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EDUCATION.

Biography as a Means of Teaching and Training.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE UNITED ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLMASTERS IN ENGLAND.

That the story of a life is, and ever has been, singularly attractive to man, and especially so to the young, can, I think, be established by a passing reference to history, to our current literature, and to our individual experience.

Biography might aptly be termed the warp of history. For what event has ever been recorded of which a life was not the basis, and in which a man was not the foreground? To look back upon history is to look upon a crowd—tumultuous, shifting and confused; to understand which, one must make a selection and proceed to inquiries, that is, study Biography.

And upon studying history, will it not appear as though this biographical teaching had ever been the most common and influential means by which to convey instruction? For if, in the primitive times, some venerable patriarch gathered around him his children and his grand children beneath the shadow of the oak, the olive, or the palm—there to inform them in their varied duties, and emulate them to virtuous and noble achievements, was it not the life-story of some revered ancestor, or some honoured and distinguished contemporary, that kindled such unwonted fire in the old man's eyes, and called up a corresponding enthusiasm in the faces of his youthful listeners? Was it not by the recital of some thrilling piece of biography, that it would be made evident how that peculiar gifts and benedictions alighted upon the conforming and the pious, while severe and significant judgments overlooked and brought to ruin the indifferent, the doubter, or the scoffer? So also, if the sturdy warrior sought a theme by which to cheer his comrades by the lonely watch-fire, or dare them to the deadly breach, was not the heroism of some mighty progenitor the watch-

word and the incentive? In fact, does not all history go to show, that the memory of those "who had made their lives sublime" was the most potent charm by which to invoke the inspiration of the poet, the eloquence of the orator, the endurance of the worker, and the valour of the brave? In all literature, in all tradition, the impure mythology of the Greeks, the heroic stories of the Romans, the indecent fables of the Hindoos, the barbaric lays of the Celts, and the chivalric minstrelsy of the middle ages, do life-stories predominate; all teem with proper names; the universal subject appears to be *Man*, and the universal predicate some form of the *verb, to live*.

If we turn to that purest and most ancient stream of historic lore—the Holy Scriptures—the power and prevalence of biographical teaching will be still more apparent. Why, I should suppose that the Bible, apart from its high and holy functions as a Divine Revelation, and considered simply upon its merits as a book, would be allowed to be one of the most captivating compositions ever penned. Now, to what does it owe its charms? Is it not to its life-stories? Cannot each one of us remember how that, in our childhood, we pored for hours over its beautiful narratives—how that we were troubled at the sufferings, and rejoiced at the prosperity, of a Joseph, a David, a Jesus, and a Paul. And how, too, that, in spite of all the little perplexities of our understandings, arising from its Eastern customs and supernatural element, we always brought away from these Bible-stories the settled conviction, that conduct which was good and pure, and true, was, somehow or the other, sure to come right at last. And when one looks back at those pleasant days, the thought arises,—Surely, if less were said about reading the Bible as a *duty* and a *task*, and more made of the *delights* and *pleasures* that attend its perusal, might not more Bibles be redeemed from cobwebs and dust, and fewer "souls perish for lack of knowledge?" But let that pass.

Not only as a literary production, but more remarkably as a Divine Revelation, is the biographical teaching of the Word of God significant. To open its sacred pages with the firm conviction that it is really and literally an inspired work, and then proceed to examine into its method, one must reason thus: Here the Divine Wisdom condescends to instruct the dull ignorance of his creatures, in one of the most difficult and important of subjects, and here every precept and every truth are

"Drawn out in living characters."

The Deity teaches by biography—sometimes by an allegory, sometimes by a figure, and sometimes by a real life—but always biographically. To turn for a moment or two to our current literature. What are the books that are universally read and relished? The books that reach no end of editions, and wander into a perfect babel of tongues? The books that, pampered in crimson and gold, adorn the drawing-rooms of the great; or, unceremoniously snubbed into a coarse paper wrapper, accompany the miscellaneous