

contained the rudiments of their poetry, history, physics, ethics, metaphysics, and theology. From this bright fountain, lipping in broken murmurs its child like tale under the soft and sunny sky of Iona, issued those diverging streams of thought, which were destined to wash the walls of great cities, to bear the stately argosies of knowledge on their broad waters, and to meet and rest at last in the ocean of perfect wisdom.

It might be interesting to trace the connexion between the diversities of national character, and the legendary tales popular in different countries,—to observe the serenity and seeming absence of pain which pervades even the most painful details of Oriental fiction,*—the irresistible admixture of humour which tempers the awfulness of Irish Banshee or Phoka,—to contrast the sharp stern outlines of the Fairy Tales of Northern Europe with the misty grandeurs of the East; agile, fairy and dusky goblin with the dim aerial form, looming in mid air, of Oriental Genius; but it would lead us too far astray from Books for the Young. The important influence exercised by such "Nursery Tales" cannot be doubted for a moment. It is obvious at a glance, that in mountaineers, for example, in the hardy Swiss and our primitive Highlanders, their patriotic ardour of attachment to their birth-place is not more owing to the remarkable features of the scenery amid which they are nurtured, than to the strange unearthly traditions which that scenery has inspired. Such glimpses into the unseen world serve at least to lift the heart from the petty sordid cares of this life to the contemplation and fellowship of bright angelic beings.

Only let there be some selection. Let it never be forgotten that a boy's character is formed, not only by the example of school friends, and friends at home, but in at least equal degree by that of the friends whom he meets and becomes acquainted with, and learns to love in the pages of his favourite books.

Among the great faults of the present day in this country are superficial intellectuality, want of originality, and dissipation of power. The abatement of these evil tendencies, doubtless, depends much on early culture. Books for the young, we have endeavored to show, should be entertaining, fitted to nourish the affections and imagination rather than the logical faculty, indirectly instructive and suggestive rather than exhaustive of their subject, presenting images of good to be followed, rather than of evil to be shunned. Above all, children must not be taught too much nor too soon. Knowledge is sometimes a hurtful burden; too much of it in proportion to the natural powers destroys originality and substitutes an unreal and insipid taste, an unconscious hypocrisy. If the dialectic faculties are later in their development than the emotions, the memory, the imagination, and the apprehension of the senses, it cannot be disputed that the young may best be influenced by personal authority and personal example; nor that the study of languages naturally comes first in order, next the events of history and human life, last of all the abstractions of Philosophy; first *words*, then *things*, lastly *ideas*. As the sense of hearing is the most acute in the dark, as the fancy is the most inventive in the glimmering twilight, so the memory is most impressible and most tenacious, the feelings are most susceptible, before they are reduced under the severe control of the mature intellect enlightened by reflection. With all that is being done for the reform of our modes of training the young, we have still to struggle with the evils of an indiscriminate and premature education. Goethe, in his *Wilhelm Meister*, sagaciously protests against an uniform dress for his Utopian schoolboys. To discover the embryo genius, if he had any, of each boy, and to give it especial cultivation, was one secret of the influence of the Jesuits. They knew that our wishes are the prognostication of our powers. With us in Great Britain it is different. Not in large schools only, but in the narrower circle of home, it is too often to be deplored, that those who have care of the young, and who ought to know of each one what he is, and what he is best able to do, fail to observe their several traits, and to shape their rough-hewn capacities to the proper end. The other evil is even more serious. The anxiety to make clever children defeats itself,—it spoils thousands who might be clever men. Not a few, and those the most promising,—children for example like Hartley Coleridge—require to be positively kept back, not urged onwards. In his pitiable case, it was not the predominance of fancy in his childhood that was unhealthy, but the unboyish consciousness of self. Games at play with other boys would have been far better for him than to sit listening with greedy ears to the philosophers of the Lakes. The two greatest among our British poets, Shakespeare and Milton, both speak complainingly of their "late spring." Their regrets were unheeded. Better, far better that it should be so, than that the fruits, nipped and shrunk, should belie the promise of the abundant blossom. Let each period of life wear its own garb, and play its own part. For old age there is rest, persevering activity for manhood, and for childhood the grace and beauty and careless happiness which are peculiarly its own.

