

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-69840-6 - Cambridge Essays on Education  
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CAMBRIDGE ESSAYS  
ON  
EDUCATION

EDITED BY  
A. C. BENSON, C.V.O., LL.D.  
MASTER OF MAGDALENE COLLEGE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THE RIGHT HON.  
VISCOUNT BRYCE, O.M.

CAMBRIDGE  
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
1917

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**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107698406](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107698406)

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First published 1917

First paperback edition 2014

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN 978-1-107-69840-6 Paperback

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## PREFACE

THE scheme of publishing a volume of essays dealing with underlying aims and principles of education was originated by the University Press Syndicate. It seemed to promise something both of use and interest, and the further arrangements were entrusted to a small Committee, with myself as secretary and acting editor.

Our idea has been this: at a time of much educational enterprise and unrest, we believed that it would be advisable to collect the opinions of a few experienced teachers and administrators upon certain questions of the theory and motive of education which lie a little beneath the surface.

To deal with current and practical problems does not seem the *first* need at present. Just now, work is both common as well as fashionable; most people are doing their best; and, if anything, the danger is that organisation should outrun foresight and intelligence. Moreover a weakening of the old compulsion of the classics has resulted, not in perfect freedom, but in a tendency on the part of some scientific enthusiasts simply to substitute compulsory science for compulsory literature, when the real question rather is whether obligatory subjects should not be diminished as far as possible, and more sympathetic attention given to faculty and aptitude.

We have attempted to avoid mere current controversial topics, and to encourage our contributors to define as far as possible the aim and outlook of education, as the word is now interpreted.

We have not furthered any educational conspiracy, nor attempted any fusion of view. Our plan has been first to select some of the most pressing of modern problems, next to find well-equipped experts and students to deal with each, and then to give the various writers as free a hand as possible, desiring them to speak with the utmost frankness and personal candour. We have not directed the plan or treatment or scope of any essay; and my own editorial supervision has consisted merely in making detailed suggestions on smaller points, in exhorting contributors to be punctual and diligent, and generally revising what the New Testament calls jots and tittles. We have been very fortunate in meeting with but few refusals, and our contributors readily responded to the wish which we expressed, that they should write from the personal rather than from the judicial point of view, and follow their own chosen method of treatment.

We take the opportunity of expressing our obligations to all who have helped us, and to Viscount Bryce for bestowing, as few are so justly entitled to do, an educational benediction upon our scheme and volume.

A. C. BENSON

MAGDALENE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE  
*August 18, 1917*

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## INTRODUCTION

IN times of anxiety and discontent, when discontent has engendered the belief that great and widespread economic and social changes are needed, there is a risk that men or States may act hastily, rushing to new schemes which seem promising chiefly because they are new, catching at expedients that have a superficial air of practicality, and forgetting the general theory upon which practical plans should be based. At such moments there is special need for the re-statement and enforcement by argument of sound principles. To such principles so far as they relate to education it is the aim of these essays to recall the public mind. They cover so many branches of educational theory and deal with them so fully and clearly, being the work of skilled and vigorous thinkers, that it would be idle for me to enter in a short introduction upon those topics which they have discussed with special knowledge far greater than I possess. All I shall attempt is to present a few scattered observations on the general problems of education as they stand to-day.

The largest of those problems, viz., how to provide elementary instruction for the whole population, is far less urgent now than it was fifty years ago. The Act of 1870, followed by the Act which made school-

attendance compulsory, has done its work. What is wanted now is Quality rather than Quantity. Quantity is doubtless needed in one respect. Children ought to stay longer at school and ought to have more encouragement to continue education after they leave the elementary school. But it is chiefly an improvement in the teaching that is wanted, and that of course means the securing of higher competence in the teacher by raising the remuneration and the status of the teaching profession<sup>1</sup>.

The next problem is how to find the finest minds among the children of the country and bring them by adequate training to the highest efficiency. The sifting out of these best minds is a matter of educational organisation and machinery; and the process will become the easier when the elementary teachers, who ought to bear a part in selecting those who are most fitted to be sent on to secondary schools, have themselves become better qualified for the task of discrimination. The question how to train these best minds when sifted out would lead me into the tangled controversy as to the respective educational values of various subjects of instruction, a topic which I must not deal with here. What I do wish to dwell upon is the supreme importance to the progress of a nation of the best talent it possesses. In every country there is a certain percentage of the population who are fitted by their superior intelligence, industry, and force of character to be the leaders in every

<sup>1</sup> This has been clearly seen and admirably stated by the present President of the Board of Education.

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branch of action and thought. It is a small percentage, but it may be increased by discovering ability in places where the conditions do not favour its development, and setting it where it will have a better chance of growth, just as a seedling tree brought out of the dry shade may shoot up when planted where sun and rain can reach it freely. I am not thinking of those exceptionally great and powerful minds, of whom there may not be more than four or five in a generation, who make brilliant discoveries or change the currents of thought, but rather of persons of a capacity high, if not quite first rate, which enables them, granted fair chances, to rise quickly into positions where they can effectively serve the community. These men, whatever occupation they follow, be it that of abstract thinking, or literary production, or scientific research, or the conduct of affairs, whether commercial or political or administrative, are the dynamic strength of the country when they enter manhood, and its realised wealth when they are in their fullest vigour thirty years later. We need more of them, and more of them may be found by taking pains.

