

Interesting Schools

Grau, theurer Freund, ist alle Theorie, und grün
des Lebens gold'ner Baum.

AS a schoolmistress I am often tempted to contradict Goethe: theory is anything but gray in our modern world; it has all the golden bloom of the green tree of life. The dull drab color is reserved nowadays for the practical worker. And even I myself, with my schoolmistress habit of ever seeing the obstacle in the way of delightful theoretic progress, cannot help taking pleasure in the vision of youth at last freed from drudgery, presented in the latest notable contribution to my own subject, Mr. Abraham Flexner's "A Modern School." This clever little pamphlet outlines a new kind of school adapted to the new kind of world we live in, as the present-day school, it would seem, is not. This new school Mr. Flexner only sketches for us; we are told that it is to teach what is "real" and dismiss what is "formal," without any precise information as to what these two heads include, but a delightful picture is given of children, never dull and never lazy, gaining spontaneously and with ever fresh interest an insight into the world they are living in. Perhaps no one but a practical schoolmistress can feel quite how seductive the vision is, or put the pamphlet down with a keener sense of the many failures of the school of to-day. So carried away indeed was I by the first reading that even when tiresome questions of matter of fact began to present themselves, as, for instance, how "a preference" for learning French irregular verbs could be "readily elicited" or how, if "the school slate were wiped clean of mathematics," or at all events much cleaner than at present, "phenomena and their relations" could be dealt with "in the most rigorous scientific form," I was inclined rather to blame myself for over insistence upon detail. But slowly as I thought the matter over I found a certain mistrust of the implication of this new education stirring within me, an implication so veiled in Mr. Flexner's clever presentation, that I saw it clearly only with the help of two of Mr. Flexner's followers and interpreters, the first of whom I met in an article published last spring in THE NEW REPUBLIC.

Mr. Randolph Bourne in the "Self-Conscious School" showed himself to me at once of Mr. Flexner's following, and all the i's of Mr. Flexner's implications he carefully dotted for me. Where Mr. Flexner threw out a suggestion: "Most of what a child should do coincides with its own preference," Mr. Bourne was explicit: "His work must be first of all interesting activity." Mr. Flexner's ever-recurring but never-defined phrases, "real tasks," "real problems," "real issues," Mr. Bourne defined as "whatever a child can do joyfully and well" because it interests him. When Mr. Flexner would have all school work keep "within reach of the child's genuine response," to Mr. Bourne all that the school has to do is "to provide manifold opportunities for the satisfaction of the child's own curiosity." And, in strict logical sequence, no sooner had I read Mr. Bourne's elucidation than there came into my hand a second one in the shape of an announcement of a school for girls in one of our larger cities designed to embody the new idea, "to energize the girls' minds through the doing of real tasks," to quote Mr. Flexner again, "while never overlooking woman's domestic rôle and function," by substituting for "formal" Latin and "remote" mathematics, dressmaking, millinery, the management of a successful social entertainment, and other such "real tasks." So finally for me the outlines of Mr. Flexner's sketch were

filled in and a clear picture emerged of the modern school as a place where dulness has been banished, where discipline is no more, and attention is as involuntary as at a moving-picture show. In brief the keynote of the new education is interest, not discipline; the aim is efficiency, not knowledge.

I wish it were possible within the limits of one short article to consider the "modern school" from both these points of view, but the value of what old-fashioned folk call "learning," the immense value to women above all of impersonal intellectual interests, is too big a subject for me to take up here. I must confine myself exclusively to the first, and to it only as it touches girls. What will this modern and self-conscious school do for the girls of the well-to-do? This is the question that has been growing large in my mind. Mr. Flexner and Mr. Bourne as men are probably chiefly concerned with boys; in any event, they know about boys as they cannot about girls, and I as a woman will not contradict them in regard to their own sex. If a doubt crosses my mind whether the man's world is a place first of all of interesting activity, and a boy best fitted for it when trained only to do "joyfully and well what interests him," I am content to dismiss it. It may well be that after his school years have been spent in purely interesting activity, life's stress, so much more urgent for men to-day than for those of a generation ago, will give him of sheer necessity the power to work hard at whatever comes to him. It must do so, or he will be openly discredited in a world where opportunities to make good are harder and harder to get. Life will discipline him surely and swiftly. But the girl? Precisely as men's work has grown harder, the work traditionally women's has grown easier, and less and less is required of them as housekeepers and trainers of children. A girl's success in the world is measured by only one standard, the marriage she makes. After marriage, she does not have to measure herself by any standard; her work is not standardized at all. Is she an incompetent housekeeper and unintelligent mother, the knowledge of her deficiencies is confined to a very few and they her most lenient judges. It is quite possible for her herself to go through life without ever being made aware of them, a completely successful woman both in her own eyes and those of her world. When, therefore, the girl leaves the school of interesting activity what will life do for her comparable to what it will do for the boy in requiring concentration, accuracy, thoroughness, in a word, the power to do hard work? Be it always remembered that a girl's home before marriage exacts even less of her in all such ways than her home after marriage. The American father's and mother's attitude toward their daughter may be summed up as, "Let her have as good a time as she can while she is young." The central idea of the old discipline, "Do it *because* it is hard; do it *because* you are afraid of it," has passed away from our comfortable, prosperous homes. I as a schoolmistress plead to be allowed to keep it in my school.

