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## I. Papers on Practical Education.

### 1. LEARNING BY ROTE.

[We have here thrown together some extracts on the evil effects of "cramming," on the brain and nervous system of children—an old subject, but one on which there is still unhappily but too much need to repeat the lesson. The first extract is from the "Chapters in Physiology" of that eminent London physician and man of science Sir Henry Holland; the second from a very able paper on the physical influence of certain methods of teaching, in the English Social Science Transactions for 1857, by Surgeon R. B. Carter; the third, from the able work of Mr. Bain on the Senses and the Intellect.]

The whole art of education as respects the memory consists in regulating the reception of first impressions, so as to give them firmest hold on the mind; and in furnishing methods by which the power of recollection in dependence on the will may be best guided and maintained. But, though thus simple in its outline, the education of the memory is in reality rendered a very difficult problem by the numerous natural diversities already mentioned, and one much less capable of being determined by general rules than is commonly believed. There are, however, various points in which its efficiency may be greatly increased by experience and good sense directed toward the result. And these are precisely the instances where physiology and medical knowledge afford suggestions of much value with reference both to particular cases and to the more general methods employed.

Upon this topic, however, I cannot enter beyond one remark which bears directly on the subject before us. This is the fact well attested by experience, that the memory may be seriously, sometimes lastingly injured by pressing upon it too hardily and continuously in early life. Whatever theory we hold as to this great function of our nature, it is certain that its powers are only gradually developed, and that if forced into premature exercise they are impaired by the effort. This is a maxim indeed of general import, applying to the condition and culture of every faculty of body and mind; but singularly to the one we are now considering, which forms in one sense the foundation of our intellectual life. A regulated exercise, short of actual fatigue, enlarges its capacity both as to reception and retention, and gives promptitude as well as clearness to its action. But we are bound to refrain from goading it by constant and laborious efforts in early life, and before the instrument has been strengthened to its work, or it decays on our hands. We lose its present power and often enfeeble it for all future use.

Even when by technical contrivances the youthful memory has been crowded by facts and figures, injury is often done thereby to the growth of that higher part of the faculty which recollects and combines its materials for intellectual purposes. And this is especially true when the subjects pressed on the mind are those not naturally congenial to it,—a distinction very real in itself, and partially recognized by all, yet often unduly neglected in our systems of education. The necessity must be admitted in practice of adopting certain average rules under which the majority of cases may be included. But special instances are ever before us where the mind by its constitution is so unfitted for particular objects that the attempt to force the memory or other faculties upon them is not merely fruitless but hazardous in result. It is tersely said by Hippocrates, *Φυσίως ἀντιπρατούσης, κίενα πάντα\**—a maxim requiring some qualification, yet never to be disregarded in our dealings either with the mental or bodily condition of man. . . . In the course of my practice, I have seen some striking and melancholy instances of the exhaustion of the youthful mind by this over exercise of its faculties. In two of these unattended with paralytic affection or other obvious bodily disorder than a certain sluggishness in the natural functions, the torpor of mind approached almost to imbecility. Yet here there had before been acute intellect with great sensibility; but these qualities

\* When nature opposes, our labor is lost.