

AMERICAN IDEALS IN EDUCATION *

THERE are a great many professions that are important, but of all the professions in the United States I think that there is no one quite so important to the country as a whole as is yours. There is no other profession which exercises so profound an influence upon the national growth, for you shape the whole course of the development of the nation of to-morrow. Every other profession deals with a part of the action of the nation to-day. You deal practically with all of the action of the nation of the future. There can be no more honorable profession. I know well that there is no other profession that is at times more wearing than that which you follow. For good or for evil, the effect of what you do is literally tremendous in its far-reaching importance. Much of your influence is exercised, necessarily, in ways of which you are entirely unconscious, in ways of which those influenced are only partly conscious. I have been struck to find out how often the child will not realize until he is grown how great the influence has been of some good teacher upon him at some critical period of his life.

It is not only a question of the effect that you have in the lessons you teach in the classroom. What I may call the by-products of your work are often, at least, as important. In the city of New York, where I am,

* Address before the Iowa State Teachers' Association, Des Moines, Iowa, November 4, 1910.

I regard the public school as being the all-important factor of good citizenship, especially for the children of the immigrants. Nothing, to my mind, is more significant than to go, as I have gone, to our East Side schools, and see several hundred children, not one of whom has had parents born on this side of the ocean, singing "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," and feeling the most intense enthusiasm, not only for the land in which they live, but for the men who, although not their forefathers by birth, are really their forefathers in the spirit, and who have become thus, thanks to the teaching they have received in the public schools.

I doubt if there is anything that has reflected more credit upon the civilization of the American Republic in the past than our common-school system, and, my friends, that is just one of its dangers. The minute that people become too satisfied with what has been done by them in the past, they are in great danger of coming short in the present and in the future. And the fact that the schools have done so well compared with the schools of foreign countries in the past, is, I think, one reason why we have been less alert than certain other nations. I should be inclined, curiously enough, to put both Germany and Japan among those foreign nations. We have been less alert than certain foreign nations in reshaping our educational facilities to meet the needs of the present day. I need not say to a group of teachers that as soon as any man has ceased to be able to learn, his usefulness as a teacher is at an end. When he himself can't learn, he has reached the stage where other people can't learn from him. Unless we now take careful thought of the educational needs of the country at the present day, unless we recognize certain evils that have grown up in connection with our social system

(but perhaps primarily in connection with our educational system), much of the value to the community of our educational system will disappear.

There are at least three different sides to the work that you do and to what boys and girls learn from you. There is, first of all, the knowledge for its own sake entirely. Without regard to what practical use in the later career knowledge can be put to, it has a real value for its own sake; and I think that we who pride ourselves upon being so practical a people must keep sharp watch on ourselves that we do not minimize that advantage. Wholly without regard to whether a man has to use what he has gained in school in his later profession, it is of immense value to him and greatly increases his value to those with whom he is thrown into intimate contact, if he has had such an education. Of course different people need totally different amounts of education.

To my mind, infinitely the most important part of education is the primary part. The part of education with which I am most concerned, and with which all people should be most concerned, is that education which is all that ninety per cent of the American people need or should get. I want to admit that in the fullest and frankest way, and indeed to insist upon it: and yet to insist also, as a corollary, upon the fact that it is an advantage for all the ninety per cent to have the remaining ten per cent get a much higher education—to get much farther along in the mere scholastic training; and perhaps one per cent to go very far indeed. And of course the higher up you go, the greater becomes the value of the education merely in and by itself, without regard to the use to which it can be put. The cultivated man, the cultivated woman, have because of their

cultivation gained a great advantage in life, provided always that that advantage has not been gained by the sacrifice of something still more important.

