

H. V. CRAIG

PRACTICAL EDUCATION

AN ADDRESS

BEFORE THE STUDENTS OF THE
INDIANA UNIVERSITY

BY

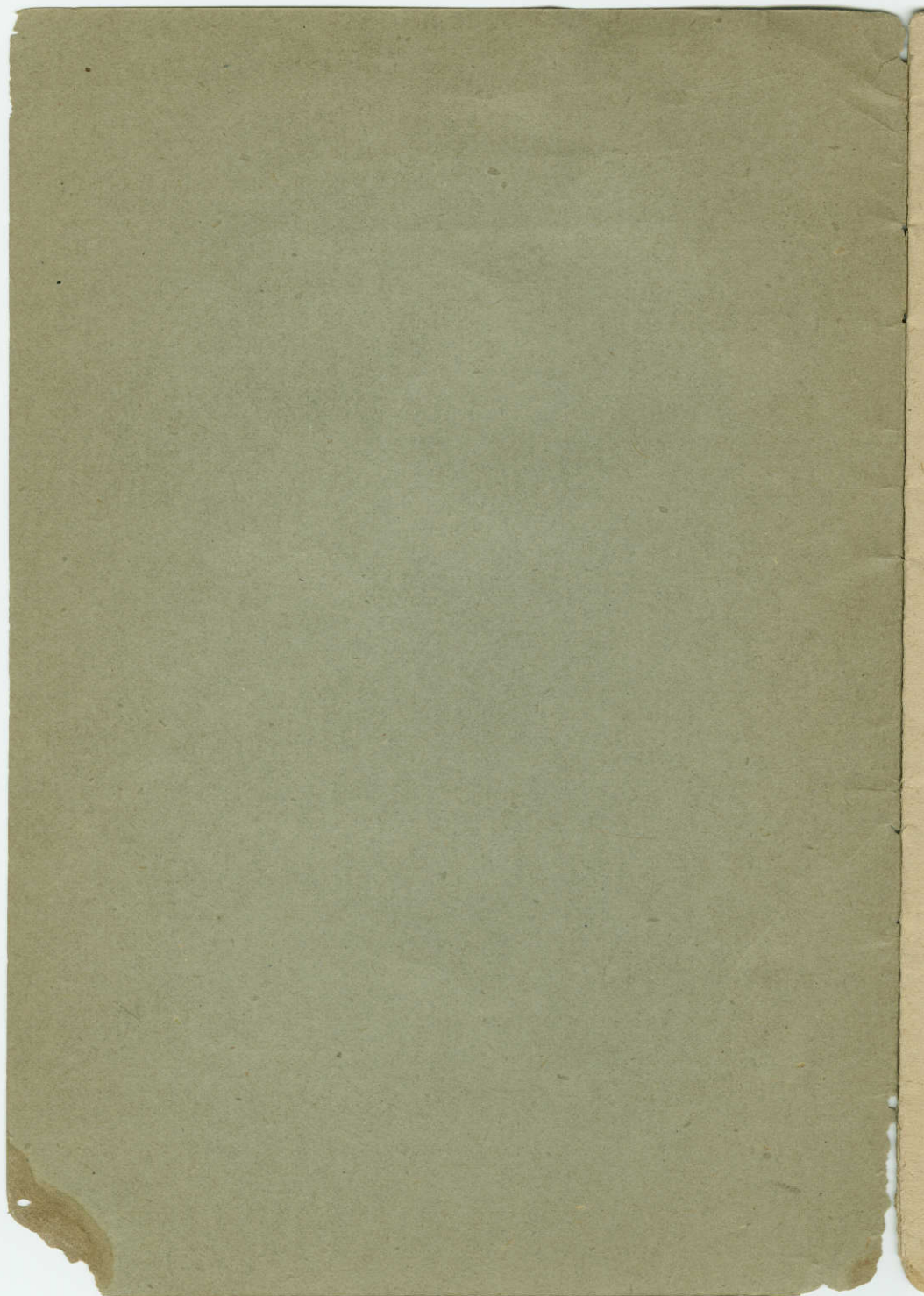
JOHN MERLE COULTER

PRESIDENT-ELECT

INDIANAPOLIS

