

# *Theology* on *the Web.org.uk*

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes.  
Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit  
or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the  
copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the  
ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the  
links below:



*Buy me a coffee*

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



**PATREON**

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbadshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bib-sacra\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php)

THE  
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA,  
NO. XXXVII.  
AND  
AMERICAN BIBLICAL REPOSITORY,  
NO. LXXXIX.

JANUARY, 1853.

ARTICLE I.

SOCRATES AS A TEACHER.

By William S. Tyler, Professor in Amherst College.

SOCRATES was one of those few men of genius, who, endowed in large measure with all the faculties proper to man, can do almost anything, and do it well. There were in him materials enough—"with such a full and unwithdrawing hand did nature pour her bounties forth"—to form several men, and those quite extraordinary. Contemplative as Plato, observing as Aristotle, practical as Xenophon, and devout as Plutarch, he superadded to these high endowments a personal courage and a moral heroism wholly his own. Hence all these men were proud to call him master. And modern authors, as great and as unlike in their greatness, Butler and Paley and others not a few, have been happy to tread in his footsteps. Formed alike for speculation and for action, he united oriental mysticism and occidental energy; German transcendentalism and English (we had almost said *Yankee*) common sense in one harmonious whole, and subjected them all to the superior control of a sovereign conscience and an inflexible will. Hence, like the myriad-minded Shakspeare, he has been equally admired by Teutonic and Anglo-Saxon minds.

The question has been much controverted and is still *sub judice*, whether Plato or Xenophon has given the more true and just account of Socrates. The true answer seems to us to be, that neither of them

has given us the whole man. Neither of them could appreciate or understand his entire character. Of course neither of them, by himself, could draw a perfect likeness of him. But each has sketched a true picture, so far as it goes. Each has brought out certain favorite features in a strong light, while others are thrown into the shade. And the features in the foreground of the one answer to those in the background of the other; for *all belong to the same man*, just as the Christ of John's Gospel is manifestly the same person, though seen in a very different light, as the Christ of the synoptical gospels. We must combine the accounts of Xenophon and Plato, together with scattered notices by Aristotle, before we gain a complete view of Socrates; just as the partial representations, made by John and the other Evangelists, must be combined, if we would form a full and just conception of Jesus of Nazareth.

Engaged in several different pursuits in the course of his long and eventful life, he failed in none; he proved equal to whatever he undertook. *Nil tetigit, quod non ornavit.* The son of a statuary and a midwife, he followed, at different times, the profession of each of his parents; that of his father in forming statues of the habited Graces, which long attested his taste and skill in the Athenian Acropolis;<sup>1</sup> that of his mother, as he often playfully remarked, by aiding the young men of Athens in the development of their innate ideas and germs of knowledge, and thus adorning his native city with living graces and virtues more precious than statues of marble or gold. As a soldier in some of the most trying scenes of the Peloponnesian war, he surpassed other men in courage, in physical endurance, in all the virtues of the camp, not less than in intellectual powers and in moral excellence. He would have been as formidable an antagonist in the gymnastic games, had he chosen to enter the lists, as he proved himself to be in the arena of philosophy; for as in mental vigor, so in bodily strength, he was a *τελειος ἄνδρα*, a full-grown, complete man, nay, in the estimation of his companions and contemporaries, something more — something quite prodigious and almost superhuman. And we are not sure, that he was less indebted to his bodily constitution, his natural temperament, his personal *peculiarities* even, than he was to his mental powers and attainments, for his marvellous power of attracting and detaining under his influence admiring crowds of rolling-eyed Greeks and curious Athenians. Quite certain we are, that without Herculean strength and fortitude,

---

<sup>1</sup> They were shown as his work down to the time of Pausanias (Paus. 9, 35. cf. 1, 22).

he never could have faced so many violent enemies and prosecuted such indefatigable labors, unawed and unwearied, to the age of three-score years and ten.

Socrates did not aspire to office; he even shunned it, that he might have the more time and leisure to train others in the performance of their duties as citizens and magistrates. Moreover, he was always in the opposition. An aristocrat amid the ultra democracy of Athens, and a democrat under the aristocracy of the Thirty, he was set down for an impracticable. Nay, he even held to the more heinous heresy of "a higher law."<sup>1</sup> Of course, he was not very likely to be appointed to office. And when he was unexpectedly elected to the Senate and called, *ex officio*, to preside in the assembly, he affects ignorance of the proper ways and means to carry into effect the popular will. But his ignorance is a willing ignorance. His inability is wholly a moral inability. He does not know how, like the popular demagogues, to bend the constitution and the laws to the prejudices and passions of the assembly. He cannot do wrong, and he will not permit the people to do wrong, while he has the constitutional power to prevent it. If the chief end of a man and a magistrate is to be popular, he answered it very ill. But if it is to execute equal, impartial, universal justice at whatever hazard, we cannot but think him a model statesman.

