

# FRENCH EDUCATIONAL IDEALS OF TODAY

Buisson and  
Farrington



# **FRENCH EDUCATIONAL IDEALS OF TODAY**

**AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE MOLDERS  
OF FRENCH EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT  
OF THE PRESENT**

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## THE HOUSE OF APPLIED KNOWLEDGE

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This volume has been subventioned by the French Ministry of Public Instruction and the Fine Arts. The publishers take pleasure in adding it to their list of professional works on education as being thoroughly in accord with their motto, "Books that apply the world's knowledge to the world's needs," and also as a means of furthering, in the special field of education, friendly mutual relations and interchange of ideas between France and the United States

BFFEIT-I

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**TO THOSE VALIANT SOLDIERS**

**OF FRANCE AND OF AMERICA WHO  
FOUGHT SHOULDER TO SHOULDER ON  
THE BATTLEFIELDS OF THE NEW WORLD  
FOR AMERICAN FREEDOM, AND ON  
THE BATTLEFIELDS OF THE OLD WORLD  
FOR UNIVERSAL FREEDOM**

## FOREWORD

Two members of the International Congress of Education, held at Oakland, California in 1915, noticed regretfully to what extent the personnel of the two systems of education in France and the United States, although animated by a common inspiration, were ignorant of each other's purposes and ideals.

It seemed to M. Ferdinand Buisson, official representative at Oakland of the French Ministry of Public Instruction, formerly Director of Primary Education in France, and to Frederic Ernest Farrington, executive secretary of the Congress and connected with the United States Bureau of Education, that a first attempt at bringing these two systems of schools closer together could be made by exchanging two volumes of texts chosen from representative educators in both countries, each volume to be translated into the language of the other country. Pursuant to this feeling, it was determined to bring out simultaneously in the two countries two volumes which should portray to American readers the fundamental ideals on which the French system of education is grounded, and to French readers in similar fashion the dominant ideals underlying our American educational spirit. *French Educational Ideals of Today* represents the American part of the plan, and we hope that it may help the American public to understand better the French educational point of view.

Two subjects, lay education and moral instruction, may seem to have received an undue amount of attention. These are really two phases of the same question, separation of Church and State, or lay versus clerical

control of education, and they still occupy a dominant position in French educational discussion. Whether the reputed revival of religious interest will have any bearing on this point remains to be seen. At all events, today lay control is unquestionably in the ascendant in France.

Obviously a limited number of extracts will give but a suggestion of the complete picture we should like to show, but we trust that the consummation of the plan will give French teachers a glimpse of America and American teachers a glimpse of France.

F. B.

F. E. F.

*May, 1919*

## INTRODUCTION

STIMULATED by a common danger, France and the United States, the two foremost republics of the world, have been drawn closer together during these last years than ever before. Democracy has been at stake, and our two great nations have joined with the other allies against a common foe. As the German school-master won the Franco-Prussian war, so the ideals that have inspired the heroes of the two great democratic nations today have been the ideals inculcated in the schoolroom.

The good feeling that has so long existed between the sister republics has been revived and more firmly established, and whatever conduces to a better understanding of the national viewpoints is to be encouraged. It is on this basis that I am happy to write this brief word of introduction to a book that sets before the American public in general and the American teaching force in particular the educational ideals that have dominated in France during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries.

After reading the simple yet eloquent phrases of Ernest Lavissee, the leading historian of France, one cannot wonder at the sturdy and dogged fortitude of the French poilu. Animated by an international nationalism, M. Lavissee in this address in 1905 sounded with prophetic foresight the dangers that France actually had to face in 1914. Mgr. Baudrillart echoes the same patriotic spirit of sacrifice in no less clarion notes.

Educators are asking each other, "What changes will the war bring in our schools?" M. Durckheim,

in the brief extract quoted, utters a word of constructive criticism on the educational ideals of the present and indicates the direction in which future modifications should tend. "Social discipline" is the keynote.

