and enables a single person to-day to transact the business formerly done by ten or twelve. The many labor-saving devices enable us greatly to increase our capacity for dispatching work and have largely increased our effectiveness, while they have at the same time freed us and our children from the necessity of doing much of the laborious work which people in earlier times were compelled to do. The necessities of life have been cheapened and made common, and even many of the luxuries of life have been brought within the reach of almost all. We of to-day belong to the world instead of to a county, we have the conveniences of the world at our doors, and we have large amounts of leisure time for service, amusement, or personal im-

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provement which used to be demanded by the necessities of mere physical existence.

Our development as a nation has been wonderful. The frontier has been pushed farther and farther to the West, and finally pushed off into the ocean. By 1850, fourteen new states had been added to the original thirteen, and these included every state east of the Mississippi River and all of the first tier of states west of the river except Minnesota. To-day the nation reaches to the Pacific and includes forty-six states, with the last two of our mainland territories standing on the threshold waiting for admission. From a little and an isolated Federation with an uncertain future we have grown into a strong nation and finally into a great world power, and we are situated in the centre of the theatre of action in the future. The problems now before us are more numerous and larger than ever before, and they call for men of large training and capacity.

Our population practically doubled every twenty years between 1790 and 1850, doubled again by 1880, and will double again by 1915. With the rapid development of commerce and

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manufacturing, cities developed rapidly after 1825. In 1790, there were but six cities having a population of eight thousand or over, and these represented but 3.4 per cent of the total population; in 1810 there were but 11 such, representing but 4.9 per cent; and as late as 1830 there were but 26 such cities, representing but 6.7 per cent. By 1850, the number of cities of eight thousand inhabitants or over had increased to 85, representing 13.5 per cent of the total population; by 1870, to 226, representing 20.9 per cent; by 1890, to 447, representing 29.2 per cent; and by 1900, to 545, representing 33.1 per cent. In 1900, there were 38 cities having a population of 100,000 or over, while 40.2 per cent of the entire population were classified as living in cities of 2500 inhabitants or over.

The growth of the city with us has been rapid indeed. The country resident and the immigrant have both been attracted to it in large numbers. The opportunities for trade and industry which the cities present have drawn many to them who have found great difficulty in adjusting themselves to the new and peculiar life. They have

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drawn to them the most energetic and capable, as well as the most vicious and corrupt. The modern city is essentially a centre of trade and industry, and home life and home conditions are determined and conditioned by this fact. The increasing specialization in all fields of labor has divided the people into dozens of more or less clearly defined classes, and the increasing centralization of trade and industry has concentrated business in the hands of a relatively small number. The small merchant and employer are fast giving place to large mercantile and industrial concerns. No longer can a man save up a thousand dollars and start in business for himself with much chance of success. The employee tends to remain an employee; the wage earner tends to remain a wage earner. New discoveries and improved machinery have greatly increased the complexity of the industrial process in all lines of work, and the worker tends more and more to become a cog in the machine and to lose sight of his place and part in the industrial process.

The character of our people, too, has greatly changed. In the earlier period the people of dif-