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Vibeful Education.

The ordained agencies for teaching have been mumbling little else but dead formulas.—*Herbert Spencer.*

This is a strange assertion of the eminent scientist. Yes, strange indeed is it if amid the time-honoured system, renowned schools, and wise instructors existing at our head centres, we hear nothing but the sound of "dead formulas," and learn nothing save the antiquated accumulations of bygone ages. Strange, if the thousands of young men frequenting the halls of learning are doomed while there to live in the far past, and thus remain in ignorance of the knowledge which would fit them for the practical issues of life.

Now, it is well known that this is the conclusion of a large and by no means unintelligent class, and they believe that that classical and mathematical system which has held absolute sway in our universities for upwards of two centuries, is well nigh collapsed, being unsuited to the requirements of the present age, when the value of every science, even that of theology itself, is tested by its practical bearing on the present life of man.

It is only fair to state here that this is my own belief, and in this and the following contributions, I will endeavor to assign my reasons and exhibit that which appears to me to be the system likely to supersede it. I will first point out the old, or grinding theory, in order that we may apprehend it more clearly, and understand the succeeding reflections respecting it.

1. The object of education is purely and solely a discipline of the understanding.

2. Classics and mathematics are the best adapted to train the faculties.

3. It matters not whether the subject be interesting.

4. It is immaterial whether the students think or care to think about the questions which occupy the highest minds.

5. The Latin and Greek grammars are the strongest tonics to the juvenile mind.

In the above we have before us the platform upon which the vast majority of our educationalists do now, and have long taken their stand. It is not necessary for me to enter into a refutation of the fallacies in it, inasmuch as, in the light of a truer psychology, they are patent on the face. The principles wrapped up in this grinding system find few if any advocates among those familiar with the mind and its laws of development; and these alone are the proper judges. It is maintained by those that the only legitimate province of education is to implant the germs of knowledge in the juvenile mind, to teach the laws in accordance with which these germs are to be developed, and the fruit assimilated with our mental nature. Further: that the only correct system of education is that which gives students a taste of the sweets of knowledge, awakens in them an enthusiasm for it, and fits their natural implements for its acquisition. Thus discipline and utility are to go hand in hand; the one is not to be separated from the other, and to do so is to do violence to the very constitution of our minds.

That the present grinding system is largely at variance with this view, is easily seen, and is admitted by its supporters. Now this old theory has had its day, and during one hundred and fifty years from its adoption, did its work tolerably well; for there was nothing better to take its place. Physical science was then comparatively unknown; the English language could not be studied philologically, and mental and moral philosophy were then in their infancy. But during the past half century it has been detrimental to the progress of a higher civilization, and in no part of the civilized world are its baneful effects seen more than in Canada. For although Canada has a common school system which will compare favourably with that of older countries, yet the higher schools—those capable of fitting young men for the University—are few. Besides, the majority of those presenting themselves at our Universities are the hardy sons of toil, and whose elementary training is, in consequence, defective. I have known not a few, entering on the studies of the four years' curriculum, whose acquaintance with Latin and Greek did not extend beyond three months. Now to admit such under the present system, is little short of criminal on the part of the authorities. It is a wrong to the young men—an evil done to the country, because they are thus compelled to spend the greater part of four years, in the prime of life, in poring over Latin and Greek texts from which they derive no lasting advantage. For all their translations they are indebted to Mr. Bohn; not one in ten can translate properly five lines of Homer or Juvenal at the termination of their course. Their mental effort is almost a purely mechanical one. The beauties of style are rarely seen, and as rarely appreciated. With the thoughts, design and sentiments of the respective authors, they are ignorant. What I have said of classics in relation to partially prepared students, will apply almost wholly to mathematics, though I admit that a previous preparation in regard to the latter does not make so much difference. But in the case of a large number of our collegians, the study of mathematics, as taught at present, is up hill, half-profitless work; pursued with very little pleasure, dealing in abstractions apart from the concrete, and expanding the faculties and leaving them blank. Remember in the above class are included one-half of the number to be found in our halls of learning, and generally among these are to be found the least alloy. In these are the stamina, the administrative talent, and the moral courage requisite to a nation's greatness.

Now, were the curricula changed so as to place *abstract* mathematics, Latin, and Greek in a subordinate position, and give to the physical sciences, philosophy, English literature, modern languages, political economy, &c., the higher place, this unprepared class would profit largely by their college course, and leave with the prospect of living well; and not only so, but for we will go so far as to embrace those whose early stages are all that could be desired. They, too, would be gainers by the change. All would be better qualified for fulfilling the ends of their existence.

JERRAD MALCS.