

of every age, seeing that the cultivation of his race is surely the most important work in which man can be engaged. It is professedly the great question of these times; yet, amid much useful discussion of school arrangements, and the methods of teaching, some of the less obvious aspects of the process of change, which is everywhere and incessantly going on in human minds, are, it seems, too much neglected. And the books by which they are amused and spontaneously educated are surely among the most powerful domestic influences to which children are exposed. The department of literature has worthily engaged writers of the highest intellect, who have known childhood well, and the habits and tastes of successive generations are formed by the fruit of their labors.

Before attempting to answer the question,—What sort of writing is best adapted for the young? another question accordingly must be entertained, What are their tastes and capacities? The warm and affectionate susceptibility of children, their noble aspirations, their confident trust in others, and unselfish admiration of whatever is beautiful and good,—traits like these, with the counterpoise of such defects as restlessness, imprudence, appetency of pleasure and impatience of pain or restraint, are manifest at a glance. But there are phenomena less obtrusive, some of which, at first sight, appear reconcilable one with another. These ought to be considered; for though from causes already alluded to, from the want of sympathy between old and young, and from the assiduous assiduity with which the cares of the man imperceptibly obliterate the very different experiences of the child, it is difficult to understand thoroughly the hidden things of childhood, so as to see their unity and relation to each other as parts of a mysterious whole, yet something may be gathered. Some few scattered fragments, a frieze here, a broken capital there, may serve to remind us how fair and how wonderful the ruin must have been, while it stood a living temple.

One of the chief points of difference between boyhood and girlhood,—and it is to the life of boys that our following remarks chiefly refer,—is, that the boy is not merely, or chiefly, passing through a state of transition. With the other sex it is for the most part different. With them, from the moment of emerging from the nursery to the auspicious epoch of "coming out," too often is a dreary blank. There is no cricket, no football, nor one of the many avocations of a boy's little world to enliven it. Hence so often in young ladies an insipid and artificial tone, totally different from the independence and unworldly spirit of a boy, especially at a public school. He lives in a world of his own, very complete and satisfying while it lasts. However alluring may be the opening vista of "real life," and however eager he may be to anticipate the dignity of manhood, still there is very much to prize and enjoy in the present on its own account,—very much that he must relinquish on assuming the "toga virilis." It was a serious mistake in the artist to represent the sons of Laocoon in the finished proportion of little men, not with the wavy outlines of youth. It would be a similar error in any system of education, and it is one of frequent occurrence now in books written for the young, to regard them merely as *men on a small scale*, and not as they are, denizens of another world. The man, matured in years, pressing onwards to some mark—power, it may be, or money—or, at all events, aware of the grave that expects him, cannot fail to note anxiously the progress of each day. He is, as it were, borne along on a downward stream, whose waters flow more and more swiftly as they approach the sea. Meanwhile, the child is floating hither and thither on a sunlit ocean, wrapt in the unconscious security of an eternal now. This completeness or to borrow an expressive word from a foreign tongue, this "entelechy" of boyhood, results in part from the rich variety of aspects which that age presents internally. Coleridge, the poet-philosopher, says that there has never been a really great man, without a considerable admixture of the feminine—not the effeminate—element in his character. The combination of courage and modesty, of impetuosity and gentleness, of the component parts, according to the Eastern apologue, of the lion and the dove, is particularly noticeable in boys. But we must proceed to collect in detail a few of their most remarkable characteristics.

One of these is what may be most shortly expressed by a word that has come unluckily to savour rather of philosophic pedantry,—their objectivity. It may be true scientifically that the quality of colour,—the green, for instance, of a tree or meadow, resides in the mind rather than in the natural object itself; but the opposite belief is more pleasant, and is one source of the vivid enjoyment which children feel in every thing proposed to the senses. They cling to what is concrete and outward. To them every person, nay, every brute creature, every inanimate object that seizes their attention becomes an independent and individual object. The image stands within the mind in bold relief, as if it were a living thing, in causeless and self-essential individuality; for as yet there is no habit of causation, no "ætiatic" habit, as it has been called, but an unhesitating and uncritical acceptance of every thing presented. Particulars are as yet in no danger of evanescing into abstractions. They are scarcely numerous enough to require digestion and arrangement into classes. Each one holds its place by its own right in the memory, a real, actual, concrete quasi-person.