Socrates was not trained in the schools of oratory. He had never been accustomed to speak at the bar or in the popular assembly. But he silenced those profane and vain babblers, the sophists. He persuaded the young and the old, all whom he could induce to hear him, to shun vice and cultivate virtue, with an eloquence, which, as his gay and frivolous auditors themselves were constrained to acknowledge,<sup>2</sup> transcended that of Pericles or any of the most powerful orators of the day. And when he was on trial for his life, declining the oration which Lysias had prepared for him, and unjustly deprived of the defence which Plato rose to offer, but which his judges refused to hear, he stood up unabashed, unmoved and, without premeditation or preparation other than that which he had always been making in a virtuous life, delivered an apology, which Plato has preserved in all its essential features<sup>3</sup> and which is certainly one of the most sublime utterances that ever fell from mortal lips. It was intended, not

<sup>1</sup> Witness, besides his resistance to the will of the people, his refusal to participate in the arrest and surrender of a fugitive from oppression.—Xen. Mem. 4, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, Conv. 216. A.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Schleiermacher's Introduction, and Grote's History of Greece, Vol. VIII. Chap. 68.

to save his life by whatever means and motives, but to vindicate his character, to assert his mission, to speak the truth which is his whole idea of eloquence, and, by securing his martyrdom, to seal his immortality. And never did any speech more effectually accomplish its end; never was any discourse more characteristic of its author; never was any oration or sermon more fully charged with those essential elements of all eloquence, truth and earnestness.

Charged with being a sophist and a naturalist (which last in those days was nearly synonymous with atheist), Socrates denies the charge and calls for the proof. Not that he has aught to say against those excellent men or their distinguished professions. Far from it. He is only astonished at their superhuman knowledge and power. Such power as that of the sophists is far beyond his feeble attainment; far above his humble aspiration. Such knowledge as that of the philosophers of his day, is too wonderful for him; it is high; he cannot attain unto it. He professes at most only *human* wisdom, only a knowledge of man, his nature, relations and duties, and that so limited, so imperfect, as scarcely to deserve the name of knowledge. But their wisdom was more than human. It stepped quite out of the province of man's capacities, nay, soared entirely beyond the sphere of man's duties and concerns. Their knowledge was quite unlimited, comprehending universal being in the grasp of a single science. Their power was quite miraculous, even reconciling flat contradictions and achieving natural impossibilities. He made no pretensions to such prodigious wisdom. Yet he would fain examine its deep foundations, and explore its mazy labyrinths, and, if possible, climb up to some of its giddy heights and look over the goodly prospect. He enters upon the work. He proceeds cautiously. He goes through it deliberately. And before he has done, the whole towering fabric of falsehood and self-conceit, lies in ruins — "vanishes like the baseless fabric of a vision and leaves not a rack behind." And in its stead, a modest but substantial and elegant structure rises, based on an immovable foundation, constructed of imperishable materials, built on a plan which combines utility with beauty, and finished, from the portico to the inmost sanctuary, as a fit temple for a god. And lo! now philosophy descends from heaven to earth and there takes up her abode among men. And thence she goes out, with Socrates, into the streets, and converses with all classes and conditions of men in the *agora*, and visits them in the cottage and in the palace, in the shops and in the halls of justice, and, in words that "have less of earth in them than heaven," instructs them in the duties which they

owe to themselves and to each other, to their country and to God. The name of Socrates is familiar to us, for the most part, in the history of philosophy. He is known chiefly as "the *moral philosopher*." He aspired to that distinction. He deserved that honorable title. Not that he was incapable of physical and metaphysical inquiries, or even indifferent to them. But ethical science was the desideratum of his age. It also fell in with the earnest promptings of his own moral and religious nature. And he pursued it with heartfelt and supreme devotion, though in no narrow and exclusive spirit. It was his glory, as a philosopher, to reconcile the beautiful with the useful, the right with the expedient, the good with the happy, the human with the divine. Theory, also, he harmonized with practice, speculation with action. He belonged to no school, though each claimed him and he held in common, perhaps, the better features of them all. A practical Platonist, a moral and religious Aristotelian, a spiritual Baconian, the real Socrates was something more and better than he was represented by any of his disciples — the fountain of "mellifluous streams that watered all the schools," and that still flow by the dwellings of men, by the temples of the muses, and "fast by the oracles of God." Or rather, Socrates was to philosophy, what Homer was to poetry, and what Homer's deep-flowing, all-encompassing ocean was to the streams :

Whence all the rivers, all the seas have birth,  
And every fountain, every well on earth.

But we have not yet exhausted the powers which this wonderful man possessed, nor the pursuits in which he engaged. We have not even reached that which was most characteristic, comprehensive, exciting and absorbing. His proper vocation, above all others, beneath all others, amid all others, was that of a *teacher*. His *mission*, as he himself represents it in his defence before his judges, which he never waived and never forgot for a moment, which he prosecuted at home and abroad, in the army and in the city, in the shop and in the *agora*, in the private house and in the popular assembly, by day and by night, from the beginning to the end of his life, the mission, which he undertook at the call of God, and which nothing, not even the hostility of the people to whom he was sent and the moral certainty of sooner or later dying a martyr's death, could induce him to relinquish, was to lead the young and the old to a knowledge of themselves, their nature and their relations, and thus to a right discharge of their various duties. In this view, it may be justly

said, that he was a teacher, a whole teacher, and nothing but a teacher.

