

## Contributions.

## EDUCATION OF THE PEOPLE

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Within the past century every science has been made to assume a new aspect; inventions and appliances of art have been as numberless as they are striking; almost every portion of the earth has been the theatre of a new and strange activity. But, after all, the most striking feature of this movement—an element pregnant with wide-spread and far-reaching consequences—is the development of the power of the people—the masses, and the revelation of that power to themselves.

In all past ages the chasm that separated between the fortunate few and the toiling masses was so broad and deep that there was little intercommunication or sympathy between them; but the time has now arrived when the masses are recognized as forming a constituent part of humanity—when their rights are acknowledged, their voice heard, and their influence felt. The great natural law of human equality—everywhere recorded in the volume of nature, everywhere revealed in religion, though overlooked and neglected through so many ages, though hunted and persecuted with the fagot and the torch, the rack and the halter of despotism, has at last obtained a voice through which to speak, not only in the ear of despots, but to the wide, wide world itself.

This element of power is now moving among the nations and upon the face of human society as the Spirit of God once moved on the face of the mighty deep. Despotism may enquire how it may be smothered and destroyed, but humanity will enquire how it may be guided, how it may obtain and cleave pure and safe development. Smothered it may not be—you may as well attempt to smother the heaving fires of Vesuvius. It is the upheaving of this mighty element that has convulsed Europe during the past few years, and, if we mistake not, the signs of the times are destined to convulse it more and more, until the establishment of universal freedom.

The only thing that can give tone and elevation, a right direction and useful result to this recognition and exercise of the rights and powers of the mass, is education—wide-spread, universal education. Along with the knowledge of their power must be imparted to the people the equally important knowledge of its proper use. There is no species of despotism so much to be dreaded as that of the multitude, conscious of their strength, but ignorant of its proper use. The French people furnish a striking illustration to this point. The world has no page in its history of so terrific a character, when the very foundations of civil government were swept away and the very framework of the social organization was dissolved, as that which records the conflicts, the sacrifices, and the fearful madness of the people in their first struggles for liberty. It was blind Samson bowing himself on the pillars of the Philistines' temple and bringing ruin and death on all beneath. And even in her more recent struggles behold the upheaving of power, untempered and unguided by light. At one moment, rising in their night, the people swept away every vestige of the throne; they then shout "Long live the Republic," and the next moment rush into the arms of despotism.

As we have said, education should be universal, the endowment of mind—I mean native, pure, bright, hopeful intellect is not a thing to be monopolized. Are the children of the rich, the learned, the powerful any more likely to be favoured with it than those of the virtuous and industrious poor? Is nature partial or even parsimonious in the bestowal of this gift? Nay! go into the by-ways of life, sequestered glen, the rugged steep of the mountain side, where

the poor cottager has erected his hovel, you pity its ragged homeliness, its poverty-stricken plainness, its want of those things which men are disposed to consider indispensable to comfort. But look upon the little flock gathered within that rude fold,—their well-developed, active limbs, their ruddy cheeks, their bright eyes, their sparkling countenances, their merry laugh, their gleesome gambols all tell us that the majesty and beauty of intellect is there—intellect whose waters bubble and gush up from their native fountains in spite of the frozen incrustation about the surface; intellect, perhaps, such as soared in the philosophy of a Newton, the verse of a Milton, or burst forth in the eloquence of a Demosthenes. Who can say that the future history of some in that family may not be interwoven with that of their country. And prouder may that father be of those heaven-endowed sons; prouder may that mother be of those blooming daughters, than of wealth, of place or power in all their efforts to bury stolid imbecility beneath a costly garb or a dashing equipage.

And if God crowns the most oppressed child of poverty with mind and intellect capable of the broadest development and the loftiest conceptions; if God crowns them with such endowments, let man beware how he would check their development or stifle their aspirations.

Defeat and scorn and shame  
Be his who strives to blind  
The restless, leaping waves of thought,  
The free tide of the mind."

We shall hail with gladness the dawning of that day in our country when the highest university shall be free as the common school, and both shall be free as the air we breathe or the water we drink.

But, lest we should be misapprehended, we urge no Utopian system of education that aims at converting the great mass of mankind into philosophers, poets, or statesmen. Till man can satisfy his appetite for food upon the abstractions of logic or grow fat upon mathematics, such a project, were it effected, would only produce famine and want. Education should not only be universal but practical; not unfitting for labour, but fitting to act with intelligence; not to smooth and wither the hand, but give nerve and power to the head, not regarding so much the exterior polish as the mental strength. We would have the people so educated that habits of reading and reflection, and above all of independent thought, will be formed. We would have them educated with direct reference to the many avocations of life, and the responsibility that will devolve upon them as members of society. By true education we mean the development of the individuality of each person, so that he may recognize himself as disintegrated from the great mass of humanity and possessed of personal responsibilities and of personal aspirations. The want of this individuality is at once the characteristic and the curse of Mohammedan nations of the east. There society is reduced to a dead level—all are alike ignorant. The beggar might as well be the prince, the prince the beggar, as far as any intellectual fitness for their different positions is concerned. It is, indeed, one form of equality that is here exhibited, but it is not an equality that has any necessary connection with liberty. Where this individuality is not developed each person looks upon himself as not belonging to himself, but to the state. A singular and ludicrous instance of this abnegation of self-ownership is the law said still to be in force among some Tartar tribes which punishes most severely any one who dares to pull the tuft of hair upon another man's head, not because it injures the wearer of that precious ornament, but because *all tufts belong to the state*. This is just such ownership as some men concede to political parties now-a-days—intellect, conscience, nay, the very tufts of hair upon their heads, belong to political demagogues, and they may plait them into any fantastic shape they please without the least murmur of complaint on the part of the poor