

ADOLPH FERRIÈRE:
THE ACTIVITY SCHOOL

Edited by

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. ADOLPH FERRIÈRE is professor of education in the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Institute at Geneva, Switzerland. He worked with Hermann Lietz in the Landerziehungsheime at Ilsenburg in the late '90's, and founded the Bureau International des Ecoles Nouvelles at Geneva in 1899. This bureau was later incorporated in the Ligue Internationale pour l'Education Nouvelle, which is the organization sponsoring the international conferences held at Calais in 1921, at Montreux in 1923, at Heidelberg in 1925, and at Locarno in 1927. Dr. Ferrière is editor of the French organ of the Ligue, *Pour l'Ere Nouvelle*. He is also adviser to the International School at Geneva, an experimental school conducted by the Ligue Internationale to exemplify the New Education practice. Dr. Ferrière is the author of several volumes, including *L'Ecole Active*, *La Loi du Progrès*, *Transformons l'Ecole*, and *Hermann Lietz: L'Ecole Nouvelle en Allemagne*. In addition he has contributed articles to such American periodicals as the *Pedagogical Seminary* and *Progressive Education*.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

(to the third edition)

Since 1921, when I wrote the first edition of this book, there has been a considerable development of the Activity School movement. Hence it would be impossible today to reproduce this first edition virtually unchanged. In fact, no one man is even able to keep up-to-date in what is published all over the world in this field. For these reasons, and also in response to the wish of many teachers and parents to see this study reduced to a single volume, I have decided to omit from this third edition the historical part, which is not so essential now that the Activity School no longer has to show its pedigree, and has received recognition in all progressive countries; and the psychological part, as this latter is to form the subject of a separate study. Indeed, science has been enriched during the last four years by innumerable careful experiments and investigations which give the Activity School a far broader and stabler foundation.

In this third edition, then, I have retained only the part dealing with practice. But, here again, how many new publications should have received consideration! Since to have done so would have doubled the size of a book which had of necessity to be cut down. I shall content myself with barely mentioning, in the last chapter, the most significant current activities: experimental schools, men who are carrying out new ideas in public and private schools, and associations working for the New Education.

Several factors have during these last four years given considerable impetus to the Activity School movement. First was the III Congrès international d'Education morale held at Geneva in 1922, over which the writer had the honor of presiding. This gathering, it may be justly said, was a parliament of specialists rather than a mere academy of theorists. In the arrangements with those who were to present addresses, in the very choice of speakers, these points were emphasized: to set forth practical experiences, to show that the child or the adolescent when brought into contact with the duties of real life, undertakes them with all the greater enthusiasm and sacrifice because he has learned to know them sooner, obeying the creative spontaneity of his nature. The reports covering this congress fill two volumes.

The year following the III Congrès international d'Education morale, there was held at Montreux the II Congrès international d'Education nouvelle. Here the theme chosen for the addresses was still more directly inspired by our problems: "The Activity School and the Spirit of Service." These 1923 addresses were published in a special issue (number 8) of *Pour l'Ére nouvelle*.

It was at about the same time that the philosopher John Dewey, the leading figure in the United States in the field of functional education, published his course of lectures entitled *Democracy and Education*, while my friend Dr. O. Decroly of Brussels published in French the same author's *How We Think*. These two works bring to our conception of education such a mass of confirmation, and such well-founded and conclusive arguments, that the reader will be tempted to ask himself which of the two borrowed its teachings and its arguments from the other. Is it not impressing to see, on both sides of the ocean, the living reality—I mean child-

hood, various, active, spontaneous childhood—lead the impartial observer to the same conclusions, those which we condense in the brief and expressive term, Activity School?

And how many other confirmations arise every day, at every turn, before our astonished eyes, as warrant that a new era is about to be born! How many names come to my pen: H. G. Wells' book on Sanderson, Headmaster of Oundle; E. F. O'Neill's *An Activity School in England*; the bulletin, *Nouvelle Education*, published in France by Mme. T. J. Gueritte and M. Roger Cousinet. These books and this review should become the handbook of all forward-looking educators, parents, teachers, and professors. I shall say a few words about them in the last chapter of this third edition, as I intend to note there, far more briefly than I should like, the significant experiments of these last four years. May the reader realize that he is in the presence not of a fragile and ephemeral utopia, but of a psychological and social reality.

The Activity School, founded on the science of the child, is in process of evolution, and will evolve further. It would be useless to wait until it is fixed in unchanging formulas. When that day comes, it will have ceased to exist. Wait? Does childhood wait? It lives, it grows, it lifts to us its questioning eyes. What are we to do, we who have a horror of the coercive procedure of the past which violates human nature? To refrain from action is one solution, but a far more dangerous one than the old style school itself. There is, then, but one thing left to do: we must study, we must understand, and then we must act. We must transform the school. We must no longer tolerate that which imposes upon the body and mind of the child, from without inward, a training which is too often a deformation. We must introduce air, life, love, so that the

child will expand and bring out—from within outward, by the process natural to all that lives, grows, and prospers—the healthy energies dormant in him, which but await their hour of realization—the realization of all the best in the child.

Reader, work with us. When you have read these pages, you cannot help becoming yourself a worker for a better and happier humanity.

Ad. Ferrière

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