While we say this, we do not forget, that he disclaimed the official title of a teacher, and never applied to his followers the name of pupils or disciples. That were to arrogate a superiority, which suited not his modest disposition, which belonged not to his humble attainments. He chose rather to place himself on a level with those who resorted to him for wisdom; hence he always called them his associates (*οἱ σύντρετοι*) and conversed with them as with a circle of familiar friends. Moreover, that were to assume a responsibility for the results of his instruction, which he shrank from undertaking. The professed teacher of any art is a shameless fellow if he sends away his pupils ignorant of the art which he professes to teach.<sup>1</sup> But he was not wise himself; how then could he undertake to make others wise? Besides, that would have enrolled him in the same rank and class with the sophists, who were the professional teachers of the day, but with whom, since they so generally miseducated the young and misled the old, he could by no means consent to be identified. For the same or similar reasons, he declined also the title of philosopher, sophist or sage.

Socrates never set himself up for a teacher;<sup>2</sup> and, when multitudes resorted to him for instruction, he wondered that they should flock to one who had never advertised to take pupils and who had nothing to teach. Parents might leave their sons with him, if they chose. He would be happy to converse with them, and they were welcome to listen to his conversations with others. But the result must depend on their own exertions and the will of God.<sup>3</sup> There were, however, wise men and able teachers in abundance, who were willing to assume any amount of responsibility, if they were only well paid. Why not go to them? For himself, he never received pay for his talk and his company. He could not consent to sell his liberty, to make himself the slave of every stupid patron, that might chance to employ him.<sup>4</sup> Thus he spoke of teaching, as usually followed, as a mercenary trade, as an unprincipled and heartless profession. But he was for all this none the less a teacher in the true intent and spirit of the vocation.

He was an unpaid, unprofessional, informal teacher. He taught at no fixed time or place. He taught no circumscribed round of books or sciences, and to no limited circle of learners. He taught, at all times and places, persons of both sexes and of every age, on all sub-

<sup>1</sup> Xen. Mem. 3. 1, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Plat. Dial. passim.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 1. 2, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Xen. Mem. 1. 5, 6. et passim.

jects involving the duty or the happiness of mankind. He taught, wherever he went, whomsoever he met, whatsoever it most concerned them then and there to know. He taught universally, spontaneously, as he sat and as he walked, as he talked and as he listened. It was natural and almost necessary for him, as much so as to eat or to breathe.

His school was now the saddler's shop and now the senate-house; and he gave lessons sometimes in statuary and sometimes in statesmanship. He instructed the lowest handicraftsmen in the true ideas and principles of their respective arts.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the first men of the State and those who aspired to be first, resorted to him to learn the art of persuasion and the art of government.<sup>2</sup> The Thirty tyrants forbade this, but the prohibition only brought themselves under the screw of his merciless dialectics. Again he was attended by a numerous class, whose highest aspiration was the successful culture of wisdom and virtue in their own minds and hearts. Every day "the schoolmaster was abroad," seeking opportunities to communicate some valuable lesson, and improving every opportunity which might present itself.<sup>3</sup> One day, he chances to meet a youthful and beautiful stranger; and, struck with his intelligent and amiable expression of countenance, he places his staff across the way and, by a question or two, attaches forever to his person the historian and philosopher, Xenophon.<sup>4</sup> At another time, he converses with the younger Pericles, and inspires him with a worthy ambition to tread in the footsteps of his illustrious father.<sup>5</sup> Repeatedly he addresses the gay and licentious Alcibiades in a strain of earnest and eloquent expostulation, which melts him to tears and overwhelms him with sorrow and shame for his ignoble life.<sup>6</sup> Now he humbles the conceited Glaucon by showing him that he knows nothing of the affairs of the State which he aspires to govern, and is not even competent to regulate the family and estate of his uncle.<sup>7</sup> Now he encourages the too diffident Charmides to ascend the bema, and speak before the people, from whose assembled wisdom he shrinks abashed, though conscious of his vast superiority to them all as individuals.<sup>8</sup> Now again the accomplished Euthydemus must be convinced, that he knows nothing yet as he ought to know, though versed in all the lore of the poets, sophists and philosophers.<sup>9</sup> To-day, he labors to reconcile the alienated brothers Chaerephon and Chaerecrates by a beautiful discourse on

<sup>1</sup> Xen. Mem. 3. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 1. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 1. 1, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Enfield's Hist. of Philos.

<sup>5</sup> Xen. Mem. 3. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Plat. Conv. 216, A.

<sup>7</sup> Xen. Mem. 3. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 3. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 4. 2.

fraternal love, as the dictate of nature and at the same time the true interest of both the parties.<sup>1</sup> To-morrow, he discourses on filial duty in a strain of high religious earnestness and almost of prophetic warning to his son Lampreocles impatient under the petulance of such a mother as Xanthippe.<sup>2</sup> An election would draw from him a conversation on the qualifications for, and the functions of some civil or military office.<sup>3</sup> A misfortune in private life, a complaint of Crito respecting the troubles of wealth or the cares of business, would lead him to a course of remark fitted at once to relieve the burdens of the rich and supply the necessities of the poor.<sup>4</sup> At a festival, he would discuss the nature and the value of temperance.<sup>5</sup> An accidental meeting with an atheist gave rise to that admirable argument for the existence and the providence of the gods, which contains the germ of every subsequent treatise on Natural Theology.<sup>6</sup> Thus he went about talking as he went, and teaching as he talked, till he turned all Athens into a school and its inhabitants into scholars, whom he instructed in whatever concerned them as citizens and as men.

