

THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW.

THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF EDUCATION.¹

AS we look forward to the work of educational reconstruction that must follow the establishment of peace we may congratulate ourselves that evolutionary science has furnished educational theory with solid foundation stones of biological fact. Not yet have we exhausted the implications of that elementary yet profound truth that consciousness has arisen and developed as an instrument of organic adjustment and adaptation. And if under the spell of this revealing truth thinkers of the present generation have been tempted to an illegitimate use of the categories of biology in explanation of the processes of social life and development, as the following argument tends to show, that does not in the least detract from the importance and value of the scientific fact in question.

In particular we have gained from evolutionary science a new understanding of the processes of perception. To this subject I wish to direct attention at the start because I believe that an examination of the content of perception in its earlier and simpler phases affords us a clue to distinctive features of the social consciousness which are often overlooked. That perceptions are originally anticipations of action is a fact upon which all at present agree. Arising when habitual responses prove inadequate, they prefigure motor adjustments that promise to result in experiences which in the past have been found satisfactory. The conflict between the actual motor adjustments of the living individual and the incipient responses to new stimuli produces a tension which is consciously reflected

¹ Read as the Presidential Address before the Western Philosophical Association, April, 1919.