

**EDUCATIONAL WORK OF
THE YOUNG
MEN'S CHRISTIAN
ASSOCIATIONS, 1916-1918**

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Educational Work of the Young Men's Christian Associations, 1916-1918 by William Orr

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WILLIAM ORR

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF EDUCATION

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EDUCATIONAL WORK OF THE YOUNG
MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATIONS

1916-1918

By

WILLIAM ORR
SENIOR EDUCATIONAL SECRETARY OF THE
INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

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EDUCATIONAL WORK OF THE YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATIONS.

By WILLIAM ORR,

Senior Educational Secretary of the International Committee.

CONTENTS.—Historical sketch—Aims and objectives—Fields of educational work: City associations; railroad branches; Army and Navy; county work; industrial department; colored work; boys' work; foreign field; war work—Program of association educational work; statistical tables.

HISTORICAL SKETCH.

At the time when the first Young Men's Christian Associations in North America were organized in 1851, at Montreal and Boston, there appears to have been little thought of including a definite educational program in the work of these associations. Such educational work as was done was limited to reading rooms, libraries, a few lectures, and, from time to time, the organization and maintenance of literary societies. The great emphasis placed upon distinctly religious work appears to have largely occupied the energies of the leaders in the movement. In fact, there is some evidence to support the view that other activities than those distinctly religious were regarded as secular and as possibly inimical to what was conceived to be the real purpose and spirit of the association.

Despite this attitude, the manifest desire of many members of the associations for opportunities to develop along intellectual lines led little by little to the recognition and introduction of systematic educational work. The records of the movement show a steady growth in the educational activities mentioned above. In 1866, 15 years after the initiation of the work on the North American continent, however, only four associations reported class work, with a total of but 60 students. It is notable that the subjects taught were mainly in the ancient languages, and for the purpose of aiding divinity students in preparation for the ministry.

About 1880, the conception of the field of the association in its work for young men began to take on new content and to develop a new meaning. It was agreed that opportunities for physical, mental, and social development were in no way contrary to the main purpose of the association—that is, the fostering of the spiritual life—but contributed most effectively to this end.

In 1889, the International Convention, for the first time, indorsed educational work as a function of the association. The subject had also been discussed for several years previously at State conventions. A number of the leaders gave the support of their influence to this form of work. Reading rooms, libraries, and lectures were supplemented by practical talks and educational groups. Class work was extended to include commercial and language subjects; and from 1890 to 1893, beginnings were made in teaching industrial and science courses. It is noteworthy in this connection that the associations were coming to realize that their large field of service in educational work was in connection with preparation for, and training in, vocations.

In 1893, the International Committee established a department of education with George B. Hodge as senior secretary. This department was made responsible for the studying of the fundamental principles of the work and for gathering data from the various associations on which suggestions for development could be made. Under the impulse of this new departure, a few local associations employed secretaries specially charged with the supervision, and direction, of educational work. Methods for boys' classes and courses were carefully studied, and a large field of service, especially for boys leaving school early to enter employment, was revealed.

As the work with classes became more systematic and thorough, it was recognized that tuition fees might fairly be charged, and a beginning was made in such a financial policy. To systematize and standardize the work, international examinations were introduced, the result of which was to increase respect and support for the work on the part of the general public and of educational institutions. In fact, much commendation was expressed for the value of the service rendered by the association in promoting interest in vocational education.

In 1900, there began a period of expansion and extension. Instead of the class work being limited to the winter time, such instruction was continued throughout the spring. Day work was also introduced, and summer schools for boys were organized to supplement the work of the public schools. Special schools, such as automobile, salesmanship, advertising, insurance, real estate, textile designing, plumbing, fruit culture, and many others were established. The educational program of the association was also extended into fields outside the building.

There was a steady increase in the number of associations employing educational secretaries. To some extent, supervision from State committees was inaugurated. Higher standards of instruction were established. The years from 1900 to 1915 witnessed a remarkable

growth of the association educational work, as exhibited by the following statistical data:

	1901	1915
Number of lectures and talks.....	3,041	14,819
Educational club members.....	4,618	26,700
Number of associations with educational secretaries.....	21	84
Number of paid teachers.....	901	2,392
Total different students, day and evening.....	26,906	83,771
Number of international certificates won.....	1,532	2,240
Students in association day courses.....	560	8,681
Students outside building.....	350	22,653
Expense of advertising.....	\$12,607	\$81,772
Tuition receipts.....	\$48,000	\$814,024

In September, 1916, George B. Hodge, who had with remarkable success, fidelity, and devotion brought the educational work of the association to a high standard of efficiency, and who had been a large factor in developing it in all fields, resigned to take up the important task of developing the statistical work of the International Committee and of the associations as secretary of the bureau of records. He was succeeded in the educational secretaryship of the International Committee by William Orr.