CARLON & HOLLENBECK, PRINTERS

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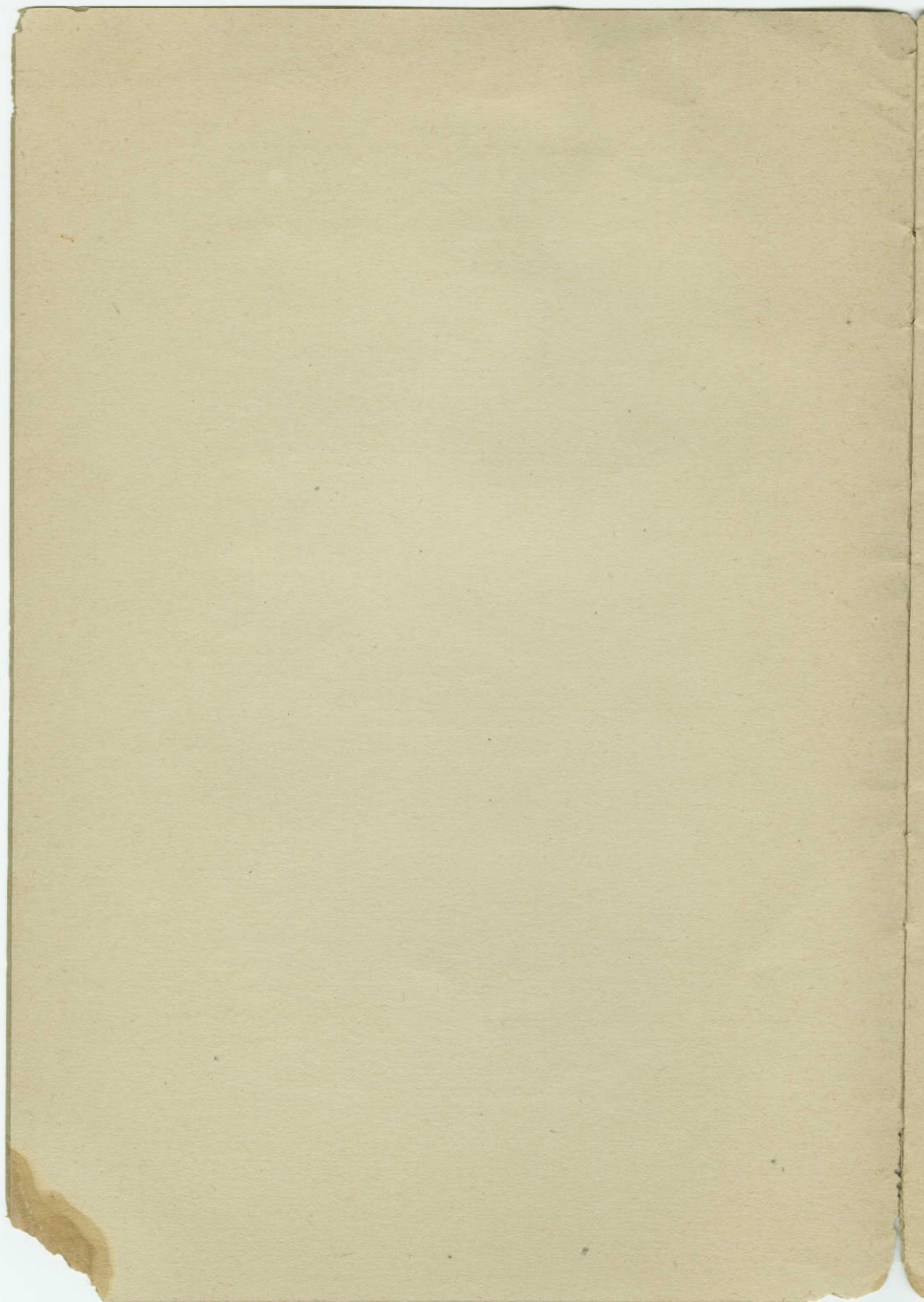
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PRACTICAL EDUCATION.