PRESENT SYSTEM OF LOCAL INSPECTION OF SCHOOLS INEFFICIENT.

In turning from the financial structure of our school system, to that portion of it which pertains more strictly to the practical business of education, the first subject which arrests attention is the mode of supervision and inspection.

It is a point generally conceded among those familiar with the subject of education, that the success of public schools depends more upon efficient supervision than upon any other one agency; that this is, indeed, that indispensable agency, without which all others have failed. Legislation may provide bountifully for the education of teachers; it may prescribe high standards of qualification; it may make stringent and wise regulations in regard to the duties of all connected with the administration of the system: but parsimony will evade, ignorance maladminister, or apathy render inefficient the best school laws, unless their execution is watched over and enforced by intelligent, active and independent supervision. Without it, cheap teachers, incompetent teachers, schools without energy or system, years spent by pupils in repeating the same branches of study, are fruits following in an invariable if not in an inevitable order of succession. The statistics of our common schools are imposing. These schools have secured great results; but what are those results, compared to those often attained by individuals by a proportionable expenditure of time and money? By the liberal arrangements of the government, tuition is rendered cheap to all, and free to the absolutely indigent. Every man, if he chooses, can send his children to school from infancy until they are called to enter upon the active pursuits of life. A large portion of our population do send their children for several months of each year, for eight, ten or twelve years. What is usually acquired by the pupils during this time? A knowledge, and that a not very profound one, of half a dozen elementary branches! Every winter the boy commences about the same round of studies, and at very nearly the same starting point; and when the term closes, he is considered to have discharged his duty creditably, if he has made a slight advance beyond former ones, and become a little more familiar with the path so often trodden. Under proper and vigorous tuition, three or four years of the life of a pupil should be amply sufficient for the attainment of elementary branches, and the remaining four should be devoted to those higher ones which will discipline his mind, fit him for business pursuits, and prepare him to discharge intelligently and well the high duties of citizenship.

How are our schools to be roused from this leaden, prescriptive inefficiency? In the judgment of the undersigned, the meliorating change must be looked for, if at all, mainly from the influences of a competent, high-toned, and zealous supervision. The history of our legislation in this particular, has been one of mutations. The plan in force prior to 1843, gave three commissioners and three inspectors to each town; a cumbrous and unwieldy machinery, but one that at first attained creditable results, when the most highly gifted and educated men lent their efforts to lay the foundations of an institution in which they felt that so many hopes centred. But when the experiment had been tried, and its success demonstrated, they felt at liberty to resign their trusts to those to whom the pay of the office afforded a compensation for their time and labour. Thereupon this plan of supervision rapidly degenerated, and soon became *effete*. In 1839, unpaid school visitors were appointed in each town by the superintendent of common schools. Their labors were productive of benefit in turning public attention to the schools; but a body of officers who neither inspected teachers, nor possessed any power over schools but an advisory one, was more serviceable in detecting evils than in correcting them. In 1841, the county superintendency was established, and the town school officers reduced to *o.c.* In some counties, where incompetent officers were selected, it resulted in little visible benefit, but generally it was far otherwise. In counties where qualified and zealous superintendents were chosen, it marked the commencement of a new era in the schools. With the pruning of a rigid and fearless inspection, a higher grade of qualification in teachers was secured. Under the stimulus of a certain and appreciating supervision, every teacher was both roused and encouraged to constant effort. The spirit spread to the people. They flocked to the school room to meet and hear an officer who brought to them high intelligence in his vocation; a knowledge of improved systems, processes and books, gleaned from a wide field of observation; and who was fired with the zeal and energy flowing from the concentration of time and attention to a single object. In some counties the enthusiasm reached such a height, that processions of children with banners and songs of welcome, greeted the superintendent as he passed from town to town. School celebrations multiplied. The schools became one of the prominent topics of popular conversation, and popular interest. The natural fruits of such an awakening followed. Better selected and better paid teachers, more regular attendance, greater uniformity in text books, more commodious school houses, and above all, a more earnestly aroused parental co-operation, marked the new order of things.

*Mr. Hackaday has mentioned a good instance of this painlessness in the destruction of the *Forty Thieves*, in the *fort* are, by Ali Baba's spending oil.