

CHANNING (W.)

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BEGINNINGS OF AN  
EDUCATION SOCIETY

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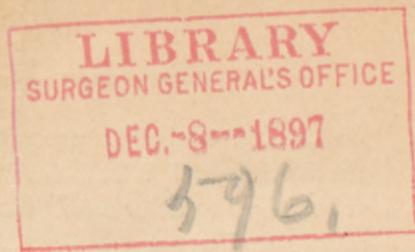
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BEGINNINGS OF AN EDUCATION SOCIETY

There can be no doubt, I think, in the minds of most parents, that modern school education has grown to a point beyond their entire comprehension. In earlier times this was not the case, for it was more elementary and simple than at present, and, what is of still greater significance, it was more directly carried on under the eye of the parent. He was more with the child and had more direct control over his conduct and education. He knew what he did, and worked and thought and felt with him.

Modern life has become filled with new interests for the parent, absorbing *his* time, and has also furnished many new ones for the child. So each has been gradually and almost imperceptibly led away from the home, the center of most that is best in the lives of us all.

School education, keeping pace with social evolution, has recognized these changes, and has been obliged to take upon itself functions formerly quite foreign to it. More and more it has assumed the responsibility of fitting the child not only intellectually for life, but ethically and physically as well. As the home training has weakened, the school training has become more potent and dominating. The equilibrium has, perhaps, been preserved; the child may be now as well fitted for citizenship as a quarter of a century or more ago, but he grows up in a changed environment. Is this the best for him? Can it make as good a man of him? Will he become as valuable a member of society? Will *he* be the parent he ought to be to guide and bring up *his* children? These are serious questions, the most serious questions that we can ask ourselves, and were the very ones that came into my mind, when our Brookline Education Society was formed and I

was asked to be its president. In my attempt to answer them, I found I had no adequate knowledge of modern school methods, or what education, from the teacher's standpoint, really was, and so, in common with others in our society, I strove to meet the teachers halfway, tell them what education, from the parents' point of view, seemed to be, and get the results of their training and experience. We took up problems of mutual interest, such as Home care of children, Reading of boys and girls, Recreation and study, Art in the schools, Music as an educative force in the community, Manual training, often inviting specialists from abroad to lead in our discussions.

The parents, we found, asked the questions and the teachers usually answered them, which was what might have been expected, as the former were necessarily learners. The result was wonderfully stimulating, and led to personal investigations and observations of school methods, and some practical contributions. For the first time, I am quite sure, the teachers felt that their work was understood and appreciated by parents before apathetic or wholly uninterested. By such direct personal contact a sudden insight, of a most illuminating nature, was acquired by the parents of what the teachers were doing, and the teachers gained a knowledge they had never before possessed of the needs of the parents. The Education Society served as a clearing house, as it were, for the brightest, best, and most progressive ideas of education.

It may be that we have been fortunate in Brookline, for our standing committee, as well as all members of our society, have been allowed free access to our schools; at any rate, we have made the progress that we have, partly because the doors of all our schools have been freely opened to every inquirer, and nothing has had to be taken for granted.

You ask for the results: let me first point out a few of the tangible ones, and then briefly indicate the more subtle and underlying ones, which are, after all, the test of what has been accomplished. I have already spoken of subjects dis-

cussed at our general meetings. I will next allude to the work of our standing committees. Our lecture committee has given us two courses of lectures, among the lecturers there having been such men as Stanley Hall, Felix Adler, John Fiske, Professor N. S. Shaler, Professor G. H. Palmer.

The child-study committee has held a number of meetings and made statistical studies of children, after the plan of President Hall, and has had mothers' meetings in several of the schoolhouses, where a large number of the mothers of the poorest children have met members of the committee and teachers, coming together socially, in this way, probably for the first time in their lives. No one can doubt the benefit of such intercourse.

The committee on music has made a study of music in the schools; has inaugurated a series of weekly concerts, in the lower schools, by amateurs of merit; has given a course of four young people's concerts, illustrative of the music of the great composers, and has arranged for a series of public open-air band concerts, during the present summer, for the people at large. In addition to this practical work, it has been carefully considering the value of music as an educational force in the community.