The volume of thought continuously applied to the work of life, whether it be applied in the library or study or laboratory, or in the workshop or factory or counting-house or council chamber, has not been keeping pace with the growth of our population, our wealth, our responsibilities. It is not to-day sufficient for the increasing vastness and complexity of the problems that confront a great nation. We in Great

Britain have been too apt to rely upon our energy and courage and practical resourcefulness in emergencies, and thus have tended to neglect those efforts to accumulate knowledge, and consider how it can be most usefully applied, which should precede and accompany action. This deficiency is happily one that can be removed, while a want of qualities which are the gift of nature is less curable. The “efficiency” which is on every one’s mouth cannot be extemporised by rushing hastily into action, however energetic. It is the fruit of patient and exact determination of and reflection upon the facts to be dealt with.

The view that it was the finest minds that ought to be most cared for, and that to them of right belonged not merely leadership, but even control also, was carried by the ancients, and especially by Plato and Aristotle, almost to excess. Their ideal, and indeed that of most Greek thinkers, was the maintenance among the masses of the military valour and discipline which the State needed for its protection, and the cultivation among the chosen few of the highest intellectual and moral excellence. In the Middle Ages, when power as well as rank belonged to two classes, nobles and clergy, the ideal of education took a religious colour, and that training was most valued which made men loyal to the Church and to sound doctrine, with the prospect of bliss in the world to come. In our times, educational ideals have become not merely more earthly but more material. Modern doctrines of equality have discredited the ancient view that the chief aim of instruction is to prepare the few

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Wise and Good for the government of the State. It is not merely upon this world but also upon the material things of this world, power and the acquisition of territory, industrial production, commerce, finance, wealth and prosperity in all its forms, that the modern eye is fixed. There has been a drifting away from that respect for learning which was strong in the Middle Ages and lasted down into the eighteenth century. In some countries, as in our own, that which instruction and training may accomplish has been rated far below the standard of the ancients. Yet in our own time we have seen two striking examples to show that their estimate was hardly too high. Think of the power which the constant holding up, during long centuries, of certain ideals and standards of conduct, exerted upon the Japanese people, instilling sentiments of loyalty to the sovereign and inspiring a certain conception of chivalric duty which Europe did not reach even when monarchy and chivalry stood highest. Think of that boundless devotion to the State as an omnipotent and all-absorbing power, superseding morality and suppressing the individual, which within the short span of two generations has taken possession of Germany. In the latter case at least the incessant preaching and teaching of a theory which lowers the citizen's independence and individuality while it saps his moral sense seems to us a misdirection of educational effort. But in it education has at least displayed its power.

Can a fair statement of the educational ideals which we might here and now set before ourselves be found

in saying that there are three chief aims to be sought as respects those we have called the best minds?

One aim is to fit men to be at least explorers, even if not discoverers, in the fields of science and learning.

A second is to fit them to be leaders in the field of action, leaders not only by their initiative and their diligence, but also by the power and the habit of turning a full stream of thought and knowledge upon whatever work they have to do.

A third is to give them the taste for, and the habit of enjoying, intellectual pleasures.

Many moralists, ancient and modern, have given pleasure a bad name, because they saw that the most alluring and powerfully seductive pleasures, pleasures which appeal to all men alike, were indulged to excess, and became a source of evil. But men will have pleasure and ought to have pleasure. The best way of drawing them off from the more dangerous pleasures is to teach them to enjoy the better kinds. Moreover the quieter pleasures of the intellect mean Rest, and a greater fitness for resuming work.

The pity is that so many sources capable of affording delight are ignored or imperfectly appreciated. May not this be partly the fault of the lines which our education has followed? Perhaps some kinds of study would have fared better if their defenders had dwelt more upon the pleasure they afford and less upon their supposed utility. The champions of Greek and Latin have dilated on the value of grammar as a mental discipline, and argued that the best way to acquire a good English style is to know the ancient

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languages, a proposition discredited by many examples to the contrary. It is really this insistence on grammatical minutiae that has proved repellent to young people, and suggested the dictum that “it doesn’t much matter what you teach a boy so long as he hates it.” Better had it been, abandoning the notion that every one should learn Greek, to dwell upon the boundless pleasure which minds of imagination and literary taste derive from carrying in memory the gems of ancient wisdom which are more easily remembered because they are not in our own language, and the finest passages of ancient poetry. There are plenty of things—indeed there are far more things—in modern literature as noble and as beautiful as the best of the ancients can give us. But they are not the same things. The ancient poets have the freshness and the fragrance of the springtime of the world<sup>1</sup>.