Practical suggestions are found in M. Petit's two articles on "Mutual Benefit Associations" and "School Excursions," while several writers set forth the ideals of the lay school divorced from ecclesiastical control which is still one of the much-discussed questions in French education. Notice especially articles by Edgar Quinet, Jules Ferry, Félix Pécaut, Georges Clemenceau, Ferdinand Buisson, Gabriel Séailles, and Paul Painlevé.

In these days of youthful irresponsibility, Charles Wagner's "In the Land of 'Just About'" is particularly timely, and is well worth the attention of old and young alike.

May this contribution conduce to a more intelligent and so more sympathetic acquaintance with the spirit of French education on the part of the American people!

P. P. CLAXTON

WASHINGTON, D.C.



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# FRENCH EDUCATIONAL IDEALS OF TODAY

EDGAR QUINET

Edgar Quinet (1803-1875) was professor at the Collège de France at the end of Louis-Philippe's reign. With his colleague and friend, Michelet, he gave those famous lectures which aroused the enthusiasm of the youth of the liberal party and the wrath of the reactionaries. Elected deputy in 1848, he protested energetically against the *coup d'état* of December 2, 1851, and went into exile, to return only upon the fall of the Empire in 1870. He spent these nineteen years in awakening the French conscience by his forceful writings. In 1850, while a member of the legislative assembly and at the very moment of the clerical reaction, he wrote *L'enseignement du peuple*, in which he resolutely states the principles of a national education animated by the republican spirit. It is Edgar Quinet's plan that was realized by the Third Republic through the school laws which have been in force since 1880.

## A LAY SCHOOL FOR A LAY SOCIETY <sup>1</sup>

No particular church being the soul of France, the teaching which diffuses this soul should be independent of every particular church.

The teacher is not merely the priest's assistant; he teaches what no priest can teach, the alliance of churches in the same society.

The teacher has a more universal doctrine than the priest, for he speaks to Catholic, Protestant, and Jew alike, and he brings them all into the same civil communion.

The teacher is obliged to say: "You are all children of the same God and of the same country; take hold

<sup>1</sup> Extract from *L'enseignement du peuple*, 1850.

of each other's hands until death." The priest is obliged to say: "You are the children of different churches, but among these mothers there is but one who is legitimate. All those who do not belong to her are accursed; they shall remain orphans. Be, then, separated in time, since you must be separated in eternity."

Do you think it would be a misfortune for your child thus to be born to civil life with any feeling of concord, peace, and union toward his brethren? Is the first smile that heaven has given him, given him to curse? Must his first lisping be an anathema?

The intention of the sacerdotal castes has always been that they are the only power capable of giving a foundation to civil and political institutions. Look at them wherever they have held sway, among the Hindus or in the states of Rome. While they reigned, each detail of the civil state, its administration, even the police, were things sacred; in the theocracy of Moses the smallest hygienic or agricultural regulation came from the wisdom on high. Every prescription of the priest is of divine institution; the thought of heaven permeates the whole body of laws.

As soon as lay society frees itself from the rule of the priests, it is considered to have broken off all relation with the eternal order. The same laws which formerly were filled with the spirit of God are now but the caprices of chance. From the moment that this State, which was said to be of divine institution, dispenses with the priest, it is proclaimed atheistic. Yesterday it was eternal wisdom, manifested and written in the laws. Today it is a blind person who pushes away . .

his guide. It knows nothing, it sees nothing. Separated from the priest, what remains for it to teach? Not even the wisdom which the ant teaches the ant.

If society without the priest does not believe in justice, why does it seek from century to century to come nearer to justice in the development of law? If it does not believe in truth, why does it pursue truth in science? If it does not believe in order, why does it pursue order in the succession of its institutions and revolutions?

Justice, truth, absolute order, what are they but the eternal source of divine ideas; in other words, that essence of the God on which the customs of the State are ordered? This God of order and of justice, this eternal geometer who descends by degrees into the very groundwork of the laws of all civilized peoples, is not the one who pleases the sacerdotal castes. Is this a reason for conceding that a society contains no principle outside its Church, no moral teaching outside its clergy, or that all light dies out if it is not lighted at the altar?

