

A CRY AND PRAYER

AGAINST THE IMPRISONMENT OF SMALL CHILDREN.

By W. H. Simmons.

The Persian Cyrus, it seems, learned nothing, when a child, but to ride, shoot, and speak the truth; which, Sir Walter Scott told Mr. Irving, was all he had taught his sons.

A better education, be sure, than most boys get, in this time of books, and country of schools!

Because a boy's great business is to grow—to develop, form, and harden his expanding frame into something like its natural perfection; and thus lay the foundation of health, strength, and long life. This Nature very plainly intimates, by the energy wherewith she is continually impelling him to active out-door exercises. These mature, in the best manner possible, his whole organization; engaging his mind in sympathetic activity with his body; in observation, recollection, comparison, description of things—with practical experiments, devices, and constructions.

While his body and mind are thus acquiring hardihood and activity, and filling out their natural proportions, teach him to speak the truth; and what is he not, by the time he becomes a big boy, that the son of a king, or of any honest man, ought to be?

His whole organization is so fairly set forward, in a healthful development, that nothing, short of the act of God, can now arrest it. He can endure reasonable confinement and application, without injury or discomfort. He is eager for knowledge; for he has never been drugged or surfeited with it—of kinds that he could not relish, or in quantities that he could not digest. What he has learned, he has learned naturally, and has enjoyed, both in acquisition and in possession. Learning, in his experience, is pure pleasure and gain. And with the increased self-command, and power of reflection, that years have given him, he is now ready to proceed to more systematic study, with a natural appetite and capacity; and with physical stamina, adequate to sustain mental action.

How different a creature, at the same age, is he, too often, who was sent, before he could go alone to an *Infant School*; and has been kept, 'cabined, cribbed, confined—bound in by saucy doubts and fears'—six, seven, or eight hours a day, on a school-house bench, and in a school-house atmosphere, year after year, up to the age of twelve or fourteen! *What does the boy know?* Very little, certainly, of the world about him. Very little of actual nature, in her various shapes, aspects, and phenomena. He has very little of that experimental knowledge and practical skill, which the curiosity and quick sensations of boyhood so peculiarly fit it to acquire, in social sports, bold exercises, and habitual intimacy with the elements and seasons—earth and air—and their growths and creatures. But he can read, write, and cipher. He knows the English for some Latin and French words, it may be; and can repeat, *memoriter*, certain scientific facts and rules; which (and especially their application) he cannot, in the nature of things, fairly understand. For this, *he has been made a pining prisoner half the waking hours of his life*; and is now left, at the most critical epoch of his constitution, more or less *pale, crooked, feeble, under-sized, nervous, and timid*. Commonly, he can neither walk, dance, run, ride, swim, fight, or speak well. He has acquired little or none of that vigor, dexterity, and grace, in the use of his limbs and organs, which exercise, while the frame is flexible, alone can give; and this, very probably, occasions a disuse of bodily exercise, for life: because no man takes pleasure in doing habitually what he does ill, after the season for learning to do it well is gone by.

Now is it possible, that while this poor boy's body has been thus afflicted and reduced, his mind has been a real gainer? Must it not be the ultimate sufferer? Probably one of two things has happened. Either confinement, and attempted application to studies in which he cannot engage himself—for nature never meant he should—have so disgusted his feelings, and cowed his spirits, that he learns nothing; and, what with vacuity and dreary inaction, his mind gradually stultifies over his books, and contracts an immortal aversion, and almost incapacity, for study; or he becomes what is called, in school, a 'good scholar;' that is: his nature yields to the violence that is done her; gradually withdraws her vital forces from their proper work of feeding and corroborating his whole growth, and concentrates them on the brain; maintaining it in that morbid activity, to which it has been wrought up by constant stimulation of his ambition.

Thus, what the poor fellow is praised and congratulated for effecting, in such a case, amounts usually to this—that he has resisted the strongest impulses of his boyish nature—impulses, the obedience to which, and the acting them out, alone could mature that nature into manhood—he has defeated them: he has reduced his little frame to quiet subjection, and a slow growth—paled his cheek, slackened his pulse, tamed his heart—fixed that clear eye, and bent the arch of that open brow, and excited the mysterious organ behind it to a morbid and premature activity, that consumes those vital energies, which are needed for the development of his whole system. How certain, that this precocious mental action, after exhausting the very means of establishing permanent organic power, must be succeeded by a momentous *reaction*, which leaves

a majority of these childish prodigies with an over-wrought, languid mind, to accompany a feeble body, through the studies of youth, and the labors of manhood.

