

Miscellaneous.

WHAT IS EDUCATION?

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The great end of education is not to train a man to get a living. This is plain, because life was given for a higher end than simply to toil for its own prolongation. A comfortable subsistence is indeed very important to the purposes of life, be this what it may. A man half-fed, half-clothed, and fearing to perish from famine or cold, will be too crushed in spirit to do the work of a man. He must be set free from the iron grasp of want, from the constant pressure of painful sensations, from grinding, ill-requited toil. Unless a man be trained to get a comfortable support, his prospects of improvement and happiness are poor. But if his education aims at nothing more, his life will turn to little account.

To educate a man is to unfold his faculties, to give him the free and full use of his powers, and especially of his best powers. It is first to train the intellect, to give him a love of truth, and to instruct him in the processes by which it may be acquired. It is to train him to soundness of judgment, to teach him to weigh evidence, and to guard him against the common sources of error. It is to give him a thirst for knowledge, which will keep his faculties in action through life. It is to aid him in the study of the outward world, to initiate him into the physical sciences, so that he will understand the principles of his trade or business, and will be able to comprehend the phenomena which are continually passing before his eyes. It is to make him acquainted with his own nature, to give him that most important means of improvement, self-comprehension.

In the next place, to educate a man, is to train the conscience, to give him a quick, keen discernment of the right; to teach him duty in its great principles and minute applications, to establish in him immovable principles of action. It is to show him his true position in the world, his true relation to God and his fellow-beings, and immutable obligations laid on him by these. It is to inspire him with the idea of perfection, to give him a high moral aim, and to show how this may be maintained in the commonest toils, and how every thing may be made to contribute to its accomplishment.

Further, to educate a man in this country, is to train him to be a good citizen, to establish him in the principles of political science, to make him acquainted with our history, government and laws, to teach him our great interests as a nation, and the policy by which they are to be advanced, and to impress him deeply with his responsibility, his great trust, his obligations to disinterested patriotism as the citizen of a free state.

Again, to educate a man is to cultivate his imagination and taste, to awaken his sensibility to the beautiful in nature and art, to give him the capacity of enjoying the writings of men of genius, to prepare him for the innocent and refined pleasures of literature.

I will only add, that to educate a man is to cultivate his powers of expression, so that he can bring out his thoughts with clearness and strength, and exert a moral influence over his fellow creatures. This is essential to the true enjoyment and improvement of social life.

According to these views, the labouring classes may be said to have as yet few means of education, excepting those which Providence furnishes, in the relations, changes, occupations and discipline of life. The great school of life, of Providence, is indeed open to all. But what, I would ask, is done by our public institutions for the education of the mass of the people? In the mechanical nature of our common schools, is it ever proposed to unfold the various faculties of a human

being, and to prepare him for self-improvement through life? Indeed, according to the views of education now given, how defective are our institutions for rich as well as poor, and what a revolution is required in our whole system of training the young.

The great aim of philanthropy should be, that every member of the community may receive such an education as has been described. To bring forward every human being, to develop every mind, is the great purpose of society. I say of society, not of government, for government is a mere instrument for holding society together, a condition of its existence, and not the great power by which its ends are to be accomplished. One of the pernicious doctrines of the day, very pernicious to the working classes, is, that government is to regenerate society, and exalt the individual to his true dignity. Government enables us to live together in society, and to make efforts for our own and others' welfare. But social progress depends on the spirit in each man's breast, and not on the operations of the state. Government may be compared to the foundation and walls of a manufactory, which enclose and protect not the moving and guiding power, but the necessary condition of their action. The people must not look to it for what their own energies can alone effect. * * *

THE SIMPLIFICATION OF KNOWLEDGE.—All great truths, whether of morals or physics, are marked by their simplicity. Although not an absolute test, since false principles or paradox often seek shelter under the same forms; yet we may affirm, that in proportion as truths become more complete and comprehensive, so are the expressions appropriate to them more simple and determinate. And this is especially the case in regard to physical knowledge. Though facts have wonderfully multiplied, so as to encumber the mind of the student, and seemingly to dis sever the material world into endless fractional parts, yet has the discovery of new relations and connections tended unceasingly to reduce the facts under more general laws, and to give to science a unity and simplicity of a higher kind at every great step in its progress. To what future point this process of integration may proceed, we hardly venture to surmise. We may at least express our belief that we stand but on the margin of what science will hereafter attain in the union and simplification of all the great laws of the natural world.—*Quarterly Review*.

CAUTION NECESSARY IN INFERENTIAL REASONING.—Nothing is more characteristic of a manly and cultivated understanding, than the habit of suspending opinion in doubtful cases, and of abstaining from unwarrantable inferences. A wise man is induced to suspend his inferences by the modest recollection of his ignorance, and the fallibility of his judgment. On the contrary, both weak minds and ardent minds,—the former from fear, the latter from presumption, fix upon the first inference which the nature of an effect may suggest.

In philosophical inquiries, inferences should follow the most complete and satisfactory induction; and where, from the nature of the case, this complete and satisfactory induction cannot take place, we should ingenuously confess our ignorance. The chief source of false systems of natural philosophy has been, that probable or plausible conjectures have been admitted in place of just inferences; such conjectures, how plausible soever they may seem, ought merely to be employed hypothetically to suggest and guide experiments.—*Taylor's Elements of Thought*.