We often see sneering allusions to men who have received a college education. If the man is of such a character that he regards the college education as all-sufficient in itself, then I quite agree that he is far better off without one. But if he has the right stuff in him, if he regards the college education as supplying him with qualities which are invaluable additions to the other qualities that he has, then its good effects can hardly be overestimated. I want to lay particular stress upon that, because I have not the smallest sympathy with the people who insist upon regarding education as of no value whatever unless it has an important practical result. Besides that value, it has the very great value of the mere cultivation that it gives, of the broader outlook upon life, of the infinitely greater capacity for real enjoyment with which it endows the man or woman fortunate enough to receive it; of the infinitely greater capacity it gives to that man or woman to add to the enjoyment of those with whom he or she is thrown in contact, and especially in intimate contact, later on. To say that such an education can be too dearly purchased is merely to say what is true of almost every quality that can be acquired. If cultivation, refinement, love of reading, love of art, love of beauty, broad appreciation of what is going on in the great world roundabout, if all of those qualities, invaluable though they are in themselves, are purchased at the cost of the loss of the power of the man, at the cost of the loss of the sense of duty of the woman, of course the price paid is too dear. But there is not the slightest need of any such price being paid. The very

best mothers I have ever met were mothers who did all the practical work of the household all the better because they had trained intellects, because they were in the widest and best sense cultivated and well-read women. And when I see it said that learning has spoiled a woman for being a mother, I doubt whether there is much there to spoil. In other words, I feel that the danger to the man and the woman in education is substantially the same. You remember that John Randolph—he of the bitter tongue—in Congress a century ago, when much irritated by an antagonist, finally turned and said: “The gentleman, sir, reminds me of the land between the Rappahannock and the James, which is almost worthless by nature, and becomes totally so by cultivation.” Of course there are men and women who will be completely spoiled by cultivation, but I don’t think that they are of very much worth to start with; and I do think, emphatically, that the woman has exactly the right to the highest education that the man has. I don’t make any distinction between the two.

Now, so much for that side of education. The second side is the training for life-work. I think I have dwelt long enough upon the value of education in and for itself to prevent your mistaking me and thinking that I fail to lay full stress upon that side. But I wish to dwell with even more emphasis upon the fact that our schools should train the boys toward and not away from the farm and the shop; and that they should train the girls so that they will be better and not worse housewives because they have been to school. Moreover, I should like to say to those interested in the higher education that they ought to see that that side of education is carefully attended to in college, in university, in

high school; because it is a bad thing to create the impression that such industrial training (to use it in its broadest significance) is only to characterize the lower grades of scholastic work. If that is done, you naturally tend to make people think that the work itself is lower. And I would like to see matters arranged so that every college boy would have to be taught some physical trade—some trade with his hands—some manual trade; and that no college girl should be allowed to get a diploma in anything unless she also got it in housewifery. So that what I say does not refer only to the lower grades in the schools; I would like to have it put all through; but of course in the lower grades it is an absolute essential.

I suppose that we are all now practically a unit in having our faces set against those tendencies of the education of the last eighty years which make up part (not by any means all—our whole social structure is responsible for a great part of it) of the reason why so many mechanics, high-grade mechanics, think that their children rise in the world if they are trained so as to become inferior clerks. Now, I had a curious experience in connection with this while I was President and we were trying to enlist sailors. I think it was in Boston, although it may have been in New York. There were multitudes of applications for enlistment from young men who simply did not have the physique to make it worth while taking them into the navy; there were so many of these applications that we finally began to look into the matter; and in a lamentably large number of cases we found that these boys were sons of blacksmiths, of carpenters, of mechanics, of working men. Those fathers and mothers had unfortunately thought that they would make their boys rise

in the world by training them only for a clerical career, and so had turned them out to make their way with simply very ordinary fitness in a very crowded profession, where the lower grades were filled already to overflowing with poorly paid people; and the boys after two or three years were tempted to give up in despair the only occupation for which they had been trained. They did not have the manual skill to take up their fathers' vocations, and came down in numbers to endeavor to enlist in the navy, only to find that for that also they had been unfitted by the very education that was supposed to lift them up.

The schools can do something to remedy that evil, but of course there must necessarily be a complete change in the attitude society takes toward manual labor. Personally I am quite unable to understand how any man could fail to have the very heartiest respect and admiration for the people who stand at the head of the higher occupations, where men work chiefly with their hands; that is, where they work with their hands and heads also. I remember as a small boy feeling that the man who drove an engine was about the biggest man that I ever came across; and I want it distinctly understood that I have kept that feeling till now; and I hope that society will more and more grow to prize the skilful performance of manual labor, and to realize that we never can get a really fine society where manual labor—so long as there is a display of head-work also—is not regarded as distinctly one of the most honorable professions.