And he did nothing but teach. That is, he made everything tributary to his teaching and touched nothing which he could not make tributary to this work of his life. He suffered nothing to come in competition, or even to stand in comparison with this high calling. He was often urged to take part in the affairs of State, as a duty to his country, with vehement expostulations on his want of patriotism and the waste of his transcendent abilities in inferior pursuits. But he replied, that he was doing far more for the *State*, in educating a multitude of able and upright statesmen, than he could do by turning statesman himself,<sup>7</sup> to say nothing of the vital interest, which the State has in the education of her inferior citizens. Besides, had he participated in the strife of politics, he would have provoked the hostility of so many by his firmness and frankness, as greatly to limit his influence, if not to cut short his career of usefulness as a teacher; and he could not consent thus to sacrifice a greater to a less good.<sup>8</sup> He was alive to all that concerned his country. He loved Athens with all her faults, and would fain correct the faults for Athens' sake. But he sought to reform the State, where alone it could be done, in the character of her statesmen and her individual citizens. He could fight for her and bleed for her, if need be, on the tented field. But he could not forget even then and there to teach his countrymen and fellow soldiers, by precept and by example, lessons of patriotism and

<sup>1</sup> Xen. Men. 2. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 2. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 3. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 2. 9 seq.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 3. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 1. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 1. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Plat. Apol. 19.

every virtue. Still less could he fail, after his return, to render her a still greater service by living for her and dying for her at his post as a teacher.<sup>1</sup> Nothing human did Socrates deem foreign to his thoughts. But if he was to benefit mankind, it must be through the medium of those, whom providence had brought within the reach of his personal influence. He studied every science, investigated the principles of every art, observed attentively every pursuit of men. But it was, that he might lay them all under contribution to the pursuit, the art, the science, which he preferred to all others and to which he had devoted his life. He disciplined all his powers and mastered all knowledge, that he might apply it all to the instruction and education of the people.

In an age, when every body was writing and publishing, the golden age of Grecian literature, science and art; when so many were pressing forward to reach the goal of immortality, and so many reached it through their published works, he must have been strongly tempted, we should suppose, to put his own thoughts, so pregnant with immortal life, into a form in which they might be read in other lands and preserved to future ages. But he resisted the temptation. He published nothing. He wrote nothing. Or rather he wrote only living epistles, which alone, in the highest sense, are immortal. He published nothing but the beautiful characters and virtuous lives of his disciples. His works were known and read in the minds and hearts of the ablest and best men of Athens; and thus have they been known and read of all men. Thus, in this sense and in this way, was Socrates a teacher, a whole teacher, and nothing but a teacher.

It now remains to specify some of the most marked characteristics of his teaching.

1. He began at the beginning. He aimed first to settle and establish a *proper method of education*, and that based on the *nature of the being to be educated*. In other words, it was his first endeavor to obtain for himself and impart to his pupils (who, it should be remembered, were not mere children but adults) some just ideas of the *human mind*, its nature and powers, the necessary limits to its capacities, and within those limits, the proper means and conditions of its improvement.

In every department, whether of physical, intellectual or moral culture, indeed, in every undertaking of whatever kind, the result of labor depends wholly on pursuing a right method. And this, of course, must be relative to the nature of the work to be accomplished and

<sup>1</sup> Plat. Apol. 17.

the power of the workmen who are to accomplish it; in other words, to the material which is to be wrought and the agents or instruments that are to work upon it. By far the larger part of the time and talents and wealth and power of the material and moral resources of mankind, have been wasted from inattention to this fact; from the adoption and pursuit of a method unsuited to the end sought or the means possessed; from ignorance or indifference respecting their own nature and the nature of things with which they have to do and the limitations which are thus necessarily imposed upon their progress and results. They have already been toiling to square the circle, to attain perpetual motion, to find a vacuum in nature or in the mind, to move the material or the moral world without a fulcrum or standing place, to discover some *royal* road to learning, some way of arriving at a distant point without passing over the intervening space, some universal solvent or philosopher's stone or elixir of life. As in religion, so in the arts and sciences, they have always been struggling to ascend up into heaven or descend into the abyss, when the word of wisdom and of life, if they had but known it, was nigh them, in their own minds and hearts. If the boundary which separates the knowable from the unknowable, the practicable from the impracticable, the attainable from the unattainable, could have been distinctly marked, once for all, to the certain conviction of every understanding, what a prodigious waste of energies and resources would have been saved in every age of the world, in every sphere of human enterprise and effort.

Now in education, as in mental science, the mind is both the work and the workman, the material and the agent or instrument by which it is to be wrought. Here, of course, it is doubly important, that the teacher and the pupil set out, if possible, with just and definite ideas of the nature and powers of the human mind. With what faculties is it, by nature, endowed? For what purpose were they given? What is the legitimate scope of their action? How may they be improved and perfected, how perverted and impaired? What is, and what is not, the gift of nature? What can, and what cannot, be the result of education? How much can the teacher do for the pupil, and how much must the pupil do for himself, and how much is beyond the reach of both teacher and pupil, dependent wholly on the will of God? What is knowledge? On what subjects, and within what limits is it attainable? How shall it be attained when it is attainable, and what is our wisdom, what our duty in reference to that wider field, which is the province, not of knowledge but of faith? These

questions, and the like, are fundamental to all right use of the human mind, preliminary to any proper theory or practice in education.

