

But what is life? In what does it consist? In its vast variety of functions, so embodied as to act in harmony, its end alone can expound its entity. That end is happiness. This is the ultimate of life in the aggregate, and of each of its individual functions. Hence the most life gives the most happiness, and *vice versa*. Then to promote or impair either, thereby promotes or impairs the other. It is not my intention, under the present circumstances, to enter into or dwell upon the minutiae of life. But we all know from experience that when we have the best health we also enjoy the most happiness. Then who would not be happy? All, if we could, is doubtless the unanimous feeling. My reply is—we all may if we would, hereditary evils excepted. Health is the natural state of the animal, as well as of the other sublimely grand and variegated divisions of nature. Like all else, it has its laws, which, if obeyed, will render it perfect from the cradle to the grave; these laws even require to be frequently violated, seriously to impair it. Bird and beast are seldom delicate or sickly, except when rendered so by man. And has our generous Creator granted His best blessings to the lower animals, but withheld them from us? Such an idea is far from being consistent, and only merits momentary consideration. Then it is foolish to become sickly; for it deprives us of pleasure and allures every ill. It is the penalty we are compelled to pay for violating and neglecting the laws of our being, and all violation of law is sin.

Then, seeing that a good physical constitution is indispensable to success, and the basis of individual greatness, the first years of our life should be directed to laying the foundation of health, which is the foundation of happiness. It is a mistaken idea, yet entertained by many, that education, in order to be thorough, should begin early. I speak popularly, not technically, for I admit education does begin with the first impressions a child receives from observation.

And its first attempts to maintain its equilibrium on the floor, or articulate the fond name of its mother, are but efforts to put into practice some of its elementary learning. But nature plainly declares that this is not the proper time for devoting the mind to the incessant labor of a scholastic education; that the faculties of the child must be permitted gradually to increase in strength by means of the exercise which the varied aspects of nature and the companionship of its equals afford. Let parents who desire their children to excel in intellectual attainments, and therefore urge on their feeble powers to master tasks to which they are anything but equal, be aware how vainly they strive. Such cannot be directed by proper motives, and suppose their object is gained, it may be dearly bought. Those who run fastest at first not unfrequently lose the race, and the stone that is hardest to polish often shines the brightest.

Of what avail are the most splendid acquirements, if they are made at the sacrifice of health; without which they cannot be turned to good account, either for their own benefit or for that of others. No matter how high the polish, or graceful the accomplishment, if the physical man is made their slave. As we look around us, o'er the vast expanse of nature we cannot fail to observe that order and regularity pervade the whole. Everything has its proper time of appearing. Even the tiniest flower that grows on the sunny slope of some verdant hill has this lesson stereotyped on its petals:—This is the time for me. Then there

is a time for study. A time to begin, and a proper method to pursue. But when that time is, and what that method is, are problems, yet very imperfectly understood by many. The time principally is the subject of our attention at present. We all value acquired ability highly; no doubt on account of what it cost to obtain it. Still we can only assign it a secondary position; and, in the language of Scotland's bard, exclaim:—

"Give me one spark of nature's fire
That's all the learning I desire!"

We generally value things in proportion to what they cost us. So health, being one of nature's gifts, costs us nothing, is little valued, and even less thought of, till we lose it; then what would we not give for its recovery? But many will be ready to ask how we are to observe the laws by which we are governed, seeing we know nothing of them? Collier says, "Carelessness can never be considered a palliation of the crimes that too often spring from it." Neither, we say, can ignorance, especially when the means of acquiring knowledge are within our reach. Some may say, we cannot learn everything, and that is true; but many of us might learn a great deal more than we do, both with profit and credit to ourselves.

"Man, know thyself," is one of the precepts of the "Book of Books." And my opinion is, if we can learn anything at all, we should first divert our attention to ourselves, and then to the things by which we are surrounded. True, we are not all gifted alike, and it is no mark of inability to see a child dull and styled a dunce; for many of the most distinguished men in every department of literature and science have been remarkable in their childhood for their dullness and incapacity to learn. To illustrate this, we may mention Sir Isaac Newton, who says that, "he was inattentive to study, and ranked very low in school until the age of twelve." Napoleon is described by those who knew him well in his childhood as "having good health, but in other respects like other boys." Alfred the Great is no exception to this rule. And, not to multiply examples, Adam Clarke, whose talent, when at school, appeared to be confined to the rolling of large stones, was in other respects a grievous dunce. We might also refer to the boyhood of some of the leading men of our own day, but it is not necessary. We admit it is possible to develop the powers of a child so as to make him out-strip—for a time—all his juvenile companions in his acquisition of knowledge, yet, ultimately, the actual amount of knowledge possessed, and the incapacity of enlarging it, will be smaller than if the dictates of nature were obeyed; for the powers of the mind are thus worn out long before the period at which, in other circumstances, they would arrive at maturity; they become incapable of further exertion when they should be in their highest vigour. Such might be said to live in advance of his years, and at an age when his more judicious companions are in their prime, his silvery locks and careworn appearance foretell his fast approaching fate.

No child ought ever, if possible, even see a letter till he is at least seven years old. But when this septennial period has expired, then it will be time enough to begin to teach him the alphabet. He will now be able to understand what he is doing, and have a curiosity for learning which would otherwise, through familiarity, never have been. This was the method of the mother of the