The committee on science has presented two valuable reports on the subject, treated in a practical way, and suggesting how the "parent can assist the teacher in her attempts to bring the children into close contact with all that is grand and beautiful in the phenomena of daily life."

The committee on history has worked vigorously in studying into the history of the town, issuing several leaflets; and, during the past year, has published a pamphlet called, *A guide to the local history of Brookline*, which has already been widely noticed and commended in the press for the excellence of its arrangement, and the accurate and full, yet concise character of the data presented. This committee might well rest content with what it has already accomplished, but it has, in addition, provided courses of lectures on local history and the Civil War, and prepared a series of guide leaflets for historical excursions.

The committee on physical training has also been very active, holding numerous meetings and investigating subjects of interest, such as "military drill," "competition in athletics," "medical inspection of schools," etc., and is now urging the desirability of a public outdoor gymnasium which, I believe, will in time be an accomplished fact.

A committee on school libraries has also made progress.

The committee on art, through a sub-committee, arranged one of the best loan collections of paintings in the Town Hall it has been the writer's privilege to visit. It was opened immediately after the close of the One Hundred Old Masters exhibit, in Boston, in April last, and, though it did not include so large a proportion of old masters, in its general excellence, and its practical arrangements, challenged comparison with it. The pictures were all collected in Brookline, and among the painters represented were, Allston, Rosa Bonheur, Boudin, Brion, Corot, Courbet, Couture, Daubigny, Dupré, Etty, Frère, Hunt, Raphael Mengs, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and many others of wide reputation.

Large numbers of school children were taken to the exhibit by their teachers, and, though the general public did not visit it in as large numbers as was hoped, it was a brilliant success, and has made, I am certain, a deep impression on our town life.

I may mention one other direction in which our society worked in a more general way. On the suggestion of a non-resident of the town, a meeting of the executive committee and a number of ladies and gentlemen was held, to see what might be done toward getting the town to establish an Art Committee, similar to the Art Commission of Boston. By the joint efforts of our society and the selectmen, our revised town laws now provide for an Art Committee of three, which not only must approve all decorations, works of art, etc., in public buildings and grounds, but also all designs for public buildings, which is a considerable advance in scope over that of the Boston Art Commission, and will, I am sure, tend to develop the æsthetic interests of the town.

The underlying results of the work done by the society

I will now say a few words about in conclusion. It is, as yet, too soon to fully appreciate these, and they are naturally not easy to properly estimate; but, as far as I can judge, they have been considerable. First, I see indications of an augmented interest in education, extending through a circle considerably larger than the membership of the society. And this is an active, eager, intelligent interest, reaching out for more knowledge which may be made to serve useful ends. Second, I see many taking a wider and broader view of school education than they had before. For the first time in our lives we have a faint glimmering of the high aims of modern education as a means of preparation for fitting the child to be a useful and moral citizen, and not a mere machine warranted to run only if crammed with cut and dried data learned by routine methods from books. Third, I perceive the idea gaining ground that *true education means a correlation of all educative forces*, both of the home and the school, supplementing each other and working harmoniously together. Perhaps the very best result we have accomplished has been the influence we have exerted on public opinion by bringing this idea out clearly over and over again in our discussions, until we may claim to have established it as a fundamental principle of education. Fourth, I perceive, in many of the teachers themselves, a more deep and serious spirit in their work, due, I suppose, to the better comprehension they have of the parents and the parents have of them, to which I have already referred. We parents have been so dull in our appreciation of our painstaking, faithful, and untiring teachers that it must be a satisfaction to them to know that at least some of us are learning justly to value the high quality of their achievement from personal observation.

Finally I wish to say, with all the emphasis in my power, that such success as our society has attained has been largely due to the attempt we have made to learn something of the *spirit of education*; of its meaning from the broadest and highest point of view. We have had no propaganda, no fads, no theories, but only a sincere desire to gain a truer

and more exact knowledge of principles. We have gone to the teachers and the schools to learn how these principles were applied, but in no spirit of criticism or thought, even, to suggest any improvements, and I believe this impersonal study of principles has given us a freedom of action and an independence and impartiality which have carried weight, lent dignity to our work, and had a more decided influence on public opinion.

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