

# THE AUSTRALIAN Journal of Education

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE TEACHERS' ASSOCIATIONS OF NEW SOUTH WALES.

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### Reform the Primary Schools.

A question much exercising the minds of educationists at the present time is that of the last two years spent in the Primary School. This is from the age of 12 to 14. The great majority of school children leave somewhere at this stage, and the question arises—is the school doing its best to prepare them for the battle of life? Should they not receive special treatment? To those who have opposed the utilitarian tendencies of modern education the question will come with something of a shock. They have come to regard the Primary School in its entirety as immune from the desecrating hand of the materialist. They have yielded the struggle with regard to the Secondary Schools, but only upon the understanding that the Primary School shall not be similarly tampered with. There, must be no insidious attempt to specialise this lower branch of educational effort. In the face of this, it will certainly require overwhelming evidence to prove that we have here a problem of a special order.

Is there, then, any reason to differentiate these two years? Any reason for special adaptation? We think there is.

The determination of a pupil's calling has always been a thorny problem for teachers and parents alike. Modern specialisation of schools has been the effort to meet the situation. If we could only determine the future calling of the pupil, education would be enabled to render him more direct and effective services. Now, it does not seem to have struck many of us hitherto, that this great majority who leave between the ages of 12 and 14 have already fixed upon their life's vocation. We are here in a measure definitely assured. We know exactly the employments which will engage their hand and eye and brain. No doubt, the decision lacks the definiteness attaching to the selection of a particular profession or trade; but there is a sufficiency of solid data offered to enable us to take action. We know, in short, that these pupils

pass from our schools into that vast array of industrial occupations which do not require any specialised knowledge or skill—they become miners, factory hands, agricultural labourers, etc.

This is then what constitutes the speciality of the case. Put in a nutshell, the case is:—The vast majority of our children leave school between the ages of 12 and 14, and pass into the unskilled occupations.

It does not appear at first sight that this clear-cut statement of the situation is of a very enlightening order. The very fact that the pupils are to become members of any one of a vast array of vocations without definitely fixing upon the particular one, paralyses, it may be said, all educational action. There can be no provision for the unforeseen.

For ourselves we think the situation a very simple one. Without raising the eternal problem of Formal Training, it may be urged that in all these callings there is a certain equipment in the way of manual skill and efficiency, and a certain intellectual curiosity in things, and processes material which are of service to all labourers, no matter where occupied. The handy, intelligent man is, in short, universally desired.

Could not the schools, then, organise to develop this type of unskilled labourer or casual? Could they not, while the pupil is still under their influence, help to cultivate that essential manual skill which will be of so much value to him in his life's work? Certainly, if they could they would be increasing their national value; they would be helping to produce a higher type of citizen. Moreover, while giving those who intended passing to the higher trades, a valuable preparation for their work, they would be stimulating the vast remainder to move similarly forward.

All this smacks certainly of crude utilitarianism. It would appear to advocate the conversion of the Primary School into an Industrial School. This is undoubtedly true. The Primary Schools must be industrialised. This is especially so in Australia. The whole basis of our national life is economic, and is destined to remain so for many years. It is then ignoring facts, and courting failure not to adapt accordingly. If the schools are to be real social forces this development is unavoidable.

The curriculum, then, of our Primary Schools must be revised and made to include a considerable amount of manual and scientific work. Woodwork, paper-work, iron-work, gardening, textile work, etc., for the boys; sewing, cooking, gardening, textile work, etc., for the girls, together with much practical related science, must be given the larger place in the curriculum. It would not be too much to set aside the whole afternoon of each day to this work. The mornings could be devoted to English, arithmetic, etc.

The humanitarian interests of the pupil

must by no means be lost sight of. For this reason English would be a very prominent subject. Its treatment should counteract the materialising tendency of the practical side of the work. There should be abundant reading of good and appropriate English, composition, receiving very close attention; grammar should be treated casually; the interesting and important parts of history and geography, while receiving no logical, systematic treatment, should be amply provided for. This is but a rough outline of the change to be made. The details would require much discussion.

### Passing Events.

A small stir has been made among Training College students by a young lady rushing into print to show her disapprobation of the advice on dress tendered by a lecturer to lady students. A brief correspondence in the daily press followed. One point seems to have been overlooked. Women assistants who dress expensively can hardly claim to be regarded as underpaid. And as to loud dress, it is entirely a matter of good taste. Those teachers who are ladies dress suitably; the others often don't.

The Public Schools' Swimming Carnival, held on the 27th ultimo, proved a very successful meeting. But the flag and megaphone officials tired just as the spectators were getting interested in their efforts.

The recent appointments to the Inspectorial staff have not given universal satisfaction. Several head masters who considered their claims overlooked, have held meetings, presumably of protest. The general feeling amongst head-masters seems to be that the matter should be made a subject of personal appeal to the Public Service Board, not of semi-public debate.

A deputation representing certain head-masters laid their case before the Council of the Association, but that body was not prepared to protest against a recent appointment. At the same time it decided that a deputation should wait upon the Acting Under-Secretary in regard to the principles underlying the method of selection of inspectors.

Sydney Technical Day School opened with thirty pupils, of whom two-thirds won scholarships or bursaries. Such schools will go far in the way of providing training for lads who cannot go to the University, and who wish to enter some more paying business than that of the sweated clerk.