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ARTICLE I.

THOUGHTS ON EDUCATION.

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Nothing is more promising, in theory, than *Education*; and nothing less certain, in practice. No science has been more deeply studied; and, in none have fewer important principles been permanently settled. Every age regrets the system, under which it was itself trained, and brings up a new generation to sigh, with similar regrets, for the errors of its predecessors. If we listen to the uniform complaints of the thoughtful, of all times, we shall be inclined to adopt the opinion of Dr. Johnson, that "Education was as well understood by the ancients as it ever can be," and to add, that it was not understood, at all, by them.

Considered as an object of enterprise it is beautiful, sublime even, "worth ambition." It is to unfold the power of thought—thought, which propagates itself forever. It is to discipline the will, the central principle of character, of all finite power, great or good. It is to nurse and mature the social and moral sensibilities of a spiritual and immortal being. Can anything be so interesting to think of, so noble to attempt? Upon the material substance of the earth it seems to be our destiny to leave very little impression. A fire, or a wave of sand passes over them, and our proudest works disappear. Time wears them all away. We search, in vain, for memorials of men beyond a few generations

before us. The coral insect builds up a structure, whose base is the unchanging bed of the sea, and on whose summit men congregate, and contend, and triumph, and pass away, and leave no trace of themselves behind. Why is it, but to intimate to us, that the true impress of our power is to be made upon mind rather than matter? The little worm, embalmed and cofined in the imperishable rock, has all of immortality, which the earth knows. For the earth's noblest creature, its lord, must there not be a loftier destiny, a more enduring memorial? May not man enshrine himself in a nobler mausoleum? Can he not engrave his name upon a work of costlier material and more lasting?

In this view it is not strange, that education has attracted so much attention; that philosophy earnestly investigates the theory of it; that ingenuity patiently devises new methods; and that private charity and public munificence so foster the institutions, which experience has approved, or enterprise proposed for the instruction and discipline of the human mind. For what besides has so much been done? In what other respect, among civilized nations, are men so cared for, and provided for? The powers of the State, and the nearer and more direct influences of domestic life, have no higher or more engrossing object. The great anxiety of mature life is to secure the benefits of education to the young. The intelligent parent deems it the richest legacy to his children. The poor prize it as the means of advancement to their families; the rich as the secret of a power which wealth alone cannot confer. All unite in declamation on its advantages, and in zeal for its improvement.

Accordingly, the apparatus, with which science and experience have furnished us, for the work, has become complicated and prodigious. And it is worthy of remark, that whilst the agency, thus brought into exercise, is almost everywhere gigantic and apparently irresistible, the subject upon which it is designed to act is, in the highest degree susceptible of impression,

"Tremblingly alive all o'er
To each fine impulse."

The circumstances could hardly be more advantageous. Mature intellect is acting upon the docility of infancy; strength engages with flexibility; skill and art are working on simplicity and enthusiasm. It is no wonder, that high hopes are indulged, that prophecy grows eloquent upon the future triumphs of this mighty power. No wonder that to the fond parent and the sanguine

philanthropist come teeming visions, brighter and sweeter than the light which foreshows the day. It is natural; perhaps, it is well. Who could relinquish the hope which never dies in a parent's bosom? What loving heart would live to despair of humanity? Who does not expect almost all he wishes for his children and mankind? Were it otherwise, charity and faith and enterprise would hardly be found on the earth. No good thing is ever done, but to realize a great hope.

To these hopes, springing fresh in every heart, repeated in their original brightness and cherished with undiminished fondness in every successive generation, the sacred writings add their divine sanction. Religion encourages the assurance, that if we "train up a child in the way he should go, when he is old he will not depart from it."

And yet how little, after all, do our best systems accomplish. To how great a degree do men grow up, notwithstanding, by an apparently spontaneous development. How seldom are they made what they become, by any or all of our methods. How much of the best mind in society owes, comparatively, little to our discipline; how much of the worst is bad in spite of it.

