

**WHAT DO WE
MEAN BY
EDUCATION?**

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What do we mean by education? by J. Welton

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WHAT DO WE MEAN BY EDUCATION?

BY

J. WELTON, D.LIT., M.A.

PROFESSOR OF EDUCATION IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

AUTHOR OF THE PSYCHOLOGY OF EDUCATION; THE LOGICAL BASES OF
EDUCATION; THE ARTICLE ON EDUCATION IN THE ELEVENTH EDITION
OF THE ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA; PRINCIPLES AND METHODS
OF TEACHING; A MANUAL OF LOGIC, ETC.

JOINT AUTHOR OF PRINCIPLES AND METHODS OF MORAL TRAINING

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PREFACE

F. O. S. S. H.
We live in an age of great educational unrest. For many years enthusiasts have preached 'education' as a cure for all social ills, and vast sums have been expended on schools. Yet the result is a very general dissatisfaction, and the voice of the doubter becomes more insistent as the demands on his purse increase. Parents are often apathetic, sometimes hostile. Employers of all grades complain that young people come to them from the schools badly trained, wanting in initiative and adaptability, and in power of serious concentration. Social reformers confess that there is little sign of a general elevation of the national character, even when they do not lament its decadence. Everywhere it is frankly questioned whether the country is getting an adequate return for the money it expends on the schools. Yet, never have teachers, as a body, been more intelligent, more enthusiastic, more devoted.

Still, the enthusiasts demand an increase of school life as an unfailing remedy for school defects, and continually schemes of training are put forward for removing all cause for complaint. Unhappily these show no agreement among themselves, are generally based on superficial analysis of the problem, and often involve inconsistent principles.

The general consensus that the results of past efforts

are disappointing, shown both by the complaints that are so common and by the numerous and transient proposals for reform, suggests the need for an investigation into fundamental principles. For, unless the foundation is sound the building cannot be secure. This is the task I have undertaken.

I am profoundly convinced that theory of education cannot be separated without disaster from theory of life. The general disappointment with the results of the work of the schools seems to me to be largely due to the misconception that the school is the only educational agent. Thus the term 'education' is applied exclusively to what is only a small part of education, and that part of intrinsically minor importance ; and then from that fragment results are expected which only education in all its fullness can produce. This is to separate education from life, to narrow its aims to the direct and immediate results of school work, and to disregard the organic unity which must exist between all forms of educative effort if the result on life, truly to be desired, is to be attained. That education in the widest sense is the great lever for raising humanity is true. That the school alone can apply that lever is false. In order that the work of education may succeed, it must be a co-operation between all who are charged with the bringing up of children, and it must fix its gaze steadily on the whole range of that life for which it attempts to prepare. So the fundamental question must be faced of what that life means, and of the qualities that make it excellent. Then comes the secondary questions of how the desired result is to be secured, and what part in the work legitimately belongs to each of the communities in which the child lives and from which he receives formative impulses.

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It is to such considerations that I have addressed myself. No attempt has been made to work out methods in which the principles I advocate may profitably be applied. For my general views on such practical questions the reader is referred to other books in which I have already discussed them. The present work may be regarded as a consideration of the assumptions which underlie what I have there written. But it is the principles that matter. Nothing is more foreign to my thought than that my own plans are the only ways in which those principles can be carried into effect. Each educator will be most truly an educator when he works freely under the guidance of vital principles which have become part and parcel of himself.

J. W.

THE UNIVERSITY, LEEDS,
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