Now these questions hold a primary place in the teachings of Socrates. They stand in the foreground of his conversations, whether of a practical or a speculative cast. They mark and shape the revolution which he effected in the philosophy of his times, in the manner of teaching and the tone of thinking at Athens. "Instead of rushing precipitately in quest of solutions" (such is the account of this revolution given in that excellent "Manual of Philosophy," which has received the sanction of the French Academy), philosophy, instructed by her previous falls, now gathers herself up, examines herself, measures her strength, compares the faculties at her disposal with the end at which she aims. She studies the instrument, before using it. She clears up and makes sure the path before her; and chooses rather to confess her ignorance than to conceal it by a falsehood when the means of knowing the truth are not possessed."

In reference to the natural philosophers of his day, Socrates wondered, that they did not discover in the very uncertainty and contradiction of their opinions, that their inquiries were misdirected, conducted in a wrong method, nay, employed in a wrong field, since, in the first place, it was impossible to find out the origin, elements and laws of the material universe; and, in the second place, if they knew them perfectly, these elements and laws were, in the nature of the case, removed wholly beyond their control, elevated far above their reach. In short, these were (in his concise and simple language) "*divine things*," and it did not appear to him modest or wise for men to meddle with things so much beyond their capacity and out of their sphere, certainly not till they had exhausted the knowledge of their own duties and concerns.<sup>1</sup> He may have erred in the application of his rule (though we think he did not err in its application to the natural philosophers of his day, since they were, for the most part, engaged in utterly fruitless inquiries according to a wholly barren method). But of the wisdom and necessity of some such rule of limitation, the history of the world, and especially the history of that age, affords a conclusive demonstration.

The sophists, also, Socrates charged with a sad misdirection of their great powers, an entire misapplication of their abundant learning, and a consequent dreadful waste of mind and perversion of the morals of their pupils. Accordingly, in his conversations, whether with them or their pupils, it was his first endeavor to convict them of

---

<sup>1</sup> Xen. Mem. 1. 1, 12 seq.

ignorance in their fancied knowledge, to expose the fallacies in their boasted reasoning, and thus to lead them, gradually and imperceptibly, to the true principles of reasoning, to a more just method of inquiry, to a better theory and practice of education. And in all his conversations, whether as recorded by Xenophon, or imitated and expanded by Plato, there is no topic on which he more frequently and earnestly insists, than the fundamental necessity and the universal availability of a knowledge of *human nature* whether in greater or less concerns, whether in public or private life, since in both, in all, we have to do with men; and they who know men, can influence them, and they who can influence men, can accomplish whatever they undertake.

2. He inculcated the necessity of *self-knowledge* as the foundation of all knowledge and the source of all prosperity and happiness.

He who knows not himself, knows nothing else. The knowledge of our own minds is the key to the knowledge of other minds, and the knowledge of the human mind is the guide and measure of all that man can know of the universe. Self-knowledge is an essential preliminary to self-education and self-government; and self-education and self-government are the stepping-stones to the government and possession of the world, or of whatever is desirable in it.<sup>1</sup> And self-knowledge does not consist in merely knowing one's name and race and lineage, but in a thorough acquaintance with all his peculiar virtues and vices, capabilities and weaknesses; all the idiosyncrasies that make or mar his worth and power as a *man*; just such a discriminating and practical knowledge, in short, as the horse-dealer (to repeat one of Socrates's familiar and favorite illustrations) has of all the qualities that add to, or detract from, the value of a *horse*.<sup>2</sup>

Here lay much of the peculiar skill of Socrates. This, more than any other one thing, perhaps, was the secret of his power as a teacher. He knew himself. He discerned, at a glance and by intuition, as it were, the character of his pupil, and it was among his earliest and most strenuous endeavors to make the pupil see himself in the same light, see himself just as he was, without any over-estimation or any depreciation of his capacity, knowledge or virtue. This was the primary object of most of those interviews with the young men of Athens, of which Xenophon has left us an account, and to not a few of which we have adverted on a former page. In reading these chapters of the *Memorabilia*, we are struck with the nice adaptation of the several conversations to the several characters with whom they are held, and their consequent power to encourage the diffident, to draw out

<sup>1</sup> Xen. Mem. 4. 2, 24 seq.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 4. 2, 25.

the retiring, to repress the forward, to humble the self-conceited, to relieve every one of his fancied good or ill, and persuade every one to make the most of the best there is in him. Take, for further illustration, the brief chapter (the first in the fourth book), which the biographer prefaces by the simple but significant remark, that Socrates did not approach all alike, and then proceeds to exemplify the remark by showing how he dealt with those who relied on their riches or their genius as superseding the necessity of study and discipline, and convinced them, by the nature of the case and by analogy, that they, of all others, most needed education that they might give their wealth and genius a right direction, such as would make it a blessing and not a curse to the possessor and to the world. "Horses and dogs of the highest blood and mettle make the *worst animals*, if not broken and trained, but if properly educated, the best." Power of whatever kind—wealth, genius, and learning itself—if unregulated or ill-regulated, is power only to do mischief, and self-destructive in the end. And the regulator must be a well-disciplined and well-balanced, a self-knowing and self-controlling mind. Ignorance, in general, Socrates did not class with madness. But want of self-knowledge was little short of madness.<sup>1</sup> All with one consent would pronounce that man insane, who should stoop whenever he entered the gates of the city or who should undertake to lift houses. But how much less insane is the man, who overrates, in like manner, his spiritual stature and strength, and who undertakes enterprises to which his powers and resources are palpably inadequate.