For our girls let us hold fast to the ideal of hard work. This is my sole thesis. I have no plan of work to recommend here or to oppose. I cannot discuss seriously the conception of "studies that serve real purposes" which puts into the school curriculum millinery and dressmaking and cooking. This is a masculine prepossession, due, I dare swear, to the lurking fear in most male minds that home comfort in the world of new women is not going to be properly looked after. It is so important to them and they are so helpless to secure it for themselves, I never wonder at their eagerness to put something, any-

thing, they think will lead to it into the schools. But we that are women know better, especially we that are college-trained women. We know how very simple for us are the problems modern housekeeping presents; how very easy it is to learn to cook; and not only how extravagant it would be to make our own dresses and trim our own hats instead of buying them ready made, but how very loudly our men-folk would object to our wearing these productions when we went out with them.

Such futile substitutes for education apart, I am not pleading for or against any course of study. The matter of vital concern is not what children study but how they study, not the information they gain but the habits they acquire. "Education," said the great English cardinal, "is not knowledge, it is the preparation for more knowledge." "The result of education," says Dr. Dewey, "is the capacity for further education." Latin, the moot subject at present, is doomed, and only a few of us will be found to do battle for it. A little pang of pity we shall feel for the children of the future who will never go down with Aeneas into that strange underworld of flitting shadows, never follow the doves to the magic golden bough, and never wait before the palace door in royal Carthage for Dido to come forth, Diana-like, in purple hunting dress. But nevertheless Latin must go, for girls in the end as well as for boys; only, I beg, let us keep it for the girls until the new school for the boys has proved that French demands as much clear thinking. Give up mathematics for the boys but let us keep it for the girls until a course in "the observation and execution of industrial and commercial practices"—to quote Mr. Flexner again—has been evolved for the boys that requires as much accurate reasoning. Or leave the boys altogether to life for the sterner training; they will not be able to escape the adamantine nails of the dread goddess Necessity. But give to the girls, denied that exacting education, schools where the central idea is work that results in discipline, whether of the mind or the will must be left to the psychologists, but at all events in some power to make oneself do thoroughly the task that lies at hand; where it is recognized that the best preparation for life in the "real" world is the habit of not shirking what is hard, and that only through steady, strenuous effort, yes, and through drudgery too, can the immense joy of work ever be tasted. So and so alone can "activity" be genuinely and permanently "interesting," for it is an inexorable law of human nature that smattering and superficiality surely lead to weariness and boredom.

My words echo back from the past when they were the battle-cry of those who fought to have girls educated as thoroughly as boys, and who thought themselves victors. But battles for spiritual interests are never quite won—and never quite lost. It is not for us to be discouraged, but as they fought against "the finishing school" of their day, so must we fight against the same idea dressed in modern phrases. In accordance with the age we live in, it substitutes practical courses for elegant accomplishments, dress-making, cooking, and "applied civics," for literature and the history of art, but it is essentially the same, to provide for our children, so over indulged and over cared for, a way out other than by the path of hard work.

"Before the gates of excellence the high gods have placed sweat. Long is the road thereto and steep and rough at the first, but when the height is achieved then is there ease."

Not yet has the road grown shorter or smoother or less steep.

EDITH HAMILTON.

The Reply

MISS HAMILTON'S paper is significant in its evidence of the preconception which is behind so much of the current allegiance to the "old" education of discipline and the drudgery. When she says "school" she has in the back of her mind an institution for the training of the well-to-do classes, and it is for them that she makes her educational philosophy plausible. Accepting present class divisions, she seems to oppose the "new" education because it is prejudicial to the life which she accepts as worthiest for the fortunate classes with whom she is best acquainted. Her argument is that life will make no stern demands upon the sheltered, economically endowed leisure which most of her girls will enjoy. Without external standards, their fibre must deteriorate unless they have learned the joy of work by the doing of things because they are hard. Without impersonal intellectual interests, their personal energy will waste away in futility or in meddling control of their own daughters. The boy will be harnessed into some kind of self-discipline by the exigencies of business life. But for the girl, the substitution in the modern school of domestic science for "elegant accomplishments" is only an illusory discipline. These arts of housekeeping are not only easy, but will not be demanded from the upper-class girl. Only the traditional curriculum, impersonal, cultural, laborious, will give her the needed stimulus to play her leisured rôle worthily.

At first sight nothing could be more ironic than this gospel of strenuous effort preached in the name of a sheltered and privileged class. It seems to give the case of the "old" education away. Why should a girl be disciplined, trained to do things "because they are hard," for a life which becomes "easier and easier," unless her teachers wished to provide her with a moral and intellectual justification of her social rôle? In the light of the newer demands, the "old" education seems to combine uselessness and effort, and it is just this combination which would maintain leisure-class functions and yet make the individuals feel morally justified. It is a little curious to find Miss Hamilton using the "utilitarian" argument against domestic science. The fact that the "select" private boys' schools are beginning to introduce carpentry shops does not seem to affect her conviction that the select and private girl should not come into touch with feminine manual work. Yet she wishes her girls to acquire "impersonal, intellectual interests," which they can never use except in not very real "cultural" dabbings and social work.

Although Miss Hamilton's social preconception is so bound up with her educational theory, she implies for the latter a wider bearing, and takes issue with Mr. Flexner's "Modern School," and with Mr. Bourne's "Self-Conscious School." She implies that the "old education is superior to any training which makes interest not discipline, efficiency not knowledge" the standard. Now the point at issue between interest and discipline has been so thoroughly discussed by John Dewey in his "Interest as Related to Will" and other writings, that one is surprised at this late day to find responsible educators willing to give the impression that they are unacquainted with Dewey's arguments. Even if disciples like Mr. Flexner and Mr. Bourne may, in their enthusiasm, unconsciously caricature him, the underlying philosophy is there in its classic form for all to read. The curious notion that interest makes work "easy," instead of intensifying the effort,