And as the memory is then most impressible, so is it also most retentive then without much aid from causality or logical relation. The fact, and the fact alone, is enough. Even a name, a proper name, is draped with form and colour by the lavish exuberance of the imagination, and seems to assert its own indefeasible fitness. Dry rules, formal and unmeaning as they seem, scarcely cost an effort to be remembered, though the principle of them, the "wherefore" of their operation, remain unexplained. From this objectivity comes a child's love of imitation, not only of imitating what is attractive, but of imitating every thing for imitation's sake; his aptness for mimicry and everything in the way of acting; the entire belief with which, either as spectator, or himself the tiny actor, he loses his own identity in that of the person represented. Hence, too, the fondness for pictures, not from any conscious appreciation of the imitator's ingenuity, but because the picture to them becomes for the moment the very person, or place, or incident represented.

Closely connected with the same principle of objectivity, is the unconscious pleasure that children imbibe from the beauties of nature. Their enjoyment of Nature is something inexpressible, the more rapturous, that it is unconscious, and undisturbed by any abstract speculations about the beautiful or the picturesque. Like the ancient Greeks, they seem aware of the pervading tone, whatever it may be, of the landscape, of the delicious languors of summer, or the bright crispness of a frosty winter's day. The details, too, they perceive singly and separately; but like the Greeks, they seem to be devoid of that analytic sense of the composition of the various features of the scene, which is so prominent a feature in modern descriptive poetry, especially in that of the Lake school.

How very early in life an unconscious sense of poetry begins to manifest itself, is obvious to all who are conversant with the sayings and doings of children; and close observers know well how rich a treasure of real poetical material lies formless and unnoticed in the depths of a child's heart. A few years pass on, and the tendency begins to show itself in overt acts. In the pages of a school magazine, however trashy and ambitious the prose may be, the poetry is often really beautiful. But the poetry that approves itself to the ears of youth is seldom of a *complex* kind. Deep it may be,—indeed it can scarcely be too deep—provided only it be simple. The taste for melody comes before that of harmony. For this reason Shakspeare is seldom a favorite with boys; unless it be for the interest of his story. His exuberant and many-sided imagination continually leads him, as it were, into intricate and complicated "fugues,"—true to life and nature, he blends into one rich harmony the most apparently discordant tones; and it is this Variety in Unity that especially marks his universal genius. But boys prefer the passionate and flowing strains of poets like Byron, Moore, and Scott. Even Milton, for this reason, finds more admirers at an early age than Shakspeare.

It is quite true that boys, especially schoolboys, have a very lively sense of what is ridiculous, and still more of what is *ludicrous*. No soubriquets elaborated in after life by the ingenuity of party warfare, hit the mark so well as those at school,—launched by the careless hand and forged in an instant by the ready wit and happy versatility of boys. But notwithstanding all this playful humour, the other element preponderates below the surface. Thus Dickens is generally a greater favorite with boys than Thackeray.

One more aspect—a very important one—of this objectivity remains to be noticed, as it affects the religious state of children. Belief in them is not what Mr. Carlyle reprobates as a "sham" belief; it is not a belief that they believe. As far as it goes, it is very real indeed. But the child's idea of a future state is rather a continuation of the happy home in which he lives, than a new heaven and a new earth. He cannot conceive it otherwise, and why should he? Perhaps this consideration tends to explain, what has been called*, in one of the little books for boys, "an inscrutable mystery in boyhood;" the rapid facility with which the sorrows of repentance are effaced by returning lightness of heart.

Another characteristic of the young—one which they have in common with the fair sex—is the *personal* aspect in which they regard things; the disposition to refer everything to the person from whom it proceeds, or to whom it belongs, and to judge of it accordingly. Principles and opinions are invested by them with the associations belonging to the persons who support or impugn them. The personal authority of the teacher, his claims to affection or respect, have more efficacy with them than the independent evidence of what he inculcates. Nor

* The passage is so beautiful, that we cannot refrain from quoting it entire:—"Truly it is a mystery, that strange privilege which boyhood alone seems to possess of being at once sinful and light-hearted. It is, as it were, the mingling of the pure and the impure in the same cup, without the whole draught becoming polluted. In after years guilt has its moments of wild and feverish delight; but boys, and boys alone, can sin and be sorry for a while, and then fling aside all thought of it, and feel as though they had never sinned at all. In infancy the consciousness of sin is a thing unknown, in manhood it presses on the heart like an ever-present burden; but in boyhood it is like an April cloud, which flits over the landscape, darkening it for a while, and then passing away altogether, and leaving it as bright as ever. Of all the mysteries of boyhood this is perhaps the most inscrutable."—*Charlton School, or the Cherry Stones.*