

and scientific acquisition. But it is one thing to determine the etymological import of a word, and another to fix precisely the character of the facts of which it is made the representative; for it is well known that words are not always used with strict regard to their original meaning, nor applied alone to the things which are clearly understood. In the present instance, there can be no dispute as to the different meanings which the original word will bear, but it may well be questioned whether these are all equally applicable to the subject of mental improvement. Education is generally understood to aim no less at invigorating the intellectual faculties, than at imparting useful knowledge; both objects are considered legitimate, if not necessary results of the process. But if these faculties neither need nor admit of any direct cultivation, as I have stated in the previous chapter, it follows that the prevalent opinion is unfounded and ought to give place to a more philosophical estimate of the human intellect. The notion of organic improvement carries with it a discouraging tendency, inasmuch as it represents the mind to be nothing or next to nothing, until it has been expanded and strengthened by education—an idea more absurd than would be the supposition that we had no eyes until they were elicited and brought to maturity by the action of light and the process of vision. In the latter case, our eyes would still be provided for by an arrangement of nature, though somewhat delayed: but in the former case, mind, overlooked by Providence, becomes solely the creature of education—that is to say, the noblest attribute of man is not original but acquired. It is remarkable that the prevailing system of education affords no countenance to this absurdity. Every science taught in our schools, has been introduced for the ostensible reason that it relates to useful facts. No object is formally pursued but the acquisition of science. Accordingly, the progress of the student is usually facilitated regardless of the effect which his attainments may have upon his mind. He studies to know things, and knowing them, nothing more either is or ought to be required. Some sciences, it is true, have been thought to exert a more powerful influence than others in disciplining the mind; but this discipline is never formally attempted, because the practical

philosophy of mankind repels their speculative errors. The difference of effect is owing to the nature of the several truths themselves, or to the method in which they are acquired, and not to any organic power which they are able to impart to the mind. Truth is powerful, and enables the mind to do what ignorance has made impossible. What we impute to discipline belongs only to knowledge; it is the same intellect acting with greater advantages—the same agent employed under more favourable circumstances. The mode of studying some sciences—a mode rendered necessary by their abstract nature, doubtless requires greater attention as well as more careful observation, and thus by employing the mind more fully, adds corresponding advantages, without any increase of essential power.

I am obliged, therefore, to conclude that knowledge is the principal object of education. Science is to be cultivated, and not the mind. In the invention and acquisition of science, there is an ample field for the best abilities of human nature, and a field where each is competent to act without the aid of previous preparation. He who is furnished with knowledge acquired by his own industry, is to be considered as educated, and his education is valuable or worthless just in proportion to the character of the facts which he has learned. Mere assistance does not vary the case; science may be improved and the labour of acquisition abridged: but the nature of the practical effort, and of its attendant effects, is unchanged. The manner, as well as the matter of our scientific pursuits, must be estimated solely by its tendency to enrich the mind with useful knowledge.

Education includes the means no less than the end—the application of the mind no less than the knowledge by which it is sure to be rewarded. As in all other instances, so in this, we find a constant connection between cause and effect. The common theory which ascribes our attainments, in part, to an increased constitutional ability, does indeed assign a cause, but one that is wholly imaginary. In the true spirit of conjectural philosophy, it overlooks the real and simple cause to fix upon one more imposing in a fiction of its own creation. Mental activity is an invariable condition of knowledge. Mind must think in order to know, and probably