

HUMANIZING EDUCATION

(A Preface To A Realistic Education)

by

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DEDICATION

TO THE MEMORY

of

G. STANLEY HALL

the most vitally human

of

AMERICA'S PSYCHOLOGISTS

a brilliant and inspiring

Pioneer of

THE NEW EDUCATION

Acknowledgments are hereby gratefully made to the following Periodicals (some of which are now in the Land Where Our Dead Dreams Go) in which various of the Analyses included under "Humanizing Education" appeared between 1914 and 1924:

The Psychoanalytic Review, School and Society, The World Tomorrow, The American Teacher, The Birth Control Review, Unity, The Modern Quarterly, The Journal of Sexology and Psychanalysis, The Medical Review of Reviews, The New York Call, The American Labor Monthly, Critic and Guide, Know Thyself, The Public, Rational Living, Humanity and Its Problems, The Ethical Culture Magazine ("The Standard"), etc.

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The problem of The New Education is briefly this: How to make unscientific minds scientific and scientific minds philosophic.

PREFACE

The main thesis of this volume is simple and lucid, to wit, that critical-mindedness spells enlightenment while credulity spells superstition; that America, speaking educationally, is persuaded that critical-mindedness is a crime against good manners; that the capacity for self-delusion is *the* overshadowing defect of the human mind, nowhere more in evidence than in optimism-haunted America; that the gulf between education and enlightenment grows more vast; that the pursuit of knowledge somehow manages to ignore the pursuit of wisdom; that facts are mistaken for comprehension and information mistaken for insight; that, in short, our education stresses credulity, subtle superstition, make-believe, self-dupery and as valiantly evades and cunningly taboos critical-mindedness, skeptic enlightenment, disillusion (which is the beginning of wisdom), self-knowledge. For a people who make a fetish of education, how little enlightened we are!

What is it our education lacks? To speak bluntly: Intellectual Honesty. Only this and nothing more! Truth, that is, an insight into evil, disillusion, skepticism, contradiction, limitation, pretence, simply and quite literally frightens us. Our attitude toward knowledge is disingenuous, our hospitality toward enlightenment insincere. Culturally, we are a nation of good-natured savage simpletons. We never arrive at maturity. We do not know how to grow up. Infantilism characterizes our intellectual level, our spiritual stature. Intellectual chewing-gum satisfies our appetite for knowledge and wisdom. Artists-in-Bunk fascinate us. Sincerity, penetration, satire, irony, disillusion, candor, *truth*, cannot thrive in a milieu saturated as ours so flagrantly is with *make-believe*. Pretence, nothing but pretence!

As James Harvey Robinson quite unceremoniously states the case against our make-believe education: "How indeed can a teacher be expected to explain to the sons and daughters of business men, politicians, doctors, lawyers, and clergymen—all pledged to the maintenance of the sources of their livelihood—the actual nature of business enterprise as

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now practiced, the prevailing methods of legislative bodies and courts, and the conduct of foreign affairs? Think of a teacher in the public schools recounting the more illuminating facts about the municipal government under which he lives, with due attention to graft and jobs! So, courses in government, political economy, sociology, and ethics confine themselves to inoffensive generalizations, harmless details of organization, and the commonplaces of routine morality, for only in that way can they escape being controversial. Teachers are rarely able or inclined to explain our social life and its presuppositions with sufficient insight and honesty to produce any very important results. Even if they are tempted to tell the essential facts they dare not do so, for fear of losing their places, amid the applause of all the righteously minded. *For we sedulously inculcate in the coming generation exactly the same illusions and the same ill-placed confidence in existing institutions and prevailing notions that have brought the world to the pass in which we find it.*" (my italics).

The great desideratum is the disintegration of the religion of credulity, and, to supplant it, the drastic cultivation of critical-mindedness: an educational renaissance sprung from courage and clarity. "Humanizing Education" is a modest contribution toward that devoutly-to-be-desired renaissance!

Education as a branch of Social Science, a social science fructified by a realistic psychology,—for which recent "tendencies" like dynamic psychology, psychoanalysis, behaviorism, are happily laying the foundation, quite effectively,—is the only kind of education that can be significant, humanistic, vital. What passes for education among the pedagogues (of high and low degree) is neither educative nor enlightening, being merely either a sterile statistical summary of local instances unrelated to the larger cultural (i. e. social) factors or an equally sterile pseudo-scientific analysis of methods and modes of teaching and of learning about as vitally related to the profounder realities of environmental situation, personality, temperament, imagination, insight, inspiration, prejudices and pretences, the

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variety and idiosyncrasy of human nature as, let us say, an erudite dry-as-dust study of syntax is related to a love of literature, poetic appreciation, creative mood, the "divine fire"! Is grammar literature?

