

**THE MEANING OF  
EDUCATION, AND OTHER  
ESSAYS AND ADDRESSES**

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The meaning of education, and other essays and addresses by Nicholas Murray Butler

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**NICHOLAS MURRAY BUTLER**

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MEANING OF EDUCATION

*AND OTHER*  
*ESSAYS AND ADDRESSES*

BY  
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## INTRODUCTION

THE essays and addresses brought together in this volume give expression to convictions and opinions on the subject of education that have been presented during the past fifteen years, in one form or another, to hundreds of audiences, mainly of teachers, in almost every state of the Union. The belief that controls them all is threefold: first, that education, in the broad sense in which I use the term, is the most important of human interests, since it deals with the preservation of the culture and efficiency that we have inherited and with their extension and development; second, that this human interest can and should be studied in a scientific spirit and by a scientific method; and, third, that in a democracy at least an education is a failure that does not relate itself to the duties and opportunities of citizenship.

Education is sharply distinguished, therefore, from the far narrower field of instruction, as that in turn is broader than the field of school-life. To give to education its rightful place in our thinking involves relating it to the laws of life in general, and especially to those laws as viewed from the standpoint of the doctrine of evolution. This I have aimed to do by proposing an extension of the commonly received doctrine of infancy, which though as old as early Greek philosophy,<sup>1</sup> owes its definite statement and exemplification to Mr. John Fiske. In this way the theory of education is given what it has hitherto lacked, a distinct relationship to the facts of organic and social evolution.

A standard must next be sought by which the value of educational processes and influences may be judged. I find this standard in the conclusion, common, I am confident, to the best philosophy and to the soundest science

<sup>1</sup> Butler, "Anaximander on the prolongation of infancy in man," in *Classical Studies in Honor of Henry Drisler* (New York: The Macmillan Co. for the Columbia University Press, 1894).

alike, that the facts of nature must be explained, in the last resort, in terms of energy, and that energy in turn can be conceived only in terms of will, which is the fundamental form of the life of mind or spirit.

I offer these two conclusions as the basis for an educational philosophy. With them in mind I have discussed a number of concrete problems that are of present importance not to teachers alone, but to thoughtful parents and to conscientious citizens.

It is sometimes hastily objected that the attempt to formulate a scientific study of education is impossible. This objection rests upon a misunderstanding as to what a science is. Science is wholly a matter of method; it is knowledge classified, and nothing more. The knowledge so classified may be knowledge of plants, or of heavenly bodies, or of the human body, or of forms of government, or of education. Only the sciences based upon mathematics are exact or lay claim to exactness; all others are descriptive only, and wider experience or further observation may modify their conclusions at any time. A science of