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Academic Teaching.

AN EXTRACT FROM AN ADDRESS BY THE LATE REV. DR. OLIN.

Nothing, either in the plan or management of a literary institution, is of any real value as an instrument of education, any farther than it contributes to one of the two great ends of MENTAL DISCIPLINE, AND THE FORMATION OF RIGHT MORAL SENTIMENTS AND HABITS.

Mental discipline is the great central idea of education, and the chief and proper end of scholastic teaching. Knowledge, which is the fruit of study, does not constitute education nor any part of it. The most comprehensive and critical acquaintance with philosophy, or mathematics, or languages, or history, or law, or medicine, or of all these together, is not education, nor is it the object in quest of which the student visits a literary institution. A man may possess a good degree of knowledge in all of these and many other branches without being an educated man. Were the well-trained scholar, on the contrary, at the moment of his transition from academic shades into the active, wide world, to be smitten with the utter oblivion of all the knowledge obtained through the medium of books, and experiments, and the oral teaching of professors, he might still bear away with him all that is fundamental and truly essential in education. He would carry with him a mind habituated to observe, to compare, to reason—the power of concentration, of fixed and continuous attention—and a lively and right perception of the beautiful, the pure, and the true. These are the real constituents of intellectual education. They are not knowledge, but elements of mental power far better than knowledge, and adapted to the acquisition and right use of all knowledge. The scholar whom we have supposed to be suddenly bereft of all memory of his scholastic acquisitions is no longer a learned, but he is still a well-educated man, for he retains the mental discipline which results from close and systematic study.

Mental discipline, then, is the fundamental principle, the *beau ideal* of education, on which both teacher and learner should fix a steadfast eye. To this all-important result, the course of study, the manner and amount of teaching, the hours of study and of recreation, should be exclusively or chiefly directed, and it is exactly in proportion as an educational establishment practically secures this object that it answers the immediate and most important end of its institution.

Deviations from this cardinal maxim in the philosophy of education are sometimes unavoidable, and frequently so in academic schools. Candidates for the active employments of life seek here for the special qualifications adapted to their chosen pursuits, without aspiring to the true and proper results of liberal education, or after having secured these results, so far as their circumstances will allow. The satisfaction of such wants becomes an important and interesting duty, which is best performed when along with the special teaching required, a constant reference is had, so far as possible, to the more general and higher objects of mental cultivation. The surveyor, the engineer, the merchant, and the schoolmaster, present a demand for instruction in those branches of knowledge, the application of which, in the active pursuits of life, will form the chief business of their several vocations; but beyond this narrow sphere they have parts to act as citizens and as men, for which special and professional attainments can not furnish adequate preparation, any further than the acquisition and application of them may train the intellectual powers to reasoning and to thought. The true and permanent interests of this numerous and important class of pupils, no less than those of candidates for the learned professions, will be best subserved by prosecuting their particular objects, under such conditions as will most effectually secure the general and more important end of all

scholastic exercises, and the intelligent and experienced teacher will study, in these instances and others more difficult and anomalous, to provide for both the special and the general want.

Much will depend upon the course of study prescribed to the pupil. The diligent and painstaking student will acquire intellectual strength and discipline from every branch of learning to which he devotes his attention, but a proper selection is still highly important. Without entering into an extended discussion of this topic, I content myself with expressing the opinion, formed after a good deal of experience and observation, that the usual academic course of linguistic and mathematical studies is fully entitled to the preference which it has so long enjoyed in our higher seminaries. I know not indeed, what studies could be substituted for these; I do not say with the prospect of equal, or nearly equal utility, but without endangering the best interests of education. So strong is my conviction of the superior value of these branches, as the means of mental culture, that I should not hesitate to advise a pupil from the district school, who had only a single year for academic training, and no special objects in view beyond that of general improvement, to employ that year in the diligent and critical study of the Latin language and Geometry; and I should confidently expect from the prosecution of such a plan more progress in mental discipline and good taste than a much longer period given to compends of philosophy, natural history, logic, and metaphysics would confer. It is a problem well worthy of a practical solution, whether the substitution of a small number of such studies for the comprehensive, but desultory, fragmentary, and superficial course usually pursued in female seminaries, would not produce a decided improvement in this interesting department of education.

To be really valuable and salutary in their disciplinary influence upon the mind, studies should be few as well as judiciously chosen. A chapter critically and thoroughly mastered is worth more than a volume hastily gone over, considered either as the means of intellectual culture or as a facility to future progress. The crowded courses of our colleges and academies constitute a crying evil, against which every friend of liberal education is bound to protest. We have nearly doubled the number of studies within the last twenty or thirty years, with no corresponding advancement in sound scholarship. I would not have less study imposed upon the pupil, but more careful and profound study—fewer books, but more thoughtful and intimate communion with them. It is not easy, I fear, to make the improvement in this respect, of which many intelligent and practised teachers feel and acknowledge the want. Our higher seminaries are running a race of eager competition, in which it might be dangerous to pause and look for the safest road. Deference, too, is to be done to public sentiment, though it may chance on such a subject to be neither enlightened nor reasonable. As teachers however, we are bound to keep our eye fixed upon first principles, and follow them out as well as we can. I shall be excused, on such an occasion, for uttering sound maxims, whatever embarrassment may be experienced in giving to them a practical and rightful ascendancy.

The difficulties referred to, press less heavily, I apprehend, on academies and preparatory schools than on colleges and universities, for, in having to provide for a greater variety of ages, attainments, and objects, they are necessarily endowed with a larger discretion. Of one important class of pupils, those who aspire to a collegiate course, the earlier studies must generally be prescribed by the teacher, and conducted under his auspices with little liability to disturbing influences from any quarter. Here, then, is a favourable opportunity for laying the foundation of sound and accurate scholarship, such as is not likely to occur at a later period; and here it is that the intellectual bias, habits, and character are, perhaps