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EDITORIAL

It is a healthy indication that the subject matter taught in our schools is being subjected to an increasingly critical scrutiny. It is only recently that we have begun to realize the extent to which our curricula depend on tradition, and to consider whether the traditional subjects are the best possible ones for the development of boys and girls to take their places in a modern social world. The opinion has been frequently expressed in these columns that there are fundamental lines of education that should find a place in every course of study. These are English, the natural sciences, the social sciences, and art. All of these are relatively modern in their appearance in school curricula, and the social sciences have been among the most recent. There is a growing conviction on the part of school administrators and others interested in the development of schools that not enough attention is being paid to the social world in which we live. The phenomena of society are just as detailed and specific as are those of the natural world, and, in the opinion of many, are of even greater importance for the successful conduct of practical affairs.

There are many problems in the teaching of the social sciences that call for investigation. To begin with the elementary school, how much time should be devoted to the study of history in the different grades, and what should be the nature of the history work in each of these grades? Anyone who has had much to do with young children knows how eager they are for stories, and many of the more dramatic incidents of history can be taught even in the kindergarten. The efforts of the Herbartians to construct a school program on the basis of the theory of recapitulation had at least the merit of emphasizing social relationships, and inculcating a thorough understanding of the development of social activities. It is undoubtedly a mistake to attempt to teach fourth grade children the philosophical significance of the French Revolution, but the dramatic events of that period will be seized upon and worked over with great avidity by pupils of that age. Most elementary schools now provide for a certain amount of local and national history, but it is a question whether large world movements might not profitably be opened up at some point in the elementary course. Many of the reforms in the teaching of geography have aimed to place a greater emphasis on the social results of man's relation to the earth, but there is little danger that this point of view will be over-emphasized.

In the high schools much has been done in the past twenty-five years to provide an opportunity for a thorough and extensive study of history. Unfortunately, however, much of the history teaching is of the static, cross-section type, and there is a generally recognized need for a greater socialization of the history work. Moreover, it is difficult to see why certain phases of economics and sociology and even of psychology might not be taught to high school pupils with much greater profit than is realized from the traditional work in mathematics and languages. The types of courses in these subjects that are best adapted to stimulate the thinking of boys and girls of high school age are still matters to be worked out. Modern physiology, while primarily a natural science, is quite properly presented in the high school with strong leanings to social hygiene, and thus partakes of the nature of a social science. With the keenly awakened and rapidly developing sense of social values in the community at large there is certainly need for greater attention to the amount of time devoted to the social sciences in our courses of study and to the way in which these subjects may be most advantageously presented.

J. C. B.