In this view the declamation of the schools and the wisdom of sages upon the power of education will sometimes appear to a considerate man equally empty and vain. Fifteen or twenty years of parental life are very apt to cool a little the ardor of our expectations, and moderate somewhat the confidence of our tone upon this topic. The man, who begins with lofty ideas of the omnipotence of education is in danger of living to run into the opposite extreme, and to wonder at the sanguine anticipations of his earlier days, if not to question the utility of systems and methods altogether.

The truth seems to be, that systematic education is but an element in our mental culture. Other influences unite with it, and modify it more than we are aware. No system of instruction can be made to monopolize the pupil's attention; no vigilance can guard all the avenues of thought; no agency of ours can entirely control the mental habits of the most docile and confiding. Our own voice is but one of the hundred that are constantly addressing him. The most engaging train of thought we can inspire in him is not a tithe of those which incessantly follow one another through his mind every waking hour of his life. Impressions are everywhere forced upon him; the ear is always open; the eye drinks in ideas from all around and above him. Every office of

friendship, every reflection of influence of which he is the source or the object, every consciousness of the presence of external objects, animate or inanimate, every hope awaked or blasted, every change without or within him that serves to mark the progress of his existence, is so much done to form his character, so much to give shape and color to his intellectual and moral being. In this sense of the word, a sense much more comprehensive than that, in which we have hitherto used it in these pages, education is always and everywhere going on. We are educated by all we think, and by all we do; by what we see and what we hear. Day and night instruct us; morning and evening, the rising and the setting sun; the moon and the stars, the sunshine and the storm are all eloquent teachers. Secret influences are incessantly stealing into the heart from every scene of nature, and from every incident of life. It is a great mistake to suppose that precepts and restraints are the principal instruments of education. Your circumstances, your wealth, your poverty, your business, your recreations, your history, your prospects, are all efficient instructors of your children. What you do not say, as well as what you say, what you omit to do, no less than what you do, where you are and what you are, in public or in private, have as much to do in forming the character of your son, as the institutions you select for him and the tuition you provide.

It must not be overlooked in estimating the influence of instruction, that the subject of this influence is a free agent, an independent being; and not simply passive, to be moulded, like wax, by the plastic hand of the artist, or carved, like marble. From the beginning the mind has all the attributes of moral freedom. It may be weak; but it will not be compelled; it cannot be dragged nor driven. The tiny spirit in the nurse's arms spurns the foot of power with the indignant self-importance of the Hampdens. Force only awakens freedom. The very ideas we inculcate are no longer the same the moment they find their way into another mind. They become immediately subject to a new power, are colored, modified, dissolved and recombined. Ideas are not quantities, fixed and conveyed at will from one to another. They are merely materials of thought, hints, starting points for a most free, most original, most independent artist. Every new thought is a new premise for the reason, a new stand-point for the imagination. Locks of cotton or hanks of silk are put into the hand of industry; but who can foresee, what they shall come back, of what texture, or hue, whether a coat of mail to shield the

sailor-boy from the storm, or a curtain of gossamer to float before the face of beauty? And who shall divine into what possible forms the materials of thought, which education supplies may be wrought by the free spirit? Who shall set limits to the new combinations of ideas, and consequently new forms of character, which, by the very act of instruction, are we teaching our pupils to create for themselves? Indeed, just in proportion as we succeed in developing the mind, we render it independent of our own control. At every successive stage of education we hold a more disputed empire. Every step we advance, so much is done to rouse the power of thought, and nourish the spirit of self-reliance. Despotism must always be based upon ignorance. There is no more mortifying lesson than is taught us every day, by our impotent attempts to tame and lead about the little heart of infant man. Power is baffled, by an insignificant being, whose puny frame, we feel, that we might crush in our hand. The soul, composed as if it animated a gigantic form, looks out and laughs, or curls the lip, at the assumption of authority. Who has not felt at once, his weakness and his strength, his littleness and his nobility, as he has seen our nature thus erect itself upon the foundation of its native greatness, and saying, in very childhood, "My Master is in heaven."