People repeat incessantly that lay society has no fundamental principle and consequently nothing to teach. At least you must admit that better than any one else it can teach itself, and that is precisely the point in question in lay teaching.

For my part I have always claimed that society possesses a principle which it alone is in a position to profess, and that on this principle is founded its absolute right to teach in civil matters. That which forms the foundation of this society, makes its existence possible, and prevents it from falling to pieces, is pre-

cisely a point which cannot be taught with equal authority by any of the official cults. This society lives on the principle of the love of citizens for one another independently of their beliefs.

Do you wish to free lay teaching? Dare affirm what three centuries have affirmed before you, that it is sufficient unto itself, that it exists of itself, that it itself is belief and science.

How has modern science been constituted? By breaking away from the science of the Church. The civil law? By breaking away from canon law. The political constitution? By breaking away from the religion of the State. All the elements of modern society have developed by emancipating themselves from the Church. The most important of all — education — remains to be emancipated. By a conclusion deduced from all that precedes, is it not clear that we can regulate it only on condition that it be completely separated from ecclesiastical education?

## JULES FERRY

Jules Ferry was born at St. Dié in 1832 and died in Paris, March 17, 1893. He was a member of the Republican faction opposed to the government at the end of the reign of Napoleon III, mayor of Paris during the siege of 1870-71, a member of the National Assembly, then of the Chamber of Deputies, where he became one of the leaders of the left wing. From 1879 to 1885 he was several times Minister of Public Instruction.

Deriving his inspiration from Condorcet's "Plan of Education" and from the ideas of Edgar Quinet, he brought about the enactment of the school laws which have been justly named the "Ferry laws." These laws provide for compulsory, free, elementary education to be given by laymen, for the secondary instruction of girls, for professional schools and normal schools. They instituted the "Higher Council of Public Instruction" and laid the foundation of the system of national education which has been gradually realized by the Third Republic.

Jules Ferry was at the same time founder of the French colonial empire, an achievement which made him very unpopular for a long time. He bore this unpopularity with exceptional dignity and strength of character.

One year after the promulgation of the law of March 28, 1882, the minister addressed to the primary school teachers the letter published herewith, as conveying the most authentic statement of the real spirit of the new legislation.

### LETTER TO THE PRIMARY TEACHERS OF FRANCE, NOVEMBER 17, 1883

THE academic year just opened will be the second since the law of March 28, 1882, went into effect. At this time I cannot refrain from sending you personally a few brief words which you will probably not find inopportune, in view of the experience you have just had with the new régime. Of the diverse obligations it imposes upon you, assuredly the one nearest your heart, the one which brings you the heaviest increase of work and anxiety, is your mission to instruct your



pupils in ethics and citizenship. You will be grateful to me, I am sure, for answering the questions which preoccupy you at present, by trying to determine the character and the purpose of this teaching. In order to succeed more surely I shall, with your permission, put myself in your place for an instant to show you by examples borrowed from your everyday experience how you can do your duty, and your whole duty, in this respect.

The law of March 28 is characterized by two provisions which supplement each other and harmonize completely: on the one hand it excludes the teaching of any particular dogma; on the other it gives first place among required subjects to moral and civic teaching. Religious instruction is the province of the family; moral instruction belongs to the school.

Our legislators did not mean to pass an act that was purely negative. Doubtless their first object was to separate the school from the Church, to assure freedom of conscience to both teachers and pupils, in short, to distinguish between two domains too long confused; the domain of beliefs, which are personal, free, and variable; and that of knowledge, which, by universal consent, is common and indispensable to all. But there is something else in the law of March 28. It states the determination of the people to found here at home a national education, and to found it on the idea of duty and of right, which the legislator does not hesitate to inscribe among the fundamental truths of which no one can be ignorant.

It is on you, Sir, that the public has counted to realize this all-important part of education. While