Our educators (of major and minor importance) are essentially pedagogues, grammarians, worshippers of minutiae, splendid specialists in detail and routinier absorptions, *who mistake quantitative report for qualitative insight*, amazingly unaware of the sterility of an education that evades the dynamic social situation, that abstracts human nature from its cultural setting, that divorces mind from that larger realistic background we call life. The conjunction of Education and Life is somehow not congenial to our so-called educators. Pivotal and incisive realities like class cleavage, the pursuit of power, of profit, of prestige, the overwhelming importance of the rôle of evil in civilization, the nature of pretence, the egotisms and aspirations and frustrations of humans, the incalculable and crucial significance of sex (unceasingly from the cradle to the grave!), the never-ending baffling play of irrational impulse and mood and desire, the enormous relevance of sub-intellectual behavior (the so-called unconscious), the increasing dominance of 'abnormal' and 'pathological' patterns of behavior among the younger generation,—these pivotal and incisive realities elude, somehow, the cloistered vigilance of our self-styled educators. Do they, too, perhaps, suffer from infantilism?

The fear of reality, or more accurately, the fear of realization, is the distinguishing mark of *homo sapiens*. The fear of realization! Mythology, religion, philosophy, art, literature, morals, manners, education, to what divine purpose? Essentially to help humans escape the burden of reality, the painful and momentous *truth about life*: life's disharmonies, evils, frustrations, delusions, limitations, ironies. *To escape realization*: that's the beginning, middle and end of man's breast-fed desire-and-goal on this earth! An infantile desire, a self-defeating goal. It is precisely the aim of a genuine, i. e. a realistic, education to teach and discipline and prepare human beings for that courage and clarity, lacking which they cannot confront reality honestly and

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thoughtfully, i. e. maturely; possessing which, they can endure, even welcome realization, consciously, philosophically, as the only ultimately meaningful initiation into knowledge-and-wisdom: the analytic and undiluted truth about life. A philosophy of Education that evades the problems of Realization is foredoomed to sterility, futility, sheer make-believe, infantilism. Our traditional and conventional education does not rise beyond the level of pretence, of make-believe. As Dr. Ernest Jones sagely remarks: "We are beginning to see man not as the smooth self-acting agent he pretends to be, but as he really is,—a creature only dimly conscious of the various influences that mould his thought and action, *and blindly resisting with all the means at his command the forces that are making for a higher and fuller consciousness.*" (my italics).

The older way of wisdom, based on the logic of taboo, looked upon the good life as evasion and concealment, that is, as resistance to "temptation": life is evil and therefore to be shunned. The newer way of wisdom, based on the logic of candor, looks upon the good life as expression and participation, that is, as non-resistance to "temptation": life is *living* (experiencing both good and evil) and therefore to be indulged. An educational philosophy that is not to be infantile, immature, sterile, unadventurous, flat, stale and unprofitable, must reckon courageously with the newer wisdom that ousts the logic of taboo (the fear of knowing what there is to be known) and keenly embraces temptation, i. e. *experience*.

Is it not of deep significance that during the very years—since the outbreak of the Great War—in which America has achieved an unparalleled power and prosperity among the nations of the earth—America's coming-of-age, imperialistically!; that precisely during these dazzling years of the ascendancy of optimism-haunted America we should behold the simultaneous emergence of a maturing homespun literature that bespeaks a dark disquiet, a deep disharmony, a sullen disenchantment, a menacing emptiness in the soul of self-adoring America? To recall but a few penetrating names—Dreiser, Masters, O'Neill, Glaspell, Anderson,

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Lewis—is to be reminded most impressively of the dark reality that stretches ominously between truth and make-believe! Our education has not absorbed—because it dare not confront—the *realities* which our true interpreters, the poets and dramatists and novelists and critics, graphically present for our mind's awakening, for our *realization*. Thus education becomes the apologist for realities that are no longer real, for dreams that are veritably nightmares, (like Imperialism!) for beliefs that are false, for philosophies that are insincere. Our education is infantile. How should it be otherwise? As C. E. Ayres, philosopher and psychologist and wit, playfully remarks: "If we are not to be perpetually miseducated, someone has got to take the trouble to tell us the truth."

This volume of analyses honors as sources of inspiration such radical-minded Educators as Francisco Ferrer, Maria Montessori, Boris Sidis, William James, G. Stanley Hall, Bertrand Russell, Sigmund Freud, James Harvey Robinson and America's two most enlightening social philosophers, Thorstein Veblen, incomparable analyst, and John Dewey, of whom it may be said that as an educator he is a great philosopher and as a philosopher, he is a great educator.

Of every tree in the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

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