To one who has had no experience, education may seem the simplest sort of thing. But it is one of the most complex problems we are called upon to solve, being not a whit behind that apparently unsolvable problem, free trade and protection. Those who have had much experience in this thing of education are very apt to have certain views of which the public in general do not approve. A superficial view may lead to one conclusion, and a careful dissection to a very different one. The trouble is that many have the superficial view, and the few do the dissecting. As teachers, we would count it a long step in advance if the public could only be brought to accept our conclusions. As it is, we are sometimes compelled to compromise between what we feel is right and public clamor. We may be driven to put into our courses of study things which are only "sops" thrown to public demand, and then must try to stealthily infuse into them as much of educational value as possible.

In these days, and in this land of haste and sham, of wretched preparation, and foundations laid in sand, it is profitable frequently to consider what we are doing. I know of no subject more misunderstood, not only by the public, but also by those supposed to stand as its representatives, than this one of education. In this country, whose very watchword is its system of education, there is grave danger of the *system* supplanting the *education*. In these latter days we have a new catch phrase, "practical education." What monstrous shams have masqueraded behind this phrase! It implies that much that is called education to-day, that all that was called education formerly, is impractical education. My claim is that the phrase "practical education" is tautological, and that "impractical education" is contradictory.

There is but one life to live, and that a short one. But a few

years of it can be devoted to what is called "getting an education," and they never can be duplicated. The training received at this most impressionable period has such a directing influence upon one's life, that it is commonly said to mold the character. Such are the facts which make this thing of education so tremendously important to a youth and his advisers. It is a question of such far-reaching influence, so unalterable in its results, that it should never be considered carelessly, nor decided hastily. The choice of an education, like the choice of a wife or husband, is "for better or worse."

I take it for granted that we have all discovered education to be a most desirable thing, a thing worth struggling for, a thing which brings in its hands not only enlarged usefulness, that noblest of gifts, but also enlarged happiness. The oft quoted "ignorance is bliss" is an outrage upon beings endowed, as we are, with that "delirious yet divine desire to know." We are all far enough advanced to have gained that more commanding outlook, from which we can see, to some extent, the exceeding beauty of knowledge, can catch in some way the faint outlines of her fair proportions, and are longing for a nearer, clearer view. From such a standpoint, far above that low-ground question, "does an education pay?" would I consider our theme.

But, one question taken for granted leads us into the presence of another, which has been given manifold and most perplexing answers, "what sort of an education is best?" In the attempt to answer this question is to be found all the educative activity of this wonderful age. Systems of all sorts present themselves to the inquiring public, all defended by stout champions, and possessing all degrees of merit, from those that are wise and prudent to those that are characterized by wildness and unmitigated folly. Never was there an ailment so provided for with patent medicines as this one. We have, in these latter days of grading and bridging and tunneling, even the wonderful discovery of a "short cut," or royal road to knowledge, so royal that the happy, unworn traveler is not only brought into the possession of an education, but himself becomes transformed into a "teacher among men." Indeed, we seem to have come to the dawn of that day when a man is to be able to lift himself by the aid of his own boot-straps. I remember reading in some old numbers of Harper's Magazine a fancy sketch of the con-

dition of the world in the year 2,000 or 3,000 A. D., and among other wonderful inventions was mentioned the very one I have spoken of. That is, the idea is the same. The details differ a little, as, for instance, in the one case you were to sit for six months or a year under a bell-jar, subjected to a particular light, and stimulated by a particular food, until the proper bumps developed; while, in the other, you spend the same length of time, or a little less, in a school-room, the other items remaining the same. Another important difference is that the former has a scientific basis, while the latter has none.

But the catch-phrase is the one already mentioned, "practical education," for it captivates the plain every-day business sense of this most practical age, the age of "self-made men." A "self-made man" is of necessity a failure; but a man of intelligence, with such teachers as Nature all about him, experience, the hardest of task-masters, God speaking through his conscience and in his word, all directing him under the lash of an unquenchable longing for something better—such a man is educated; perhaps not in the formulæ of the schools, which are but as husks, the outward trappings, but in that development of mental muscle which gives him an iron grip upon affairs, he is every inch an educated man.