Again; our ignorance alone is enough to render all systems uncertain. It is regarded as one of the most embarrassing circumstances in medical practice, that the vital functions are carried on in profound darkness. Irregular action and its causes are only intimated by obscure signs in the external man. The mental phenomena, in sickness and health, all thought and feeling, are equally concealed, with the additional security from detection, that they control, to a great degree, even the outward symptoms of their own existence and character. The moral pulse is a very imperfect diagnostic. In vain the most penetrating eye searches the bosom even of a friend. That friend himself but half knows, what is going on there. When he tells us with apparent frankness all the secrets of his heart, how we still long to look into his soul. That sanctuary no eye may profane. The prerogative of moral privacy cannot be taken away. God only knows the heart-sweet thought, to an honest man, that there is one, who knows it—and, therefore, God only "turneth the heart as the rivers of water are turned."

It is worthy of remark also, that we have no direct power over mind, the most docile and yielding, even our own. We cannot

say to this feeling, "Come," and to that feeling, "Go." We cannot command a thought. Our influence, when easiest and strongest, is all indirect. To produce thought in ourselves, it is not enough to say, "I will think." The laws of thought must be observed; the occasions of thought must be presented; the objects of thought must awaken the attention. In no other way can we enjoy the privilege even of forming our own character, and determining our own destiny. Instruction and discipline, therefore, have no exclusive right; they cannot monopolize the work of education. They perform a part; important it may be, but yet a part only; and that on precisely the same principles, according to which all other influences are exerted upon mind. The consequence is, that, with all its freedom, mind is, in spite of itself, subject to incessant education. It cannot stand still. It is never the same to-day that it was yesterday. It never repeats the experience of an hour. Society and solitude, action and repose, man and nature, all things instruct us, all are working changes in us.

The result of these views of education is, obviously, not at all to lessen our interest in its improvement as a science, or to let down our idea of its dignity as an art. It is, undoubtedly, however, to moderate, in some degree, the sanguine expectations of those, who look altogether to schools and systems of instruction for realizing our hopes of the progress of mankind.

We may not effect all we aim at; we may not, at present, approximate to our ideal of a perfect education. But let us not petulantly abandon modes of culture, to which long and large experience has given its sanction, because it does not accomplish impossibilities; nor undervalue our institutions of learning, because they are imperfect. We have a certain degree of direct influence in the development of intellectual and moral character—influence most valuable and important, beginning with the dawn of reason and continuing to the end of life; essentially and forever affecting the usefulness and happiness of all that are dear to us, throughout the whole period of their being. This influence we cannot too much cherish. The schools and colleges, the domestic training, and the public religious instruction, by which it is exerted, are above all price. Private charity and the treasures of the State are not ill employed in extending and perpetuating it. Family government is not well administered, legislation is shortsighted and illiberal, where education is not the prominent object of parental solicitude and deliberative wisdom.

But we had in view, in the commencement of these remarks, a class of influences, less direct, collateral, by which, even where our systems of instruction are most perfect, all the character they develop is materially modified. Some of these we proceed to specify. And the first which occurs to us is the atmosphere of the place—the “genius loci.” Tacitus says of Agricola, “Arcebat eum ab illecebris peccantium, praeter ipsius bonam integramque naturam, quod statim parvulus sedem ac magistram studiorum, Massiliam habuerit, locum Graeca comitate et provinciali parcimonia mixtum, ac bene compositum.” The remark discriminates with a felicity worthy of the superlative beauty of that monument of filial piety, of which it is a fragment, a kind of agency in our early training too seldom appreciated or regarded. It may not be of consequence under what star a man is born. The other planets may have little to do with his destiny. But it is of moment to him, where, upon earth, he is cradled and brought up. The mere physical features of the place are not indifferent; there are correspondences of the outward with the inward world; there are aspects of nature fit to nurse and call out the greatness and loveliness, of which the seeds and germs are in all hearts; external beauty, variety and grandeur appear mirrored, with increased softness and richness, in the calm depths of the spirit which reposes among them. The same system of instruction and the same instructors have, by no means, the same effect on mind in the town and in the country, amid the monotony of a western prairie and among the hills and waterfalls of New England.