Adaptation, not merely to the nature of man, but to the character of the individual pupil, is a prime element in education, but too often overlooked in the attempt to educate the young in systems and by masses. Few modern teachers enjoy the entire freedom in their ways and means of education, which Socrates secured by his peculiar position as a voluntary and unprofessional educator. But if they had his discernment of the different characters and tendencies of their pupils, they would no more think of applying the same identical discipline and treatment to them all, than of administering the same medicine to all the patients in a hospital; but while recognizing the propriety and the necessity of system, of general rules, of the same regimen so far forth as the same natures are to be educated, they would also make it their constant study so to vary and adapt their instructions that each moral malady should insert its proper remedy,

---

<sup>1</sup> Xen. Mem. 3. 9, 6 seq.

and each peculiar want find its corresponding supply. When Xenophon, in his simple language, recorded, that Socrates "did not approach all in the same manner," he taught a lesson of surpassing worth to teachers and, with the unconscious ease of true wisdom, he pronounced the highest eulogium on his honored master.

8. Humility and modesty are the unfailing fruit of self-knowledge and the knowledge of the human mind. And these closely related, inseparable virtues are the characteristic ornaments of Socrates both as a philosopher and a teacher, as they are also the distinctive graces of the Baconian philosophy and the Christian religion, the keys alike of speculative and practical wisdom, the passwords at once to "the kingdom of science" and "the kingdom of heaven."

There always have been, and probably always will be, two sorts of teachers in the world. Those of one sort know everything. Of course, they can teach everything, and they can learn nothing. They never make a mistake, and never change their doctrine. If they do, they cannot be convicted of it, and will not be charged with it; they will never acknowledge it, and never take it back. They are infallible as an Oracle, and immutable as the decrees of Fate. They can inspire like Apollo and govern like Jove. They magnify, not only themselves, but their office and their school. It is the teacher that makes the scholar, and the school that makes the man. And they are the only teachers, and theirs the only school. Their pupils were made forever, when they came under their instruction. Like the self-complacent Phoenix, nurse of Achilles's boyhood as well as companion of his riper years, they take their pupils on their knees and feed their helpless infancy with meat and wine; they go forth with them (so they flatter themselves) to the forum and the camp, at once "the sayers of their words and the doers of their deeds;" and however distinguished any of them may ever become, the credit all belongs to them:

"Great as thou art, my lessons made thee brave,  
A child I took thee, but a hero gave."<sup>1</sup>

The other sort of teachers arrogate little to themselves or their office. Wisdom was not born with them and will not die with them. They know but little and they can teach still less. They claim for themselves no sovereign efficiency, for their office, no creative power. Their pupils will be what God has made them and what they make

---

<sup>1</sup> Hom. Il. 9, 485.

themselves. Teachers are but *guideposts*<sup>1</sup> to knowledge, and those not infallible. At best, they can only go along with their pupils as *guides*, who know some portion of the way and can see a little further in the dark. Of course, they make mistakes, and are happy to correct them. Questions are often asked them, which they cannot answer, and they are frank to confess their ignorance. Possessed of no papal attributes, they aspire to no papal authority. It is not their wish to dictate. Dogmatism is foreign to their nature and remote from their province. They are themselves but older scholars in the school of universal truth, more experienced inquirers at the oracles of infinite wisdom. So far from placing an impassable gulf between themselves and their pupils, they break down, as much as possible, every interposing barrier, and assiduously multiply the points of sympathy and contact. Instead of deciding questions, *ex cathedra*, they come down to the same seats with their disciples, examine the subject in common with them, say to them, *cave*, which is so much more potent than *go*, in the race of wisdom; in a word, they grow young again in their company, and enter with them, "as little children," into "the kingdom of science."

It need not be said, which of these two sorts of teachers will be most likely to discover the truth, nor which will be the most acceptable and the most successful in its communication. The sophists, for the most part,<sup>2</sup> belonged to the former of these classes; Socrates was the model representative of the latter. "He does not, like the Ionic and Pythagorean schools, announce himself as a philosopher, who is going to reveal all secrets. Still less does he boast himself, like the sophists, in the possession of the universal science. Follow him in his conversations with the representatives of the different schools, and you see him full of admiration at their knowledge. But for himself, he knows nothing; this is always the starting point, at which he begins. But this admiration of which he speaks, look well to it—it conceals the Socratic irony. He presents himself as a humble learner, and little by little, the disciple perplexes the master, confounds him, reduces him to silence; and the all-presumptuous philosopher falls to a level with Socrates, or rather falls below him; for they

<sup>1</sup> This was a favorite illustration of the late Professor Stuart, who was one of the ablest, because one of the most suggestive and impulsive teachers, of our age.

<sup>2</sup> We say "for the most part;" for we think with Grote (Hist. Gr. Vol. VIII. Chap. 6), that the sophists have been too indiscriminately condemned; though the mass doubtless deserved the reprobation they have so generally received.

know nothing at all, but Socrates is conscious of his ignorance, and to be conscious of ignorance, is it not to know something?"<sup>1</sup> It was just this knowledge of his ignorance, which drew from the Oracle the response that he was the wisest of men, which, according to his modest construction of it, meant, not that Socrates himself was so very wise, but that he was the wisest of men, who, like Socrates, was conscious of his almost utter ignorance.