Some one has said that the permanent gift of the Middle Ages to us was the gift of their great cathedrals, which have been the only architectural contributions to the world's progress in the last thousand years which in

any way compare with the extraordinary architectural contributions of the civilization that flourished, and most of which died, before Christianity came into the world; and those great cathedrals were built, not by architects in our sense of the word, but by master builders—master workmen—men whose names are unknown; but men who belonged to a profession in which they took much pride and in which they were so skilled that they were enabled to render this absolutely incalculable service to future time. That, of course, could not have been done except in a society which frankly regarded such work as of the most honorable character. Beyond question at that time the master builders looked down with entirely haughty and unaffected scorn upon the person who could merely read and write. His scorn was not justified, but the inverse feeling of the person who can merely read and write nowadays for the individual who lives by the work of his hands is just as little justified. We have gone so far in the other direction that our attitude now is at least as damaging to society as the utter ignoring of the man of scholastic education in the Middle Ages. The pendulum has swung too far away, and it will have to swing back in order to make our national life socially rounded out, fully developed on all sides, as it should be.

Therefore I feel most strongly that there should be a tremendous development of industrial training—mechanical training in the cities, agricultural training in the country. I am not going to discuss the question of the country schools. I feel strongly that the school with less than ten pupils in the country districts has ceased to be a real benefit, and that what we must try to do is to build up schools which, together with a broad basis of the kind of education that is general, and that fits

the boy and girl for life generally, shall also tend steadily to train them to be contented with and get the best out of the farms on which most of them should live; and that the training should above all things not be of such a character as to make the boy and girl feel that for them to go away from the farm to the city means a rise. It is a lamentable thing when our education produces such an effect upon the boy and the girl in the country districts. More than that, I think that the country school should be made a social centre. I think that the time has come when our people must consider very seriously the question of trying to help the men of the country districts in building up their country life so as to make it not only equally attractive with city life, but equally full of opportunity. It can certainly be done, and while it must be done primarily by the farmers themselves—by the men who live in the open country, yet they must be stimulated to feel the need of doing it, and it is our duty to help them in every way in the effort to do it.

I am certain that no small part of Germany's extraordinary commercial success is due to the character of the German schools. I don't mean to say for a moment that I would imitate blindly the whole German school system. I think there is only one thing more foolish than blind imitation of something that has done well abroad, and that is the narrow spirit that refuses to adopt anything just because it comes from abroad. The prime necessity in training any boy is to train him so that he can make and keep a home. The chief element in the average profession should be that of being a successful husband and father, and the prime necessity with the girl is to train her so that she can do well in her own home. I need hardly say that with boy or girl, any

training for life that leaves out of consideration the fact that the life is a failure, unless it is led primarily with a view to making and keeping a home, is itself a thoroughly vicious and faulty system. And that, again, is something which not merely school-teachers, but all our people will have to more and more keep in mind. If you turn out girls who, because they have been to school, are less fitted to do work in their own homes, you can be sure that there is something very wrong in the schools. There is no need whatever for it, as I have said. In every walk of life, everywhere where I have known people intimately, the very best housewives and best mothers that I have ever met have been those who have had the mental training, so that there is not the slightest necessary connection between the mental training and the inability to do practical work on the part of the girl in the home, on the part of the man on the farm, in the shop, in any of the occupations of life; and it is for you who have to do the practical work of the schools yourselves to see what the trouble is wherever it exists and apply the remedy.

And now, friends, comes the third division of my subject and the one with which I am much better fitted to deal as an expert. So far I have spoken only of the purely scholastic side of training, or of the side that is practical in the sense of training the boy and girl to do the mechanical part of his or her life-work. The President in introducing me said that I would speak upon "American Ideals." The third part of what you have to teach consists in the influence, direct and indirect, that you have upon the children under you in making them good citizens, in making them such men and women that in the future our country will go up and not down.

