

# The Educational Weekly.

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How great an advantage a systematic method of study has over an unordered one has often been pointed out. It shows itself most distinctly in the difference which, as a rule, exists between those who have conscientiously worked through one or more branches of a university curriculum, and those who, satisfied with the grounding they received at school, have, in after life, taken up at random higher departments. Each may have read the same authors; each may have an enthusiastic love for his subject; but still between them there is a gulf fixed. One knows how to know, as it were; the other is unable to discriminate between the valuable and the valueless. To one the subject presents itself as a complete whole, harmonious in all its parts; the other is unable to take this broad view of the subject; is unable to rightly gauge the relative importance and bearing of its various factors; is unable to recognize in perspective the different distances at which the various facts lie.

Neither is this a matter for surprise. By an unsystematic student some facts must be overlooked or insufficiently regarded. This destroys the continuity of the subject. Again, no one subject is explicable without the aid of side lights thrown upon it from cognate sciences. Who, for example, could thoroughly understand palæontology without geology, or geology without mineralogy, or mineralogy without chemistry? Indeed, if we could only see deep enough, would not every science be but parts of one whole? "Truth," we have often been told, "is one and eternal." But, apart from this philosophical aspect, it is impossible not to recognize the fact that for a thorough comprehension of any subject, not only must that subject be methodically considered, but other and kindred subjects—themselves methodically considered—must be brought to bear upon it.

Life is now too short—as we are accustomed so often to hear—or rather, and more correctly, knowledge is now so increased that no one can, in Bacon's words, "take all knowledge to be his province." Not even a Pascal in this year of grace could venture to undertake the comprehension of many recognized branches of learning. And for the ordinary individual one or two at most are found amply sufficient.

And truly to know thoroughly in all its details this one branch requires much labor and much perseverance, and above all much system. The two former are of little value

without the latter. As in all effort, skilled effort, scientific effort, is the most productive. Less labor well arranged will eventuate in greater and better results than ill-arranged and purposeless labor.

But because one has not had the advantages of a university education, need all efforts on their part towards self-culture in the higher branches of learning be necessarily unsystematic and therefore less productive? By no means. It needs only that we know how to study; and with the numerous text-books and curricula at hand there will be no difficulty on this head. With the grounding received at school; with the innumerable works by excellent authorities on every variety of topic; with the many libraries, museums, magazines and newspapers at our disposal; and with many around us who have undergone a thorough mental training, there assuredly need be no insuperable obstacle to our gaining an intimate acquaintance with such subjects as our tastes and proclivities will point out.

This intimate acquaintance with some one subject we recommend all teachers to aspire to. This is an age of specialism, not only in the sense that it is difficult to be otherwise, but also in the more sordid sense that specialism is now apparently of more value to the individual than is versatility.

For encouragement in our attempts at this self-culture we have many brilliant examples of success. Each person's reading will supply him with instances. Perhaps one of the most notable is that of Carlyle, who, at the advanced age of thirty-nine, studiously applied himself to learning Greek—and this after the production of what many consider his greatest work—the *Sartor Resartus*.

But that which we wish here more particularly to insist upon is, that such study must be systematic: must begin at the root of the subject and travel gradually and slowly to the branches, and that the flowers—to pursue the metaphor—must be the last examined. We have met men, brilliant men, to whom the name of "scholar" could not be applied. And why? Because, although widely read and very intelligent, they had not taken upon themselves the labor of commencing at the rudiments of a subject, and working it out through all its ramifications. They were able to quote authorities, but they were unable to rightly estimate the value of such authorities for they could not judge of their fundamental premisses. They could support a theory

with highly plausible arguments, but they were unable critically to analyse such arguments. They had at their finger ends numberless technical terms and phrases by which to explain the causes of phenomena, but the hidden meaning—or, often, the want of meaning, of such phrases could not by them be seen or acknowledged. And this, it appears to us, was due solely to a want of system in reading. In their profession: in the particular branches of learning, to which they had entirely devoted themselves, no such faults existed. This was enough to show their ability and mental calibre. It must, then, have been from some other cause that they were deficient in those which they had studied by other methods, and this cause we trace to unsystematic study.

Education is the trunk of the tree, culture its branches, refinement its blossoms, and taste their perfume. Without the trunk there can be no culture; and even if we would attempt to graft a foreign branch, there must be beforehand a living and growing trunk. In truth, true culture is impossible without a firm, substantial, and immovable basis of education. And not only so, but to arrive at such culture as is worthy of the name, we must see that we avoid a "one-sided development," must take care that our tree is not allowed to branch out in one direction only, but equally on all sides. And if we would have true refinement and good taste—fair and sweetly-scented flowers, we must see that our tree is carefully pruned, that no one branch is allowed to take more than its share of the sap.

And, dropping the metaphor, is not this, too, the essence of system? Could he be called "cultured" who knew nought but one science—however great an authority he might, in that science, be considered? Who are our truly "cultured" men? The names of Ruskin and of Matthew Arnold will, perhaps, rise first to our lips. And in what subjects are these great men proficient—or let us ask of what subjects are they altogether ignorant? To thoroughly appreciate their writings one must truly have more than glanced at the whole "circle of the sciences," and have known much of art and literature also. The ancient classics, French, German, Italian, they are both deeply read in. All great English authors they are perfectly familiar with. With the natural sciences Mr. Ruskin is perfectly at home, and Mr. Arnold is thoroughly acquainted. Art, of course, both have deeply studied. But, and on this we again insist, each has also made one or more branches of learning a subject of prolonged, earnest, and systematic meditation.