It should be remarked, however, that the ignorance which Socrates professed, was not skepticism. The humility, which he exemplified and inculcated, was not indifference to the truth. "From the humiliating state to which he brings down the pride of the sophists, he draws no inferences against the possibility of knowing. This conclusion bears only on the temerity of the sophists, on their unrelenting ambition. For himself, far from appearing indifferent to the truth, in the midst of all these disputes, he manifests towards it the most sincere and unchangeable affection. It is necessary to seek truth with more sincerity than the sophists, with less temerity than their predecessors. It is necessary everywhere to preserve a spirit of prudence and moderation."<sup>2</sup> Socrates loved truth, as other men love beauty. It was a passion, which burned as a fire in his own breast, and which he sought to kindle in the hearts of his disciples. He sought for truth as with a lighted candle, and dug for it as for hid treasure. He believed he had found it in some measure; and others might find it, if they would search for it with the same humble, teachable, earnest and obedient spirit. But he was sensible that the known bears, and must always bear, to the unknown the same relation as the shore to the ocean, as the finite to the infinite; and, while he prized what he did know above all price for its intrinsic excellence and its value relative to his practical necessities, at the same time he felt, that in comparison with the infinite unknown and his insatiable longings, this knowledge was less than nothing and vanity.

Socrates was an enemy to all ostentation and false pretension, to all mere seeming and vain-boasting. He insisted that it was far easier, as well as far better, to be than to seem.<sup>3</sup> The shortest road to arrive at a reputation for any branch of knowledge or form of excellence, was to acquire the knowledge or the excellence itself. To go about the business in any other way was to waste time and toil and money only to incur ridicule and contempt in the process, and to have one's labor for his pains, if nothing worse, in the end. It were

<sup>1</sup> Manual of Philosophy.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> For the substance of this paragraph, see Xen. Mem. 1. 7.

ridiculous enough for a man to set himself up for a musician, who knew nothing of the art. He might send out his advertisements and display his instruments, he might draw in pupils and gather about him the gaping multitude; but the moment he undertook to perform, he would prove himself an impostor. It were still more absurd for a man to give out that he was a skilful pilot when he was not. He might, perhaps, persuade the ship-owners and the sailors to entrust their fortunes and their lives in his hands. But no sooner would he take the helm, than he would discover his incapacity, and the first storm would send him to the bottom (if so much vanity would sink), and engulf with him all the interests committed to his care. How much more ridiculous, how much more censurable for one to pretend to play well on that instrument of thousand strings, the human mind, without a thorough acquaintance with the art and the instrument on which he plays! And how much more absurd, how much more fatal to the rulers and the ruled, when incompetent men persuade the people to entrust the helm of State to their unfaithful and unskilful hands!

Such power to expose the vanity of false pretenders, accompanied with such childlike humility and such freshness of youthful sympathy, made Socrates a general favorite with the young men of Athens. And we cannot but think him, in all these respects, a model teacher. Scarcely anything would, probably, contribute more to the acceptableness and usefulness of teachers in our own or any day, than to combine the feelings and sympathies of youth with the wisdom and experience of age, "in understanding to be men," but in truthloving simplicity and humility "to become as little children." Without this sterling quality, this almost evangelical virtue, the more they advance in knowledge, the further are they removed from the understandings and sympathies of their pupils; the more they know, the less are they qualified to teach. With this spirit, as some rare but bright examples show, they never grow old; but, "with old heads on young shoulders," they ever retain the freshness, beauty and vigor of immortal youth.

4. The earlier stages of the Socratic method of instruction were rather negative than positive.

This is implied, perhaps, in what has been already said. But it deserves a distinct statement. The primary aim was to correct errors rather than to communicate truth; to convince of ignorance rather than to impart knowledge; to remove the rubbish of prejudice and lay the foundation of humility, docility and self-knowledge rather

than to build up at once on such basis as might chance to exist such a superstructure of wisdom or folly, as it might be capable of sustaining.

Pupils usually come to their teachers with much that they need to unlearn; and great teachers have generally been distinguished for the earnestness and skill and power with which they address themselves to this preparatory work of eradicating the roots of all error and falsehood, and breaking up the soil for the reception of the good seed. They come with their minds like so many heathen temples, full of *idols* — to use the favorite figure of Lord Bacon — idols of every sort, idols of the tribe and idols of the family, idols of the individual and idols of the school, idols of theory and idols of practice, idols of faith and idols of philosophy. The demolishing of idols is never a very pleasant process. It seems as if the very temple itself would fall with them in one frightful and universal ruin. Still, idols must be abolished, before the worship of truth and holiness and God can be established. And great teachers, like great reformers, whether in philosophy or religion, have always been mighty iconoclasts. Who, that ever sat under the instructions of the late Professor Stuart of Andover, has not felt, at the beginning of his course, as if the very foundations of all faith and all knowledge were removing from under him? But who has not found, in the end, that this ruthless destruction of his hope and peace was amply compensated by the broader and deeper foundation, that was thus laid for a more truthful and more enduring structure?