We are engaged in the very greatest, the most glorious and the most difficult experiment ever attempted by men and women on this earth. This is the first time that a serious and successful effort has been made to apply popular rule to a gigantic nation of the first class. So far we have been infinitely more successful than any republic that has ever hitherto existed. Long before the Roman Republic had reached anything like our wealth and extent of territory and power and population it had become not only hopelessly corrupt, but hopelessly unable to govern itself. And the Roman Republic is practically the only republic that has ever existed for a considerable length of time on a large scale. Every other republic that has ever existed has been small in extent of territory and in population; and even though small (I am going to make an exception for a very few primitive republics), if it attained wealth and power, it always fell, primarily because it changed into a republic of castes, so that it had a line of cleavage between the rich and the poor. Sometimes they were known as rich and poor, sometimes as patricians and plebeians, sometimes as aristocrats and the people. But when once that line of cleavage was established the end was certain. It made very little difference which form the end took: whether the rich tyrannized over and exploited the poor, or the poor overcame and plundered the rich; in either event the end of the republic had come.

Now, you have got to give to the pupils under you not merely an intellect, but an ethical training. It is partly going to come through your exercise of an influence of which they are hardly conscious. It is partly going to come through your direct teaching of them in such ways that they will know that they are being

taught. But it is a responsibility that, if you are to do your full work, you cannot escape. I don't for a moment think that the father and mother have any right to shirk their share of the burden. They can't put it on you and do their own duty. I know, and you know probably much better than I do, the type of parent who really seems to have about as much sense of responsibility as a cuckoo, and who, having left the child at school, blandly assumes that the unfortunate teacher can make good all the lack of parental discipline and bringing up. The parents can't escape the responsibility for doing their share of the work; and even after both you and the father and mother have done all that you can, I know that much will remain that you can't accomplish.

There is unfortunately a great deal of truth in the Arab proverb that "the son is the son of his time quite as much as the son of his father"; and the children under you will be curiously responsive to general movements over which you and the parents can exercise only the smallest control. But while their careers can only be shaped, their characters moulded, to a certain degree, it is also true that up to that degree it is in your power to shape the career, to mould the character; and there is where, in my judgment, the greatest of all your tasks lies. We who are in public life after all do not deal with the real and vital things. That is one reason why I always find it a little difficult to make any distinction between my so-called political speeches and those in which I am only dealing with good citizenship; because down at bottom I haven't any real interest in anything in politics unless it counts for good citizenship. Tariffs, the currency, all kinds of other things that convulse the country and attract every one's attention, are not of any

real consequence compared with having the right kind of men and women in the homes of the country. No stream can rise above its source, and in our popular government we cannot get good results if we haven't the right kind of men and women in private life. And as regards that type of citizenship, all that we do in public life, all that we do in Congress, in the State legislatures, anywhere, sinks almost into insignificance compared with what you here whom I am addressing can do. You men and women engaged in this great work are in the highest and truest sense the real servants of the Republic. You have a greater task to perform than any public man can perform. It rests with you to see that the boys are turned out manly, fearless, and yet tender; turned out so that they shall be ashamed to flinch from any man or to wrong any woman; ashamed to show weakness in the face of strength, or not to deal gently with weakness if shown in others; and to teach the girls equally that to them belong by right not only the virtues of tenderness and unselfishness, but the virtues of strength and courage; so that it shall be a disgrace to the man if he is only strong, but not gentle; and a disgrace to the girl if in addition to gentleness she does not have strength.

Great is your task, and therefore thrice over are you to be congratulated because your task is great. Nothing in this world is worth having or worth doing unless it means effort, pain, difficulty. No kind of life is worth leading if it is always an easy life. I know that your life is hard; I know that your work is hard; and hardest of all for those of you who have the highest trained consciences, and who therefore feel always how much you ought to do. I know your work is hard, and that is why I congratulate you with all my heart. I have

never in my life envied a human being who led an easy life; I have envied a great many people who led difficult lives and led them well. And I come here to-night partly to speak with you over your tasks, partly to ask you to bend your best thought to considering in what way you can better perform those tasks, and still more to express to you the genuine admiration and regard I feel for you; and to say that, like every other American citizen worthy of the name, I hold no other class of people in our community in quite the regard that I hold the American teacher who is moulding the American nation of to-morrow.