But "practical education" is now the thing. The days of sentiment, of romance, of impracticable notions, are past, and that most unsentimental thing, science, has induced people to ask those dreadful questions, "What is it for?" "What good will it do?" "Can we make any use of it?" As well reason with the wind and argue with the whirlwind as attempt to prove anything to persons who could ask such questions. In these days, every study pursued is looked upon like so much real estate, that can be sold or mortgaged as occasion may demand; that something can be made out of it, and this something, freely translated, means money.

What is the popular definition of "practical education?" It seems to be for a man to study the very things he proposes to do in life; that is, it amounts to serving an apprenticeship to a trade. If he means to be a farmer, let him study agriculture; if a merchant, let him study book-keeping; if an engineer, surveying, etc. "Everything else will be so much wasted time," is the corollary to the definition. As if to add sure proof of this, it is usually triumphantly asked, "To what use can one put this, that, or the other

study?" and this is often further strengthened by the testimony of short-sighted graduates themselves, who frankly acknowledge that "they don't remember a word of this, that, or the other study." You may have heard some one say, "I spent four years in the study of Greek and now can not read a line of it;" the inference being that the time devoted to this pursuit was so much time thrown away.

So much for the popular definition of a "practical education." It sounds well at first, it is so practical. "If you want to be a thing, be it," is what it resolves itself into, without any reference as to whether one is ready or not. Such phrases sound practical, but are anything else, for the *how* is not considered. I would like to subject this popular definition of a "practical education" to a little cold analysis. Let us get it out of the fog bank into which "practical men" have put it, and get it into the sunlight of "impractical men;" which is to say, get it away from emotional ignorance, which to-day is called "practical," and turn it over to logical intelligence, which is said to be "impractical." Take the definition as already illustrated, "if you want to be a farmer, study agriculture; everything else will be wasted time." Let us apply the same reasoning to the other operations of this would-be farmer. He would say, "If you want a crop of corn, plant corn; everything else you do will be so much time and money wasted. Drainage, fertilizers, breaking up, cultivation, all these take time and money and will soon be out of sight and forgotten; all you want is corn, so plant corn." I suppose he will get corn, but you know the kind. The young mind, with all its latent powers, with all its individual characteristics, is well likened to an uncultivated field that must be drained and broken up and harrowed, ready for the seed. Education is the draining, the breaking up, the harrowing, all the preparation for the seed; and the seed is one's specialty, which is to be planted when the ground is ready. This popular cry for a "practical education," therefore, asks us to omit the preparation of the soil and plant the seed at once, that there may be no loss of time. This figure seems to express the proper relationship between the general training or preparation, which we call "education," and the special training or apprenticeship which looks directly to one's life work. It is these two stages which are distinct in method and purpose; that are ignored in the popular reasoning. One prepares the soil,

the other sows the seed; the one reduces the metal, the other fashions it to its special use; the one develops the muscle, the other turns this developed power to some definite purpose; the one weaves the cloth, the other cuts and fits it. Think of shaping an ax from unreduced ore; of wielding a sledge-hammer with weak and flabby muscles; of cutting clothes from an unworked fleece, and you have the sort of reasoning used by "practical" men concerning what is called "practical" education.

We have come, then, to the notion that education is simply a period of preparation, a general calling forth and equipping of the powers of the mind; a sort of Indian clubs, parallel bars and trapeze for the development of mental muscle. And just here lies another fallacy. Many would confound education with information, and would say that the Indian clubs, parallel bars and trapeze are foolishness; why not develop this muscle by hoeing in the garden, or sawing wood, or something of that sort? In other words, get your education by studying subjects that you can afterwards use. Without discussing the merits of this question, I think it is apparent that mental muscle may be developed without a single item of information being obtained as such; not only this, but that it may often be cultivated in a pleasanter, more even and scientific way, if the utilitarian idea of obtaining information be not constantly present. The most symmetrical muscular development comes from the gymnasium, not from the cornfield. Qualifying the information obtained in a theoretical course of training by the phrase "as such" is necessary, for it is impossible to conceive of any kind of training which will not involve a certain amount of incidental information.