Why then, my dear madam—allow me to inquire—why need your son, for the first six or seven years of his life, ever open a book? A startling query, truly! in this incomparable nineteenth century of ours, which has repeatedly resolved itself to be greater and better than all the eighteen (not to say fifty or sixty) that have gone before it, could they be lumped in one—this age, that has brought cant and humbug, as well as some better things, to an unprecedented perfection, (and, a word in your ear, madam—education—twattle is its pet cant, and baby-schools and baby-books its pet humbug)—in such an age, a saucy query mine, truly! But, I pray you, answer, or at least consider it, fair lady. 'Tis put, believe me, quite in earnest, and with cordial good intent. Why need your little darling open a book? He can learn nothing that he cannot learn in a hundredth part of the time hereafter, and without being urged or annoyed. And as for the mental exercise, he does not need it; he inevitably suffers from it. His mind, like his body, instinctively takes all the exercise that is good for it. It is matter of notoriety, that children who are obliged by poverty to do a great deal of hard work daily—as in the English factories—very generally come to be dwarfish and short-lived men. Now, a child's *mind* is no more capable than his *body*, of severe or continuous application; and if subjected to it, he is abused.

'When I was a child,' saith a wise and sainted scholar—(whom I know you reverence, madam, notwithstanding that petulant little *obiter dictum* that fell from you, awhile ago, anent his metaphysics)—'when I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.' Do not attempt to improve on this good pattern, by requiring your child to put away childish things before nature has made him capable of any other; and to learn our hard lessons, instead of her easy and well-remembered ones.

That little limber, laughing elf,
Dancing, singing, to itself;
With fairy eyes, and red, round cheeks,
That ever finds and never seeks;

for heaven's sake metamorphose it not into

—'the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school!'

O leave him to play and grow, and be happy; and in the lustre of his joyous innocence, remind men of the kingdom of heaven! Let him play out childhood's sweet little prelude to the busy drama of life entirely *ad libitum*—his exits and his entrances at his own good pleasure. Let him spend the live-long day, if he pleases, *sub Dio*; let him bring home every night a face embrowned by Phæbus, or reddened by Aquilo; let him play with Amphytrite, in her element, and chase the Nymphs on their mountains; let him rival the Fawns in archness, and the Satyrs in merriment—and I care not if this be, at present, his only acquaintance with classic Mythology. The more potent he is among his play-fellows—the more inveterate his vagrancy—the more unextinguishable his laughter—the stronger his preference for the outside of a house over the inside—the more invincible his aversion to long sessions and unintelligible lectures—the more hopeful you may think him. And boon Nature, be sure, whose impulses he is obeying—whose laws he is living by—whose child he is—will impel his little mind to all the action that will benefit it—to all, that consists with its tender immaturity, and rapid growth; teaching him by other inspiration than the birch's terrors, or the medal's lure, to

—'and tongues in trees,
Books in the running brooks, sermons in stones,
And good in every thing.'

Just the sermons, the books, and the tongues for his edification. From them, better than from all the first-lessons, or infant-school-philosophical-apparatus, ever devised, he will learn that habit of observation and recollection—that prompt self-command, and readiness of resource—that aptitude and availability, of knowledge which, in their ultimate and combined results, make up the *efficient man of sense*.

After that period of childhood which has been indicated, our young master may take a slate, and a writing book, and geography into his hands, and spend an hour or two daily over them within doors. Coming to these studies with an organization healthfully expanding, and with a spirit, not broken and subdued by confinement, but

'Whole as the marble—founded as the rock—
As broad and general as the casing air,'

he will learn more in six months, than his rival, the infant-school prisoner, has acquired in as many years.

Advancing into the estate of youth, and hobbledoydom, of course he becomes capable, gradually, of a greater and greater amount of application: the caution, for the conduct of that application, still being, not to let it defeat its own object, by causing the neglect, or taking the place, of physical exercises, or by pro-

ducing more action and excitement of the brain, than can be balanced by impartial exercise of the whole system.

