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CHAPTERS ON EDUCATION.

By Derwent Conway.

Chapter I.

Works upon Education.

It is a remarkable fact, that although the whole world is agreed upon the important influence which education exercises upon the happiness of mankind, there should, notwithstanding, be no work extant, in which the subject is fully and thoroughly investigated,—no treatise, of so approved a reputation, that if a difference in opinion should arise with respect to the expression, "a good education,"—a form of words in every body's mouth,—it might be possible to refer to some authority for light upon the subject.

I believe there is no science, if I may be permitted to use that term, in which so little progress has been made, as in education; nor any thing, indeed, about the importance of which the world is agreed, so little understood. There are no acknowledged first principles. Every one admits the propriety of giving to a child a good education, and every one acts upon this admission to the best of his ability; but to enter upon the task, is like entering upon a wide heath, across which there are many paths, but no finger-posts. Education differs in one most essential particular from most other things which influence man's happiness: The difficulty lies, not in merely practising principles which are universally admitted, but in ascertaining the principle that is to be acted upon.

That we possess no standard work upon education, is certain; and I think may be added, not one deserving of a higher reputation than it enjoys. Treatises upon this subject have hitherto been left in the hands of the ladies; and of these we have, indeed, many; but there seems to be no good reason why this branch of philosophy,—the most profound that can be subjected to the investigation of the human faculties, because requiring the deepest knowledge of the human mind,—should be quietly resigned to the powers of that sex, which, it is generally thought, can boast with less justice of its own philosophy, than of its power of vanquishing that virtue in others.

It is evidently impossible, within magazine limits, to supply the desideratum in the science of education; I do think, however, that he who should present to the world a work, in which principles so just and intelligible were laid down, that if applied in practice, the errors now abounding in education might be avoided, would leave behind him a prouder and a worthier legacy, than was ever yet bequeathed by the pen of the scholar, or the sword of the conqueror.

I proceed with my short, and, I trust, intelligible exposition.

Chapter II.

There are too great principles in Education.

It is quite indisputable, that the end and aim of all education ought to be, *to improve, to the greatest possible extent, in every mind subjected to its operation, the faculties which nature has implanted.* Nature always does something; and it is the business of education to carry on her design.—But in no system of education with which I am acquainted, is nature looked to as the guide: a design is formed independent of her. Now, if I am right in the position laid down, every plan of education in which nature is not consulted, must be imperfect; and the rational object of enquiry, therefore.

There seem to be two great principles upon which all education must proceed, in order that it may produce its greatest results: is, *By what laws of nature shall we be governed in the training of the human mind?* the one, that *it must be in accordance with the invariable order which nature has established in the progressive development of the human faculties;* the other, *that it must not run counter to, but be in agreement with nature, in the varied distribution of her endowments.* The first of these principles is in direct opposition to the system inculcated by a certain modern female oligarchy; the second principle is opposed to all systems of education whatever. I proceed to speak of the first

Chapter III.

The folly of being wiser than Nature. Female Philosophers.

A clever writer has said, "Poets live in an ideal world of their own, and it would be as well if they were confined to it." Some such saying might be spoken of the fair sex,—only substituting the word *real* for *ideal*,—and adding, that although it might be well to confine them within their own world, yet so delightful a world it is, that others would fain share it with them. I trust the gallantry of this *tournure* may be thought a sufficient extenuation of the rudeness which there doubtless is, in denying to the fair sex the palm in philosophy.

It seems to me, that the first principle to be attended to in education, viz. to follow the order which nature has established in the development of the human faculties, is directly at variance with that system which has of late years been recommended by a conclave of well-meaning individuals, as the new and rational system; for what is the order which nature invariably follows in the development of the human faculties? It is, that among all the mental powers, judgment is the last to ripen. This fact, however, is either unknown to the disciples of the new school, or despised by them; for the books which are now recommended to be put the earliest into the hands of children, are addressed almost exclusively to the judgment, and little, if it all, to the imaginative faculty; but if it be true, that at an age when imagination is capable of being impressed, judgment is incapable of being directed, it necessarily follows, that to attempt to instruct the latter, while the former is permitted to lie uncultivated, is labouring to do that which cannot be done, and at the same time neglecting to do that which might be done. It is impossible greatly to err in education, if an attentive eye be kept upon the operations of nature; and it is equally impossible to do otherwise than err, if we substitute, for her wise and unvarying laws, systems, the success of which depends upon a presumed want of wisdom in nature. The faculties of the human mind are, doubtless, matured in the best possible order: that faculty which is the first capable of being improved, ought to be addressed the first; to act otherwise, is to act either ignorantly or presumptuously.

(To be continued.)

The advantages of the study of Nature.—Nature has charms even for the most uninitiated. The green fields and the waving woods, the playful motions of happy animals, the wheeling flights of birds, the buoyant air filled with innumerable insects on glittering wing, the fleeces of white clouds rolling their fantastic lengths along the blue sky, are all capable of imparting a simple pleasure to the mind. But a knowledge of the various operations of Nature is calculated to heighten this pleasure of contemplation in a tenfold degree, and enables one to perceive delicate beauties and nice adaptions, before unheeded or unthought of. A philosophical poet has very beautifully remarked, that the sight of the rainbow never gave him so much pleasure as when he first was able to understand the principles on which it was formed, when he viewed it not only as the "arch sublime" spanning the heavens, but as a curious and beautiful illustration of the rays of light, decomposed into their various constituent colours, by the natural prism of the globes of rain from the dropping cloud. The landscape-painter looks with additional delight on a beautiful scene, because he can enter into the perception of the mellowing of tints, the disposition of light and shade, and the receding perspective of the relative objects.

The appearence of the silky-like haze rising from the ocean, floating about on the surface of the deep, and hence ascending in clouds of various shapes and hues, and sailing along the sky, and lighted up or darkened as they pass and repass the sun, is a sight of beauty and splendour calculated to please and amuse the eye; but when we know that this appearance from the deep is a species of distillation going on—that a portion of the pure water of the ocean is taken up by the atmosphere, carried along by the winds, and descends upon the face of the soil in refreshing showers, giving life and sustenance to the animal and vegetable world,—to our feelings of pleasure are superadded those of wonder, delight, and gratitude.

It is the same with the botanist, the mineralogist, and the investigator of animal life. A tree is, perhaps, one of the most beautiful objects in nature; the massive strength of the trunk, the graceful tortuosity of the branches, and the beautiful and variegated green of the leaves, are all so many sources of pleasure to the beholder. But when we think on the series of fibres and tubes by which this tree for ages, perhaps, has drawn nourishment from the earth, and, by a process of assimilation, added circle after circle of woody matter round the original stem, till it has acquired its present enormous bulk,—when we reflect on the curious mechanism of the leaves, by which, like the lungs of an animal, they decompose the air of the atmosphere, selecting through the day what part of it is fit to enter into the composition of the tree, and giving out at night a different species of air,—when we think of the sap passing up the small series of tubes during summer, and these tubes