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TABLE OF CONTENTS.

Motive Power in Education..	177	Rectification	188
Practical Hints and Exercises	178	Honours to Canadians.....	188
Accurate Expression.....	181	POETRY :	
Train Pupils to Think	182	Sowing	188
Beauty of the Clouds.....	182	What the old clock said to	
School Government.....	183	me.....	188
Visit of H. R. H. Princess		Practical Methods of Physical	
Louise and the Marquis of		Culture in Schools.....	189
Lorne to McGill University	185	Jacotot's Paradoxes.....	190
Visit of H. R. H. Princess		MISCELLANEOUS :	
Louise and the Marquis of		Boarding round	191
Lorne to Villa Maria.....	186	Socialism.....	191
EDITORIAL :		Early English Dwellings..	192
Articles deferred.....	188	Meteorology	192

Motive Power in Education.

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As is the motive so is the man, and in this respect also "the child is father of the man." Whether, therefore, we speak of the schoolroom or of the university, it is of primary importance to secure the best motive power. And the best is not merely that which happens to be the strongest, Nay, the worst case is that in which the strongest is not the best. It is the strongest in a particular person because the wrong thing has got uppermost; and perhaps the teacher, by undue indulgence and stimulation, is strengthening what he should weaken, and weakening what he should strengthen. In things mechanical, we are satisfied to get a motor of any kind, provided it be powerful enough, inexpensive, and easy of application; but man being rational, and an end in himself, quite other necessities arise. In this human mechanism there is a spirit within the wheels, and all executive ability that militates against spiritual perfection is worse than lost. However much we may covet scholarship, we have always to remember that there is something beyond, and to strive so to make the scholar as not to unmake the man.

Motives, therefore in education must be ranked as lower or higher. Among the lower motives may be reckoned the rod, the desire to win prizes, medals, bursaries or scholarships, and the feeling of emulation, whether in its spontaneous form, or as stimulated and forced by class lists and marks of approval. Among the higher will stand the love of knowledge, self-respect, thoughts of ideal perfection, the sense of duty, and a generous scorn of idleness and of all superficial, imperfect work.

As to the rod, it has always placed a more or less useful part in the training of boys. Now and then a teacher or parent has had such a genius for government as to be able to do without it, but the cases are rare, and even then it is valuable as a power in reserve. As a good horse goes all the better for a whip in the carriage, so in the schoolroom it is well to have a rod in the back-ground. To supersede it, however, higher influences should be the teacher's ideal, toward which let him travel as fast as he can. The rod may be called the fourth R, and like the other famous three is only preliminary to something beyond.

The teacher should, I think, act in the same spirit in relation to other secondary motives. Competitive examinations, prizes, class lists and similar honors are perhaps useful incentives, within certain limits, but they are certainly not incentives of a very high order, and may easily be pressed to the detriment of nobler principles. In earlier years more manly sentiments may need to be supplemented by such auxiliaries, but it is never well to lay the chief stress on the lower part of our nature, not even in boyhood, much less during the university career. Competitive examinations, with the accompanying rewards and honors, are much relied on in our day, especially in England and Canada, and there is reason to fear that we are getting rather beyond the wise and healthy use of such stimulants. This has been called "the age of examination," and the Germans sneer at us, saying that it is as if we stood crying to all the world, "Come, come, and be examined." Examinations of some sort are, I suppose, indispensable, but they are by no means an infallible test of excellence, and when made not merely the