

**ETHICAL ADDRESSES
AND ETHICAL RECORD;
EIGHTEENTH SERIES**

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AND

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EIGHTEENTH SERIES

PHILADELPHIA

THE AMERICAN ETHICAL UNION, 1415 LOCUST STREET

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THE NEED FOR SCHOOLS OF ETHICS

BY ANNA GARLIN SPENCER.

An address delivered at the Summer School of Ethics, held under the auspices of the American Ethical Union at Madison, Wis.

DR. NICHOLAS MURRAY BUTLER has said that "for forty years education in the United States has been seen to be a process in the spiritual evolution of the race." During the last hundred years the ideals of education have changed, from the old conception of the duty of making each generation a copy of the best of the past, to the new conception of the duty of developing personal power in each human being to the end that race progress may be achieved and each generation excel the last.

During the last hundred years the scope of education has also changed radically from the effort to fit a few masters and leaders of the race for their function, to the effort to fit all normal children and youth for intelligent share in a democratic community life. During the last hundred years the content of education has also radically changed from a few studies deemed the sole constituents of "culture" and "learning" to the wide range of curriculum that now makes the opportunity and almost the despair of teachers. During the last hundred years, also, the method of education has changed from the memory-drill of constant repetition to the laboratory work, the practical demonstration, the appeal to original thought, initiative and choice. All these most vital changes have come about in response to two great movements,—of democracy in government

and social order in the practical conduct of life, and of the birth and development of physical science in the intellectual realm. The last has caused a hunger for facts, for the actual and the certain. The first has made every smallest and feeblest child an heir apparent to the commonwealth of human thought and achievement. It has all meant a demand, unprecedented and imperious, that we should learn the mind of a child, should learn what process nature ordains for human development; that we should sacredly regard personality in each growing youth as a sign manual of race integrity and progress; that we should cease to be despotic in forms of education and learn how to give freedom without weakening the sources of self-control, and to woo to conscious self-direction latent powers of choice without making youth capricious and shallow.

It has all meant a new demand in moral training. If every child has some model to copy then only obedience and painstaking is needed. If, on the other hand, he is to become a new manifestation of the eternal life and his elders should seek unique value from him, then new skill in education is demanded. If only a few people, those favored in personal gifts or special opportunities, need culture of the schools, then with leisure and partial generosity the race may slowly and perfectly train its elite. But if all the people are to be called upon for large use of intelligence and character in self-government then the poor, who must haste to earning, and the dull, whose parents knew no life above the clod, and the weak, whose strength cannot be taxed too heavily, must all have right of consideration in the scheme and method of the schools. If, again, the content of learning be small and well defined as when the classic fetich was universally worshipped, then it is easy to breed fine teachers who would "e'en make the dullard learn." But if new sciences rise

and cluster, if each day a new study demands to be included in the schools as vital to full culture, then is it increasingly difficult to get teachers who can "teach children," however easy it may be to get teachers who can "teach subjects." If, finally, the method required for the school be what the old-fashioned list of studies made so much more consistent with true learning, the method of repetition and constant drill in rules and accepted statements, then is the teacher's task one of patience merely; but if, as now, the method demanded by science include the patience of the old teacher and an ingenuity quite new, then is the combination hard to find.

We have come to a time in education when the drill of the schools involves so many difficulties, and the appeal to the child is of so new and varied a character, that it is more difficult than at any previous time to secure habits of obedience, a leisure for self-knowledge, an atmosphere for reverence and a mechanism for character-training such as children demand for true development.

Moreover, we have, in our cosmopolitan population, a mixture of racial inheritance, religious background, and social experience which gives confusion and often engenders hurtful friction in the influence of the environment upon the individual. What is right? Whose standards shall be accepted? Is there any difference, except personal taste, between one way of living and another? Shall one sacrifice the pleasure one desires for some unknown good? Is there any standard one ought to accept and follow, any irrefragible foundation of morality that preserves and enforces the everlasting right?

These are the questions that press upon youth and upon maturer consciousness as well; and these are questions which the very complexity and freedom of modern systems of teaching and modern conditions of school life