There is, however, a local influence of another sort, and still more worthy of regard. An intellectual, spiritual atmosphere, invests the favored spots where great minds have commanded respect, and noble natures have aspired to deserve it. A seat of learning cannot become venerable without age. Time gradually gathers about its halls and groves an air of moral greatness, which no expenditure of money can anticipate. Its ample libraries, and extensive cabinets, the multiform apparatus of science, models of art, and memorials of genius, the slow accumulations of ages, all conspire to give impulse and tone to every mind admitted to its sacred retreats or suffered to repose under its classic shades. A species of grateful enchantment pervades the place; higher dignity is imparted to science; and new charms invite to liberal studies.

It is a hasty conclusion, that, because a man must be, always,

in a great degree, self-taught, he may, therefore, learn equally well, anywhere, at a university or in a farm-house. There is, indeed, no place where mind may not flourish; genius appropriates nutriment to itself from the most sterile soil; it can live upon its own blood. But in propitious scenes, surrounded by congenial objects, saluted by loving and hallowed voices, and stimulated by great examples, it conceives more lofty purposes, and advances with a bolder step. In the presence of greatness it is itself greater. In the atmosphere of thought it is easier to think. To *be*, in such society, is to improve.

There is a necessary greenness and crudeness in new institutions. The scholarship formed in them is like society in new settlements, coarse, rude, noisy, vulgar. The eminent propriety of thought, the delicate sentiment, the grace of mind, the artist-like relief and beauty of expression, which distinguish the already ripening scholar from his coëvals, are almost never the growth of young places.

Another style of mind is the product of private education. It may be conducted among the loveliest scenes of nature, and by the most skilful tutors. Nothing useful may seem to be wanting. But a sort of man is formed wholly unlike the products of the schools. He grows up too much in the shade. He is wanting, generally, in two essential points of character—a true self-reliance and respect for others. He is, accordingly, timid or rash in action, and distrustful or credulous in opinion. We learn to know ourselves and others by the same means, by measuring ourselves with them. Confidence in the duties of life is the result of experience, of trial of ourselves; and respect for mind is produced by acquaintance with mind. Arrogance, presumption, and vanity are the fruits of ignorance,—ignorance which books and tutors never entirely remove; the only certain remedy for it is found in the earnest pursuit of great objects in competition with kindred minds. We learn, in this contest, both our weakness and our strength.

Another of the accidental influences, which modify the effect of systematic education, is example.

We have in mind not the general power of example, in which each is affected by all, and all by each, and a common public sentiment generated, a social character formed; though no man liveth to himself, and thought and feeling everywhere tend to diffusion, to an equilibrium. The influence we allude to is rather that which characterizes here and there an individual, in every

community, gifted somewhat above his fellows, and capable of fusing and remoulding the minds about him. They are ruling spirits in their day and generation; and, whether elevated to attract the admiration of a whole people, or confined to a village popularity, seem evidently "born to command," and exercise, it may be, unconsciously, a formative energy. They lead, by general consent, by an acknowledged native right. Their power is in their temperament, in their will, in their earnestness, mainly. They are impersonations of moral energy. If this character be combined with a proportioned and beautiful intellectual and moral development, we then see humanity in its utmost perfection. The spectacle of such a man silently elevates and rectifies his age, his town, or his village. In a class of students, academical or professional, it raises the standard of ambition, sheds lustre on the pursuits of learning, and insensibly diffuses a liberal and generous love of letters through the whole circle. No teacher can have failed to see how sensibly the example of one true scholar is felt, and how magnanimously it is admired, among his equals and competitors.

In active life the same delightful power is illustrated. A noble heart never beats alone. A renovating spirit never breathes in vain. With living excellence we have inextinguishable sympathies. It consecrates the place of its abode, and leaves memorials of itself sculptured on the imperishable material of which souls are made. A good man with a great and resolute heart cannot live unfelt, nor die to be forgotten. And an earnest bad man is the most flagrant scourge of Heaven. The intellect perverted by him, the hearts he sours, or sears, the hopes he blasts, the happiness he poisons, who thinks of it all without wondering with David, at "the prosperity of the wicked."