Education, then, being the development of mental muscle, the period of preparation, we are confronted with the question, "What is a practical education?" not in the popular meaning of the term, but really. Plainly, it is that kind of education which will bring about the development of this mental muscle, this preparation which is to bring ability to grasp one's specialty and the problems of life. Hence, studies become tools, the agricultural implements, not the seed; the means not the end. No study in our ordinary unprofessional schools has any right to be other than a means; the subject itself entirely lost sight of in its application; the grindstone forgotten in the sharpening of the tool. The prac-

tical farmer buys plows and harrows and drills and sows his seed; the so-called "impractical" educator advises the same thing in educational matters. On the other hand, the impractical farmer ignores plows and harrows and drills, but pokes a hole in the hard ground with a stick and drops in the seed; while the so-called "practical" educator advises the same thing in educational matters. I think that we have come to the conclusion that the proper definition of "practical education" is directly the reverse of the popular definition; that the "practical education" of the popular cry is the most impractical and visionary thing that can be imagined—the farmer without tools; and that the only practical education in fact is that which is sneered at to-day as utterly impractical; and Lowell's definition of a university is literally true, "a place where nothing useful is taught."

The question still remains, what are the studies that are to be considered as the proper tools for preparing the soil, the proper stones for whetting the blade? Surely there must be a choice here, among the great array of studies now presented! The notion that only a few studies out of the many can be considered the proper tools of the teacher is a very prevalent one, not so much now as formerly. Swing, in his "*Parlez vous Francais?*", very aptly puts it as follows:—

"For many centuries it has been assumed that the study of the dead languages, Latin and Greek, and of the higher mathematics, is the labor which gives the best results, the exercise which turns a plowboy into an orator, or a statesman, or a philosopher. College courses have been run amid these three shapes of toil and information, and it came to pass long ago that a mind not reared upon this strong food was deemed still an infant, having known only the weakness that comes from a diet of diluted milk. That power of prejudice, the power of what has long been, over the frail form of what might be, which we see in old medicine, or old religion, or old politics, re-appears in old education, and a scholar or a thinker without the help of Latin and Greek was as impossible as a state without a king, or a salvation without a clergyman. The feeling in favor of the classic course has not been all a prejudice, for that was and is a noble course of mental progress; but it was a prejudice so far as it denied the value of other forms of mental industry, and failed to perceive that what the human mind needs is exercise, and not necessarily Greek exercise or Latin exercise. A special must not thus dethrone a universal. A king may be a good governor, but his courtiers and sons and

daughters must not overrate the crowned man and predict the utter failure of any nation that may ever dare attempt to live without the help of a throne and royal children. Evidently, the greatest, widest truth is that the mind is to be made powerful by exercise and it will always be a secondary consideration whether this exercise shall come by loading the memory with the words and forms found in several languages, by compelling the judgment to work continually amid the many possibilities of syntax and translation, or shall come by a direct study of facts, and causes and laws, as found in science and history and literature.

"Once the roll of human greatness read thus: Homer, Hesiod, Æschylus, Euripides, Pericles, Plato, Virgil, Cicero, Cæsar, Tacitus, and the splendor of the catalogue none will have the rashness to deny; but in the later centuries the book so long sealed has been opened, and there have been added Dante, and Milton, and Shakespere, and Goethe, and Schiller, and such thinkers as Bacon and Newton, and such students as Cuvier, and Humboldt, and Darwin, and Huxley, and Agassiz and Gray. By these enormous additions the equilibrium of the old earth has been disturbed, and a side which once lay in a perpetual shadow enjoys a long summer-time. Into the intellectual world came a wonderful company of modern princes—a Newton, equalling a Plato, and a Shakespere balancing all antiquity; and under the heavy footsteps of all these moderns the earth has been whirled about, and a larger and deeper shadow falls upon the land where Demosthenes once thundered, and Sappho once sang. With this tipping over of the earth, the Greek and Roman lands lost their exclusiveness of empire, and were invited to become only sister states in a world-wide republic."

The point then is that the studies referred to are to be considered not as the only tools that can be used, but as among the best. From the great array of worthy studies, then, how is one's choice to be made?

