THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF CERTAIN AFTER-SCHOOL MATERIALS AND ACTIVITIES IN SCIENCE

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The Educational Value of Certain After-School Materials and Activities in Science by Morris Meister

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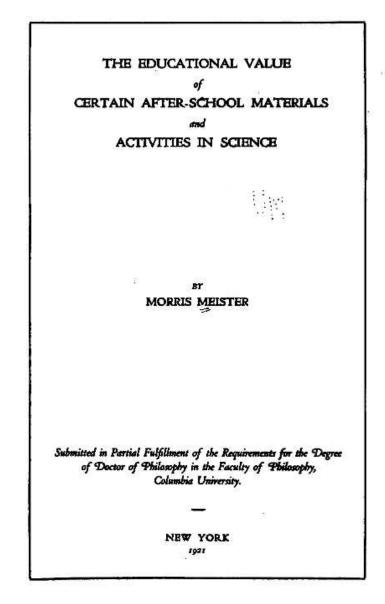
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MORRIS MEISTER

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Educational thought and investigation of the last ten or fifteen years have been focusing the attention of teachers, supervisors, educators, and the thinking public upon certain educative forces that exist quite apart from the activities of the schoolroom. These forces are sometimes so vital and so important in shaping the life of the individual that the failure of the educational system properly to guide and control them has brought upon it a considerable portion of the criticism of recent years. Developments in educational philosophy and psychology have been very emphatic in pointing out that what our pupils do during every hour of the twenty-four in the day-and of every day in the year-is a factor making for education and therefore a legitimate consideration for the school and teacher. Thus, we have begun to investigate such questions as home-study, play, and nutrition. We have gone into the home and made recommendations to parents in matters which have hitherto been looked upon as belonging only to mother and father. We have begun to lay stress upon student organizations of all sorts; seeking in them value in citizenship and habit formation. Clubcraft, scoutcraft, and camping have become pertinent considerations for the educator and, what is more important, imesfor the teacher in the class room. And, as might be expected, this newer element has had its influence upon our schools, their jorganizations, curricula, courses of study, and methods of instruc-5 tion. The concept that the school is not a place where we pre-> pare for a life that is to come, but is an integral part of life itself. must necessarily and in a very intimate way relate school procedures with the vital factors of life,

In a sense, we are preparing our pupils for a future life in the most effective way when we teach them to live better their present lives. From considerations such as these, extra-curricular cativities have been deriving greater and greater importance. Eventually the line of demarcation between the two phases of

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activity should fade completely. The school day may start at 9 and end at 3; but its influence will function at all times. And in turn, methods of work, content, and organization within the four walls of the school-room should take their quality and their inspiration from the well-springs of enthusiasm so common to afterschool activity.

Needless to say, we are as yet far from so ideal a development. To the pupil, out-of-school time has always been and still is the period of freedom par excellence. We have perhaps progressed beyond the point where he thinks of the school-room as an abode of horrors, of the teacher as an ogre, and of books as instruments of torture; but too often his real life is still essentially distinct from the school. His greatest activity and his greatest enthusiasm still center around the extra-curricular where are to be found problems of his own choosing and ideas born of his own inner urgings.

As for the teacher, he has been reacting to the extra-curricular in many different ways. When seized by the immensity of some teaching difficulty, he may storm at the "distracting influences" which take "their minds off their subjects," or he may feel envious of these rivals to his efforts, or he may welcome them as offering a "whip" with which to lash pupils into submission by laying punitive restrictions upon their after-school time. Or, he may throw care to the winds, and enter whole-heartedly into the extra-curricular plans of his boys. If he is one who reacts in this last way, he almost always attains a popularity and a sphere of influence that make teaching a joy.

The parent is perhaps the only one who is in a position fully to appreciate the extra-curricular. Most of his problems as a parent, a good deal of his worry, a goodly portion of the cost of child support, and nearly all of his pleasure with his children are tied up with the extra-curricular. If he be the unintelligent parent, he welcomes such a procedure as will relieve him of his problems. Time spent in school is so much less time for his boy to get into mischief. If he be the thinking parent, he will make the effort himself to reconcile for the boy the two distinct claims upon the latter's time. Both types of parents are ready to cooperate and to accept recommendations looking to a better state of affairs.

Introduction

And society is filled with individuals who look back upon these two phases of their past lives with two quite distinct attitudes: with censure, criticism, and unpleasantness for the one; and with glowing recollections of time profitably spent for the other. It is a very wide-spread reflection upon American college education that it is essentially an extra-curricular training. In some colleges it is frequently a matter of disrepute to have devoted much time to studies. The same condition holds for the high school and in a different sense even for the elementary school. The man of sixty who reviews his life and concludes that his real education was what he got while in contact with the world of actual experience is often paralleled by the high school or college student who regards as his real schooling his experiences of outof-school life. "He has nine months in which to get his schooling and three months in which to gain an education."

From every point of view possible, extra-curricular activities loom up as immense factors of educational importance. In the field of science there has always existed a body of materials and experiences that were essentially tied up with life out of school. Before the great industrial changes which brought to civilization the "factory," and which herded our masses into congested cities, the home was a center of industrial, social, and intellectual activity. In this activity were found a stimulus and an opportunity for experiences of a physical, mechanical, and manipulatory nature. This stimulus existing quite apart from the systematic education of sixty or seventy years ago, nevertheless made one of the largest contributions to the intellectual development of the individual of that day. As modern industrialism continued in its growth, the home ceased to function in the old sense. Education became more and more "curricular" and systematic, "squeezing the educational juice" out of the home.

Charles W. Eliot in his paper on "Changes Needed in American Secondary Education," comments upon this situation as follows:

"If any one should ask—why has modern society got on as well as it has, if the great majority of its members have had an inadequate training of that sort, the answer is that some voluntary agencies and some influences which take strong effect on sections of the community have been at work to mitigate the evil. Such are, for example, athletic sports, travel, the use by city people of public parks and gardens, the practice of that alert