For good, or for evil, we are affected more than we are aware by the models of personal energy, with which, in the course of life, it is the lot of us all, more or less to come in contact. Not one escapes, altogether, the contagion of example, more potent than all precepts, more plastic than our arts of education. A master mind, oracular even when not original, in which ordinary thoughts kindle and burn, and by which familiar subjects are electrified, is responsible, to society and to God, for a fearful power.

The only other influence of the same kind, which it occurred to us to notice, is the all important one of government. On this we do not intend to dwell. It is too ample for our space, and too important to be hastily despatched. Government educates the people

by supplying the most important trains of thought, which occupy the waking hours, or fill up the dreams, of the majority of mankind. Office, wealth, personal consideration are all dispensed, or secured, by the civil constitution and administration, under which we live. Other institutions and agencies are controlled by the public policy. If enterprise and ambition are attracted to virtuous and noble objects, if pure purposes and just principles are recommended and engendered by the civil power, if government be, indeed, "a terror to evil doers and a praise to them who do well," it is, in itself the highest and most efficient national education. If, on the other hand, wrong principles are encouraged, and bad passions appealed to, if the objects of ordinary ambition are held out as rewards to the most sagacious, the most wily, the most unscrupulous, it matters little what morals are taught in the books, or what discipline is enforced in the schools; a corrupt government is a fountain of poison.

The practical influences from the foregoing observations are:

1. That our true policy is not to multiply institutions of learning, but to enlarge the foundations and increase the advantages of those we have—to neglect nothing in or about them, which may serve to add dignity to science, or to refine and elevate the taste and the moral feelings. The seat of a college should be, if possible, a rural city; and the more of the monuments of learning and art, and living excellence, we can accumulate in it the better. Money is not wasted upon its architecture or its grounds. Not a new niche is filled with a work of genius, nor a new alcove with books, but to a useful and important end. Not a man raised in its bosom to adorn its annals should be parted with for love or money. Not a fragrant recollection in its history should be allowed to wither and dry up, nor a purifying and ennobling association with its name, or its halls, be suffered to grow dim. Whatever of the true, or beautiful, or great, or good in mind or the products of mind, in nature or art, industry or wealth can procure is part of its means of education. Baldness, sterility, deformity, physical or moral have no genial, wholesome influence upon the sensitive heart of youth.

2. It should be an object never lost sight of to secure in seminaries of learning, and indeed everywhere, examples of the most perfect mental development. Systems which tend to equalize the benefits of education by reducing the standard of practical attainment—lessening, in this way, the difference between the highest and the lowest, have the effect, ultimately, to depress all;

for they remove one of the best incitements to excellence, the actual exemplification of it in a living instance before us, and of us. If a man of preeminent character and attainment should do nothing else but exist, in the eyes of his associates and neighbors, he would live for a most enviable usefulness. And a system which raises up one such man, in a class of students, or a community, really improves and elevates the whole.

3. Good men may not excuse themselves from an active and efficient agency in the government of their country. It is just leaving the principal instrument of power over themselves, and their posterity in wicked hands. It is essentially counteracting their own endeavors to improve society. It is permitting unprincipled men to educate, in fact, to a great degree, their children. What avails it for us, under the plea of avoiding all meddling with secular, and especially civil matters, to labor in the schools, and in the church, regardless of a tremendous power incessantly at work, in high places, and carry its pestiferous influence everywhere, to corrupt and mislead society? How futile to rely on *means*, and yet not use those which a beneficent Providence has put into our hands, of determining, to some extent at least, the character of the government under which we live, and the public policy of the people of which we are a part! If government is a matter of indifference, it may be left to boys. If it is nothing but a scramble for petty titles and a little brief authority, those who love the dust and the noise of popular excitement, and public parade, should be allowed to have the conflicts and the victories all to themselves. But if most of the great objects, which men seek in life, if most of the enterprise, and industry, which fill up that life, if the spirit of the country, its morality, its integrity, its justice, its piety, its whole education, theoretical and practical, are intimately and must be forever connected with the exercise of civil power, no good man, no thoughtful Christian can shrink from his responsibilities as a citizen, can relinquish his birthright as a freeman.