My first answer is, that the individual bent of mind, the taste, must be a prominent factor in the decision, so that study can get the wonderful impetus of consent. When the mind is in constant rebellion against any course of action, progress in that direction has upon it a constant break. I suppose a man could be nourished and developed by artificial and very distasteful foods, but nature's way, the better way, seems to be to get the consent of his taste. At a college convention I once heard the opposite position advanced by a college professor. His notion was that whatever a pupil disliked and mentally rebelled against taking, must be the

¹Swing, Club Essays, pp. 91 and 97.

very thing he needed most. "If he don't like Greek, make him take it; if he don't like mathematics, make him take it," was his cry. This is strange philosophy, especially among educators, whose sole mission is to develop the powers possessed by the mind, as indicated by the aptitudes or tastes; and not to undertake the somewhat hopeless task of making something out of nothing. But what if there is no taste, no aptitude, a perfect blank? I would treat it just as a hopelessly sterile field should be treated, one in which there seemed to be no power to be developed, viz.: advise that it will be a waste of time and money to go to the expense of draining and harrowing and cultivating with no possibility of a crop in the end.

A very common mistake in this matter of choosing studies is the serious one of choosing too many. It is the mistake not so often made by pupils as by those who prepare the courses of study. Many studies are now clamoring for admission to our schools, and all with some show of reason. If all are admitted, one of two things must be done: either for the pupil to select those desired, or for every subject to be pursued but a very short time. I am sorry to say that the latter is too often the thing done; and it is the chief complaint I have to make against the schools and ordinary colleges. It is a term of this, two terms of that, and almost a year of the other, a regular butterfly-flitting from one flower to the other, everything in turn, nothing long. What a travesty is this upon education! And then to do this hop, skip and jumping act in the name of a broad and liberal education! If there is breadth, there is neither length nor thickness; and this thin veneer, which soon cracks and shows the untouched roughness beneath, is a most common possession of a graduate.

In his "Evolution of the College Curriculum," President Jordan thus describes this popular notion of a school or college:

"That its purpose is to give a broad and well-rounded culture, to train men to 'stand four-square to every wind that blows,' such a culture as comes from a slight knowledge of many things, accompanied by thoroughness in nothing. Indeed, the desire of a student to know some one thing well is characterized as 'undue specialization,' and every effort is made to induce the student to turn with equal eagerness from study to study, equally interested, equally superficial in each. If a momentary spark of interest is evoked, it must fade out in a few days, as the subject in ques-

tion gives place to some other. The procession moves in haste, and the student can not loiter if he is to keep his place in the line."

I submit it to your candid consideration whether the average college and school curriculum does not resemble that patchwork known as the "crazy quilt," a regular Meisterschaft plan, in which the oftenest recurring phrase is "umsteigen." This scratching the surface will not do; one must plow deeper. *Few studies thoroughly done, and these few studies to the taste of the student*, is the conclusion we have reached, thus far, in answer to the question, "What is a practical education?"

This makes the elective system the one to choose, rather than the patchwork system. One of the striking demonstrations of the truth of the statement that a few studies thoroughly done develop the most strength is to be found in the old classical colleges, in which but few studies were pursued, but they were pursued continuously, and in such schools were developed the intellectual muscle and sinews of the world. When these studies began to be cut short by the demands of new subjects, just so much was the course enfeebled. This old classic course was simply a special course, what would be called an elective course now, the development of a specialty, the sticking for years to one or two things, a magnificent illustration and proof of what is claimed to-day for special or elective courses as opposed to the superficial smattering of a maximum of subjects in a minimum of time. Elementary instruction in a variety of subjects is good enough for general information, but if mental power is to be developed, the alphabet and preliminary definitions must be left behind in some subject or other, and the mind be led to the frontier, that ill-defined boundary between the known and unknown, and gain in one direction, at least, that look into the whirling mist of the unknown which is a tremendous education, and one which no treading of myriads of well-worn paths can ever bring.

From the valley at Fabyan's, in a comfortable seat upon a broad veranda, one looks out upon the noble forms of Mt. Washington and its associates, with their rugged sides and dark forests, their heads up among the clouds, and the glory of sunlight over it all. The mountains look peaceful, the cloud seems to rest like a filmy veil about the summits, and so your impression of mountain and