Or take another sort of instance. Take the pleasures which nature spreads before us with a generous hand, hills and fields and woods and rocks, flowers and the songs of birds, the ever-shifting aspects of clouds and of landscapes under light and shadow. How few persons in most countries—for

<sup>1</sup> Take for instance this little fragment of Alcman:

Οὐ μὲν ἔτι, παρθενικαὶ μελιγάρυες ἱμερόφωνοι,  
 Γυῖα φέρειω δύναται· βάλε δὴ βάλε κηρύλος εἶην,  
 Ὅς τ’ ἐπὶ κύματος ἄνθος ἄμ’ ἀλκυόνεσσι ποτῆται  
 Νηλεγές ἦτορ ἔχων, ἀλιπόρφυρος εἶαρος ὄρνις.

What can be more exquisite than the epithets in the first line, or more fresh and delicate and tender in imaginative quality than the three last? A modern poet of equal genius would treat the topic with equal force and grace, but the charm, the untranslatable charm of antique simplicity, would be absent.

there is in this respect a difference between different peoples—notice these things. Everybody sees them, few observe them or derive pleasure from them. Is not this largely because attention has not been properly called to them? They have not been taught to look at natural objects closely and see the variety there is in them. Persons in whom no taste for pictures has ever been formed by their having been taken to see good pictures and told what constitutes merit, are, when led into a picture gallery, usually interested in the subjects. They like to see a sportsman shooting wild fowl, or a battle scene, or even a prize fight, or a mother tending a sick child, because these incidents appeal to them. But they seldom see in a picture anything but the subject; they do not appreciate imaginative quality or composition, or colour, or light and shade or indeed anything except exact imitation of the actual. So in nature the average man is struck by something so exceptional as a lofty rock, like Ailsa Craig or the Needles off the Isle of Wight, or an eclipse of the moon, or perhaps a blood-red sunset; but he does not notice and consequently draws no pleasure from landscapes in general, whether noble or quietly beautiful. The capacity for taking pleasure in all these things may not be absent. There is reason to think that most children possess it, because when they are shown how to observe they usually respond, quickly perceiving, for instance, the differences between one flower and another, quickly, even when quite young, learning the distinctive characters and names of each, enjoying the process of recognising

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each when they walk along the lanes, as indeed every intelligent child enjoys the exercise of its observing powers. The disproportionate growth of our urban population, a thing regrettable in other respects also, has no doubt made it more difficult to give young people a familiar knowledge of nature, but the facilities for going into the country and the happy lengthening of summer holidays render it easier than formerly to provide opportunities for Nature Study, which, properly conducted, is a recreation and not a lesson. There is no source of enjoyment which lasts so keen all through life or which fits one better for other enjoyments, such as those of art and of travel. Of the value of the habit of alert observation for other purposes I say nothing, wishing here to insist only upon what it may do for delight.

It is often alleged that in England boys and girls show less mental curiosity, less desire for knowledge than those of most European countries, or even than those of the three smaller countries north and west of England in which the Celtic element is stronger than it is in South Britain. A parallel charge has, ever since the days of Matthew Arnold, been brought against the English upper and middle classes. He declared that they care less for the “things of the mind” and show less respect to eminence in science, literature and art, than is the case elsewhere, as for instance in France, Germany, or Italy (to which one may add the United States); and he thus explained the scanty interest taken by these classes in educational progress.

Should this latter charge be well founded, the fact it notes would tend to perpetuate the former evil, for the indifference of parents reacts upon the school and upon the pupils. The love of knowledge is so natural, and awakens so early in the normal child, that even if it be somewhat less keen among English than among French or Scottish children, we may well believe our deficiencies to be largely due to faulty and unstimulative methods of teaching, and may trust that they will diminish when these methods have been improved.

If it be true that the English public generally show a want of interest in and faint appreciation of the value of education, the stern discipline of war will do something to remove this indifference. The comparative poverty and reduction of luxurious habits which this war will bring in its train, along with a sense of the need that has arisen for turning to the fullest account all the intellectual resources of the country so that it may maintain its place in the world,—these things may be expected to work a change for the better, and lead parents to set more store upon the mental and less upon the athletic achievements of their sons.

Be this as it may, no one to-day denies that much remains to be done to spread a sense of the value of science for those branches of industry to which (as especially to agriculture) it has been imperfectly applied, to strengthen and develop the teaching of scientific theory as the foundation of technical and practical scientific work, and above all to equip with

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the largest measure of knowledge and by the most stimulating training those on whom nature has bestowed the most vigorous and flexible minds. To-day we see that the heads of great businesses, industrial and financial, are looking out for men of university distinction to be placed in responsible posts—a thing which did not happen fifty years ago—because the conditions of modern business have grown too intricate to be handled by any but the best trained brains. The same need is at least equally true of many branches of that administrative work which is now being thrust, in growing volume, upon the State and its officials.

If we feel this as respects the internal economic life of our country, is it not true also of the international life of the world? In the stress and competition of our times, the future belongs to the nations that recognise the worth of Knowledge and Thought, and best understand how to apply the accumulated experience of the past. In the long run it is knowledge and wisdom that rule the world, not knowledge only, but knowledge applied with that width of view and sympathetic comprehension of men, and of other nations, which are the essence of statesmanship.