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EDITORIAL

It is a noteworthy fact that the present is a time of unrest in education. There is not a phase of our whole educational scheme from the kindergarten to the university that is not under the fire of criticism. To some timid and conservative souls this is very disquieting, but for the optimistic and progressive it is a most hopeful sign—an indication that people are becoming dissatisfied with the passive acceptance of tradition, and are disposed to demand a type of education that is in accord with contemporary thinking. At no time in history has the public shown a greater willingness to spend money for education, but it wants to know that it is getting its money's worth. There are charges of waste in college, waste in the high school, and the greatest waste of all in the elementary school. No one feels more keenly than the educators themselves that in some way our present educational procedures are wrong. The recent report of the National Education Association committee on economy of time shows a clear realization of this waste. In many quarters complaint is made that school curricula are overcrowded, that teachers are obliged to attempt too many things, that there is a wild scramble to "cover the ground" and no intensive mastery of anything. A certain vociferous, non-reflecting element raises a great outcry against the "new subjects"

that have been introduced into the schools, holding them up to ridicule as "fads and frills." Their slogan is, "Back to the fundamentals!"

But what are fundamentals in education? An answer to this question can be found, as Commissioner Snedden has pointed out, only in a study of the social needs of our time. Is arithmetic a fundamental? Assuredly not! Even a casual inquiry will show that in all lines of social activity—in the professions, in business, in manufacturing, in banking, in social work, in the drawing room, in the kitchen—the need for arithmetic is vanishingly small. The engineers, the bankers, the insurance men, the bookkeepers resort to tables and machines for even their simplest computations. Is handwriting fundamental? The business man or the business woman scarcely uses the pen for anything more extensive than a signature, almost all literary work is produced on the typewriter, and even in social correspondence it is felt to be something of an infliction to have to decipher script when the mechanical writing is so much clearer, neater, and more legible. Is spelling fundamental? Recent studies have shown that ninety per cent. of all the words that are ordinarily used in writing are found in a list of 1000 words. Of these not over 200 words would give trouble to any one individual, and these could be learned with ease in twenty hours of properly distributed practice. Is grammar fundamental? All experimental studies agree that its contribution to efficiency in the use of language is negligible, and that it might well be relegated to the college or the graduate school. Of all the traditional elementary subjects reading alone retains its place of primary importance, and even it is undergoing striking modifications in method of treatment.

A broader conception is needed of fundamentals in education, and a consideration of the demands made by modern life upon the individual who is to pass as educated leads to the recognition of four lines of study which are basic for all education, and which should be kept in view in making curricula from the elementary school to the college. They are: (1) A study of the vernacular, including the technique of silent reading, a broad knowledge and appreciation of the best in modern literature, and fluency in both oral and written expression. (2) An understanding of and respect for the natural sciences and their significance for the conduct of practical affairs. (3). The social sciences, including history, economics, government, sociology, and individual and social psychology. (4) A comprehension of

art as the loftiest product of human intelligence, a familiarity with representative masterpieces of painting, sculpture, architecture, and music, and the development of a certain degree of skill in one or more of these lines. These are the four cardinal points of a liberal education, and should determine the direction of the teaching process in the elementary school, in the high school, and in the college. A detailed consideration of the changes in courses of study which acceptance of these four fundamentals would involve must be postponed to a subsequent occasion. It remains merely to emphasize the omission of mathematics and languages from the list of fundamentals. Far be it from the writer to underestimate the interest and value of these venerable objects of mental activity. No scheme of secondary or higher education should be devoid of opportunity for those students who wish to perfect themselves in these lines. But from the point of view of general social needs their significance is ancillary rather than fundamental.

J. C. B.