Since 1916, the educational work of the associations has continued along lines that have become recognized as standard. There was imposed upon the association, in consequence of the war, the responsibility of meeting the needs for a most extensive educational program in connection with the prisoners of war in Europe, in the Army and Navy camps, and training stations in this country, and later in connection with the extension of the service of the National War Work Council to the American Expeditionary Force in France and among the French and Italian troops, in fact, wherever the Young Men's Christian Association was maintaining Red Triangle work for the benefit of the men with the colors.

Meantime the local associations had, in many cases, modified their courses so as to contribute toward the training of men for technical service in the Army; the achievement in this respect is one of the most notable in the annals of the movement. Much was done also through lectures, practical talks, and clubs to educate communities and the immediate membership of the association upon the great issues of the war. With the signing of the armistice in November, 1918, the need for the war work in the local associations ceased, but there continued to be an even more urgent call for such service in the camps. In January, 1919, for example, after a considerable period of preparation, there was inaugurated in France one of the largest educational movements on record in the shape of schools and classes for the benefit of the men in the American Expeditionary Forces. The direction of this undertaking was in charge of an Army Educational Commission, with headquarters in Paris.

In the home field, the associations have been adapting themselves to a return to peace conditions, and are now considering a standardization of certain classes and schools on a national basis.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES.

Association educational work originated, as one might say, spontaneously, in response to the needs of boys and men with whom the secretaries of the associations came into sympathetic relations, through observation, through personal interviews, and through an intimate knowledge of the embarrassments and difficulties which beset the path of those seeking a satisfactory and worthy life career. The workers in the association movement, both laymen and employed officers, came to realize the great need of educational opportunities in the field of both general and vocational training. Gradually the aims of the movement in this enterprise became clearly defined, and in all development of the work these aims have been kept clearly in mind as guiding principles determining both content and methods.

The particular function of the association, through its educational service, has been to furnish and to make easily accessible to men and boys, mainly those in industry, such courses of instruction as would enable them to become better citizens and workmen. It is significant that even at the very outset of the educational work, this purpose appears in the courses in ancient languages intended to aid men preparing for the ministry. While such subjects as these no longer appear in the programs of instruction, the vocational aim has continued to dominate. As expressed in terms of the particular purpose of the association movement, such training is regarded as essential in developing capacity for the largest service to one's fellows and for the best-realization of one's life in accordance with the highest Christian ideals.

In undertaking to realize these purposes, the association has consistently sought to supplement rather than to duplicate the opportunities offered by the public schools and other educational agencies. In fact, an extreme solicitude in this respect is to be noted; and, from time to time, tests have been made with resultant revisions of the program, whereby certain forms of work are eliminated and others introduced in accordance with the educational conditions and needs in each community.

Naturally, much of the service of the educational departments has been of a pioneer kind, and from competent authority definite recognition has been made of its achievements, particularly in the field of vocational education. One of these is that of E. E. Brown, now chancellor of New York University, and formerly United States Commissioner of Education, who states:

The Young Men's Christian Association is one of the best pioneer educational agencies in America, blazing a way for public schools and others to follow.

With the development of vocational courses in public schools and higher institutions of learning, especially since the organization of the Federal Board for Vocational Education, it has been found necessary for associations to make progressive adjustment to the opportunity for vocational work offered by other agencies. The increase of the age of leaving school, and the establishment of continuation schools have made unnecessary at certain points much of the work formerly done through the associations for boys up to the age of 16. It is significant, however, that in centers where there are abundant facilities offered in technical and business courses, association schools are maintained successfully. The education of public opinion as to the value of skilled workmen, as against unskilled, in all fields of business and industry, tends to greatly increase the demand for vocational training. There appear to be certain subjects that can be offered on a satisfactory basis to groups of men and boys through the association channel, and consequently classes in these subjects are well patronized.

The aims of the association in its educational work are by no means limited to vocational training. Much is being done in advancing knowledge in fields of general information, such as history, science, literature, art, and mathematics. There is a definite endeavor to promote reading and to stimulate the circulation of books from both association and public libraries. It may be noted in connection with reading that for the year ending May 1, 1918, 13 associations reported a circulation of over 5,000 books each among the membership. In many cases there is very effective cooperation between the public libraries and the local associations. Railroad branches have been particularly active in the stimulation and direction of the reading habit. Other means of general culture are through lectures, practical talks, and, to a limited extent, through classes.

Where an association is not in a position to develop organized educational work on its own part, alert secretaries in city and county associations are cooperating effectively in promoting the work of public schools and of higher institutions of learning.

FIELDS OF EDUCATIONAL WORK.

CITY ASSOCIATIONS.

By far the greatest part of the class work of the Young Men's Christian Association is done under the auspices of well-organized and adequately manned associations in the larger centers of population. The extent of this field can be seen from the following statistics taken from the Yearbook for 1918, which shows there were in opera-