Under this caution what should be the first and great aim of juvenile studies? Acquisition? No. Development.

What is *education*? Can you define that noun, Sir? Nay, be not affronted. You, then, at least, fair lady, who have not, I hope, devoted your blooming years to Lexicons, may not object to be informed, or reminded, that *educatio* is Latin for *leading forth*. To educate a pupil, is to lead forth—bring out, or develop, the principles and faculties of his nature. Another may help him to do this, but cannot do it for him. A wise teacher attempts nothing more than to supply the means and aids; to inspire and direct his pupil in the great work of *self-education*. God has set this example to all subordinate teachers.

He does not make us wise and good, but invites and enables us to make ourselves so. He does not educate (otherwise than cooperatively) his most blessed child—the saint, the poet, or the sage. He but opens before them the awful and shining pages of existence; and they read therein, aright. The moments and ages—atoms and worlds—of creation, make the words and sentences of that infinite book—dead letters to us, and worthless, if we do not study out their meaning—which is Truth—the divine aliment, the vital breath, of the Soul.

Life has been said to be a series of schools, concluding with a great university—the world. This last is the best; for its President is Omniscient. Let the subordinate ones make it their model.

A young student's memory, if forcibly crowded with more facts than it can associate, and more, therefore, than it can permanently retain, is strained and weakened. If exercised naturally and pleasantly, according to its capacity, and in company with his understanding—he being skilfully moved and occasioned so to use it—it is developed, or educated. The object is, not to fill his memory, but to strengthen and enlarge it; to furnish it with bonds of association, topics for reflection, data for judgment. The opinions of others should be submitted to him, to excite activity of comparison in forming his own. Illustrious examples should be holden before him, to mature his appreciation of the greatness they illustrate. Rules should be taught him, not as the end, but as a mode, of investigation. So that, by incessant reference of doctrine and example to his own experience and instincts, however crude, he may gradually develop, out of the mental elements of his nature, his own conscience and reason; the only reason or conscience for him.

Those of his faculties which (from any of the mischiefs, whether immediate, or accumulated by inheritance, that damage nature's germs) appear least forward, will be speedily cherished; in order to a complete and symmetrical development. But there will be no attempt to foist the extrinsic into the place of the intrinsic; to patch (O absurdity!) the vital and expanding growth; to supply, by adventitious substitutes, the imputed deficiencies of nature. A character, or a mind, so formed, cannot endure; its materials cannot assimilate; it must ever want unity and truth. What is thus done, must be undone. Foreign accretions, by which it has been vainly thought to fill up nature's imperfect work, must be thrown off, however cemented by time, before that mysterious work can complete itself, from its own self-generated and immortal substance. If aided, in so doing, by true education—an honest furtherance of nature—the mind will expand constantly towards its own proper perfection; and however little of it may, at any stage, have been developed, that little will be sound, native, and indestructible. W. H. S.

For the Pearl.

APOLOGY FOR THE FOREST WREATH.

TAKEN FROM THE INTRODUCTORY PAGES OF THE FORTHCOMING "MEMENTO."

Whatever may be the nature of my claims upon the muses, my heart has ever burned with a poet's devotion. No sooner could I wield a pen than that pen was restless to record the playful roivings of my fancy. As I advanced in childhood, my mind grew more and more determined to hazard a display of its solitary musings, while hope, like a heaven-born beacon, broke through each dreary doubt, and cheered my spirit onward. To the eye of imagination, the world presented a theatre of promise, and my too credulous heart believed the vision real.

Hence my artless songs of boyhood were carefully imprinted in my book of young desire, or more daringly exhibited in the public columns of the day. Caressed and applauded by many, and deeming that my very profession was sufficient apology for extravagance and haste, I anticipated no evil, but off went each offspring of my idle hours, as wild and free as the mind that gave it birth.

Full soon a number of my earliest productions were promiscuously embodied in the supposed majesty of a volume, and the public attention was speedily attracted by a target for criticism in the premature appearance of my "Forest Wreath."

My debut was not inauspicious, notwithstanding the careless independence of its bearing. Many were the brother bards and sister muses that breathed a kindred welcome to my name—and