

CONTEMPORARY OPINION ON EDUCATIONAL TOPICS.

TECHNICAL INSTRUCTION IN
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The State has the right to teach any branch of knowledge that will promote the public welfare. This is the broad proposition on which public education rests. The attempt to draw a line through education and deny the right of the State to cross it, is illogical and futile. The State has either the right to teach all branches of useful knowledge, or it has no right to teach any branch. There is no middle ground.

The right of the State to teach all useful knowledge does not necessarily make such instruction its duty. The right to teach is one thing, and the obligation to teach is another. The duty of the State in education is limited by its ability. It cannot teach all persons all knowledge, and it is not its duty to attempt it. When the teaching of one kind of knowledge necessarily excludes more important instruction, the State is released from obligation to teach such knowledge.—If it has not the ability to cover the whole round, it becomes its duty to give attention to the more important and useful.

To what extent, and how, should the State provide this industrial instruction and training? This, as is seen, involves the question, "To what extent can technical instruction be given in our public schools?"—To narrow the question, permit me to assume that it is the duty of the State to provide an efficient system of industrial training, and then let us see how much of such training can be wisely incorporated into our present school system.

The public school exhausts neither the right nor the duty of the State in education.

It may establish higher institutions, and it may organize or encourage special schools of an elementary character to meet the wants of classes. The public school is primarily an agency for the general education of all classes of youth. It is a common school,—a school designed to impart a common education,—an education useful to all and open to all.

This primary function of the public school is of the highest practical importance and value. Its comprehensive aim is to prepare the child to discharge the duties and meet the obligations of coming manhood, including his relations to the family, society, and the State,—relations involving the highest and most important activities of civilized life.

The public school assumes that every child that crosses its threshold to receive instruction is to be a man, and that his first and highest need is to have all the elements of manhood within him developed, quickened, and energized. The first element in this elementary training is character, and the second is intelligence,—intellectual furnishing and force.

My next position is that this primary function of the public school should not be subverted to provide technical instruction.—This would sacrifice the more important to the less important. All experience shows that even for industrial purposes, no technical training can compensate for the lack of general education. "The hand," says Mann, "becomes another hand when guided by an intelligent mind." Thought gives quickness and accuracy to the eye, and cunning to the fingers. Popular intelligence not only promotes industrial skill but it creates a demand for its products. It touches both of the great laws of wealth. What a conservator of industrial skill and enterprise