cloud is made, something that a glance can take in, and then you turn to some other view. But wait! Suppose, with staff in hand and muscles trained, you begin to climb. At first the way is smooth enough; but soon the road is steep and rough, the rocks are wilder, the forest darkens, and the breath quickens as muscles begin to feel the strain of effort. Higher and higher you push along the toilsome way. Will it never end? Are the rocks and the forest and the steep ascent endless? Up, up, till the breath is gone, the muscles quiver, the brain throbs, and you sink upon some deep couch of moss to rest. Glancing downward, the world lies at your feet; fields, plains, valleys, mountains, stretch out in endless succession, and such a view, such thoughts as enter you then, were never yours before. But still there is height above, and throbbing heart, and straining muscles, and the steep, rough road are yours again, as you press up, up, up; until, at last, the moment comes when your feet are on the loftiest summit. The wild desolation of ruin is everywhere, a blinding, driving mist storms wildly all about you, and you are dazed with the ceaseless din. You are alone in awful solitude, a pigmy in the presence of tremendous size and force; your own littleness settles down upon you; the greatness and majesty of nature fills your soul; and then, suddenly, the mist is torn aside, and you get a glimpse of a vision that no art can portray, no tongue of man describe, a glimpse of far-off lands and cloudless skies. Which is education in mountain and cloud, the lazy on-looking from the porch, or that of the long, rough road, the driving mist, and the vision?

I care not what mountain you climb, but if you are among them, say not that you know them until you have had at least one beneath your feet.

I believe the conclusion irresistible: that to obtain the best results, the best development of mental powers, the best education, at least one study, and that a chosen one, should be pursued through as great a length of time as possible; if in college, throughout the entire course. Accompanying this there should be related or supplementary studies which the one chosen involves, none of which need represent a serious amount of time. Thus the chosen subject is the backbone which runs continuously through the system, and the correlated studies are like the ribs supporting and bracing on every side.

Thus is combined the sum total of advantages, viz.: few studies, the consent of taste, thorough and advanced work in some direction, a maximum of general information consistent with the other ends in view, which prevents too great narrowing. This is no ideal sketch of an unattainable condition of things, but the actual working plan of our more advanced colleges. This is the ideal "practical education," which must make the strongest men and women. The same principle should find its application not only in highly favored colleges, but in our schools and academies as well. "Too many studies," "too many studies," is the cry to take up against them. Why, a high school has become a little university, with its fourteen weeks of everything! When it can be beaten into the head of the average curriculum maker that studies are not an end, but a means, and that the number and subjects of studies make little difference compared with the time devoted to them, we may hope for something better. Biology, for instance, in ordinary schools, need never be taught in both its departments of botany and zoology, but that one selected with which the teacher is most familiar, and the whole time usually assigned to both devoted to that one, and that doubled by throwing out two or three other studies. This sort of decimation in all distinct departments of study would leave the schools in a very healthy condition, like a skillfully pruned vine, and the chances for bearing fruit would be largely increased.

Even with our vertebrated courses of study there still remains the danger of smattering, even within the confines of a specialty. Suppose one has chosen the general and frequently selected department of modern languages; not German or French or Italian, but modern languages. I speak of this particularly because if there is anything which masquerades as "culture" in modern society it is a smattering knowledge of modern languages. The young lady and gentleman are not considered finished until French and German phrases roll glibly from their tongues and imbed themselves in the massive English like dried currants in a pound cake. As Swing puts it:

"Many young persons are learning more ways of expressing thoughts than they have thoughts to express, and instead of having ten ideas of value, they give promise of reaching at least ten methods of stating one idea, and perhaps a small one at that. Suppose your beautiful daughter has by much toil and expense learned to say in five tongues, 'he has the pretty yellow dog,' in Greek, in

Latin, in French, in German, and could she by industry find the Chinese and Zulu vowel sounds, it would be well for the girl and parents to remember that, amid all this variety of speech, there is only the same yellow dog all the time."²

So there is such a thing as smattering within the confines of a specialty. If language, let the vertebral study be one language; if science, but one department of one science, and so on. This is what is meant by scaling a single mountain, and not walking about on the plain below and looking up at the summits of many.

