

AMERICAN IDEAL OF EDUCATION AS CONCEIVED IN THE TEACHERS'
COLLEGES OF NEW YORK AND CHICAGO.

The schools attached to the Teachers' College of the Columbia University and to the School of Education of the University of Chicago focus the most advanced movements that are going on in America in regard to the ideals and methods of education. In other schools, especially in the public schools of New York and Chicago, we may clearly trace the influence of the same general principles, and find teachers using methods based to some extent upon them; but in the schools named we find the work of teaching being carried on by men and women who are imbued heart and soul with a certain ideal of education, and who seem to believe in it and to understand it so well that they can carry it out with logical thoroughness of detail and with pronounced success in the results.

The primary object of education is to the minds of these reformers not the mere acquisition of knowledge, or even the development of powers in themselves, but social efficiency—the *social* efficiency of the *individual* citizen; or, as the Principal of the Horace Mann Elementary School aptly puts it, "Education involves the development of the natural powers of the individual, and the acquisition of knowledge, so that he may become adjusted to the ideals towards which society is moving. 'Social efficiency' is, therefore, the best brief expression of our goal, emphasizing the capacity to do as well as to know." The three Rs have become with us a phrase and a fetish, and we have been apt to forget that, valuable instruments as they are in part of our education, mainly that part which is got through the medium of books, they can never be the real aim even in our elementary schools, where, as everywhere else, "the primary object is to enable a man to play a solid part in practical life, and to distinguish himself if possible; and the secondary object should be to enable him to use his leisure hours vigorously, and with some intellectual zest*"—always, of course, with a view to his social relations and duties.

In attempting to carry out the idea of training a child for social efficiency, the reformers have regard to another very important fact, which, in spite of Froebel, is still often forgotten—namely, that child-life is not simply a preparation for the future life of the adult, of the workman or professional man, or of the mother, but essentially and truly a part of life itself; accordingly, if we so call forth the child's activities, train his observation and thought, develop his physical and moral powers, as to make him realise his own child-life in the best way in his relations with his companions and with others, we are far more likely to produce in him as a member of human society a higher degree of efficiency than if we cling uncompromisingly to the old pedagogic ideals. To one who has been accustomed to see the regular formal work of our elementary and secondary schools, it is, at first, somewhat of a shock to walk into class-room after class-room, and to see in one children dressed as North American Indians sitting in front of miniature wigwams; in another children binding and decorating their notebooks, or weaving cloth, or making toy watermills (which, indeed, work well in a rough way); here making up rimes, and trying to find tunes to them; there making a forge, or building a Roman galley; here telling old Greek or Saxon fairy tales to one another and to their teacher, or dancing a Norwegian folk-dance; there pressing flowers, or drawing a crayfish that lies sprawling on a tray before them, or tempting a shy grey squirrel to take nuts from their hands: when one sees all this, however often one may have read of it, one is inclined to make the remark that this is glorious play; but what about the mental discipline, the thorough mastery of a subject, the habits of accuracy and perseverance (supposed to be) acquired in learning the dry details of grammar or in working out hard sums in complex fractions? But when it is found that these children can speak and read, write and count at least as well as children of the same age in our schools; that children trained on the same lines have passed into the High Schools, and, after four years there, have reached a standard of knowledge that, judged by our tests, is higher than that generally reached by the best pupils of our secondary schools; that, in addition, they have gained a practical power in observing and handling the things around them and a practical outlook on life that our pupils seldom get until they get it from the hard experience of business—then it cannot be denied that the system that affords these results is worth careful examination.

It is often said that the American ideal is that of making money; and I had really expected to find this spirit making itself evident in the schools. I was agreeably disappointed: in the American schools I visited there was apparently less of the commercial spirit than in the schools of Great Britain—say, London, for example—unless, indeed, it be fostering the commercial

* A. C. Benson, *National Review*, September, 1907.