Thus have we reached the relation of studies to a practical education, the rules which should govern their number and selection, and the important question of time. To my mind the most practical question remains to be answered. Suppose you have selected your course with the greatest skill, fulfilling all the conditions we have just been laying down, of what profit will it be in the hands of a poor teacher? The largest, the overwhelming factor in a practical education is the teacher. Be skillful in your selection of teachers and all else will follow. So much would I let this principle govern that I would select a great teacher first and then find out what he could teach me. If studies are tools, almost any tool will accomplish the results when in skillful hands; and no tool will succeed in the hands of a bungler. Don't select buildings and expensive laboratories and enormous libraries and high tuition; let none of these things catch you; but select great teachers. Equipment is as nothing to a successful teacher, who can utilize whatever he happens to have, and is himself the chief opportunity of his pupil. It takes men to make a school or college, and not buildings, but at what distant date our boards of control are going to understand this is very uncertain.

What are the signs by which one may recognize a great teacher? the ear-marks which point him out to inexperience? What are the qualifications that in these days fit a man for the teacher's position in our colleges?

In the first place, the subject of his department should be his life-work, the subject that to him is the most interesting and important of all subjects, which when slighted by pupils or left out in elections produces in him either astonishment or pity for such short-sightedness. The day is far past when a man trained to be a

² Swing, Club Essays, p. 110.

minister or a doctor, or even a college graduate, is necessarily fitted to teach any department. Because a man has been trained to harness a horse, does it follow that he is the one to shoe him? Such reasoning is far too common.

In the second place, as a result of the first, our teacher will be an authority in the subject of his department, not a local authority, any charlatan can be that, but one among his fellows. He stands for his department, and when known at all, is known as Smith, the mathematician or Greek scholar.

In the third place, he must have power enough to be productive. The notion of a teacher as one whose whole business is that of a pump, simply to be pumped full from some reservoir that he may fill the little pitchers held up under his nose may be true, but it is dreadfully belittling. He should rather be a perennial spring, where refreshing waters are constantly bubbling forth, a center and source of supply. The man who has neither power nor inclination to work in his own department, not only demonstrates his unfitness for teaching, but loses a great source of inspiration to his pupils. Imagine the difference between two teachers before a class; one carefully crammed with second-hand information which he is there to impart; the other in the flush and fire of his own thought and work, stepping aside a moment, as an artist, with palette and brushes in hand, to explain the beauties of some great picture which he is painting. The one is a taskmaster, the other an inspiration.

I am glad to believe that our better schools and colleges are not only beginning to demand fewer studies and more time, but also better teaching.

Thales was a great king and philosopher. He lived in the days of brawn, when a stout arm and a sharp sword formed the goal of man's ambition. He delighted to surround himself with men of might, men that were tried and true. Near the far off border of his kingdom was a famous hill, for it bore upon its sunny slopes golden apples, the apples of success. He who would win a place by Thales' side, a leader of his forces, a member of his council, must reach this distant hill, and lay at his master's feet some of its golden fruit. Frequent was the success, much more frequent the failure; for between the court and the hill lay a long and dangerous way, beset by snares, and beasts of prey, and wilder men,

and he must be well equipped who fought his way back to his king. Two youths were being trained for this hazardous journey, but their training was very different. One feasted to repletion upon all the dainties he could find, for he must lay up food in store against the day of its failure. The rest of the time was spent in providing everything he might need for use or defense. He must have a helmet, a breast-plate, a shield. All his body must be padded and defended. Then he must carry everything for which his imagination or that of his friends could suggest a possible need. He thought of this device, and that was hung to him; some friend thought of another, and that was fastened on; and so one thing after another was brought and strung upon him, until at last, when the day for starting came, he stood ready, padded, helmeted, covered with cloth and brass, enwrapped, festooned, bedecked with endless bric-a-brac, and underneath it all flabby muscles, a quaking heart, and, rusty in its jeweled scabbard, an untried sword.

The preparation of the other was quite different and by no means so varied. He ate sparingly of substantial food, trained his muscles unceasingly, and day after day, day after day, sharpened his sword. Training his muscles and sharpening his sword, this was the dull, monotonous round of his daily life, and when his day of starting came, he stood forth magnificent in health, every muscle as rigid as iron and true as steel, his eyes flashing undaunted courage, and his tried sword as keen and trusty as the famous blades of Damascus.

One failed for there was no strength in him; he could hardly carry his cumbrous trappings.

The other, presently, laid the golden apple at Thales' feet.

Do you wonder at the result?