Just so it was with the pupils of Socrates. They came to him, not unfrequently, like a merchant's ship with too much rigging, which an old preacher<sup>1</sup> said, a woman must *not* resemble, “so bedecked with streamers, flags and ensigns, so miscreate with their vanity and self-conceit, with their foolish notions and evil habits, that he who made them, when he looked upon them, should hardly know them with their plumes and fans and silken vizards, with feathers in their caps like flags in their tops to tell, I think, which way the wind will blow.” But he soon lowered their flags and feathers, brought down their plumes and stripped them of their vizards, riddled their sails and shattered their yards, till it seemed as if the very hulk must go to pieces or sink beneath the general ruin. If in this sad flight, they persisted in paddling away from them, he abandoned them to their fate.<sup>2</sup> But if they surrendered at discretion, he soon fitted them out, or rather showed them how to fit themselves out, with a new rigging

---

<sup>1</sup> Wilkinson's *Merchant Royal*, A. D. 1607.

<sup>2</sup> Xen. Mem. 4. 2, 40.

at once more safe and more beautiful, of sounder materials and in better proportion, which could weather the storm, and which worked so easily, so spontaneously, that it seemed a part of the vessel, and the vessel itself a thing of life.

This negative process, though especially necessary at the commencement, was not wholly confined to the earlier stages of education. In all his instructions, Socrates accustomed his pupils to look at the difficulties and objections by which a doctrine is beset as well as the arguments by which it is supported. And this process, though painful and tedious in itself, is of great value in its result. A subject is never understood, till it is seen with all its lights and shades, in all its difficulties as well as all its attractions. A doctrine is never settled and established, till the arguments against it as well as for it, have all been taken up and weighed in the balance. And it is far more important to see all the objections and feel all the difficulties as we go along, than it is to arrive forthwith at some satisfactory conclusion, just as it is more important, that the foundations should be well laid and every stone examined before it is wrought into the structure, than that the building should speedily reach its completion. "First negatively, then positively," was the order of sermonizing in the days of our fathers. It is the order of nature and reason; and, though not to be always and slavishly observed in preaching or teaching, it should never be overlooked by preachers and teachers.

5. Socrates taught one thing at a time with most unwearied patience and exemplary thoroughness.

His predecessors seem scarcely to have attained to any such idea as division of labor or distribution of the sciences. On the contrary, it was their ambition to bring all the subjects of human inquiry within the scope of one grand and comprehensive science, of which they professed to be the perfect masters; to discover some one key for the unlocking of all mysteries, of which they claimed to be in the full and indisputable possession. The philosophers undertook to solve by some single idea, element or principle, the problem of the universe; and they sought for this universal solution with the same avidity and just about the same success, as the alchymists, previous to the time of Bacon, had toiled for the discovery of a universal solvent. The sophists professed to teach everything in one all-comprehensive art, an art or wisdom which enabled its possessor to comprehend alike and at once all kinds of knowledge and to discourse with equal fluency and conclusiveness, not only on every subject but on every side of every subject, an art or wisdom which they per-

fectedly understood and could infallibly teach to all their pupils in a very limited amount of time. They were, in fact, the prototypes of our modern itinerant lecturers and patent-right professors and high-pressure steam-engine teachers, who will undertake to put a scholar through a science, as conductors engage to carry a passenger over a road, in so many hours and so many minutes, and each party will give the other a certificate at the end, testifying that the work has been done according to agreement—with this difference, however, in favor of the *ancient* sophists, that their art was one, undivided and complete, and their stadium compassed the universe.

Socrates, in the first place, substituted anthropology for the cosmogonies of the philosophers, mere humble, "human things" for the vast and sublime medley of things human and divine, which made up their universal science. In the next place, instead of the all-comprehensive art of the sophists, he devoted his attention particularly to ethics, separating it from other branches with which it had hitherto been confounded, and making it, as it were, his department and profession. Furthermore, he subdivided ethics into branches and subjects, and investigated each by itself. He took up, for instance, one virtue at a time and looked at it in every possible light, till it was understood, so far as it was capable of being understood, by himself and his disciples; till this much at least was known, that it was not knowable. Moreover, in the examination of that particular virtue, he was never in a hurry. He never cared how much time was necessary for the development of a great idea or the establishment of an important truth. On the contrary, he chose to linger long in the field, and beguiled his pupils to dwell on the subject, and contrived to waste time in this profitable way. He began at the beginning and went slowly forward, feeling every step as he went, till he arrived safely at the end, perfectly acquainted with the whole ground. He looked at every opportunity, started every objection, went all around a subject, examined it on every side, and, in so doing, not unfrequently seemed to be wandering away from it; but he always returned to some nearer and clearer point of view, always ascended to some higher and more commanding post of observation, till at length that matter could be set down in his own and his pupils' chart as a fixed point never again to be unsettled or in doubt, seen in all its bearings and known in its exact position and magnitude. Then he took up another in the same patient and thorough way. The mind thus disciplined to habits of patience and thoroughness, a discipline and a habit in itself of more value than any amount of mere knowl-

edge, the process became easier and more rapid; every new fixed point helped to fix another; the bearing and elevation of each determined the form and surface of the whole country with the definiteness of a modern typographical survey and map; and the disciples of Socrates learned to believe, that the fastest way round a subject is the nearest way to a perfect knowledge of it, and the quickest as well as the best method of comprehending the whole of a great truth or assemblage of truths is to master them *one by one*, and *little by little*. This was the way in which God taught by his prophets; and we have often thought that the best system of education could not be better expressed than in these words of holy writ: "Line upon line, line upon line, precept upon precept, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little." One thing at a time, a little at a lesson, and that dwelt upon till it is thoroughly understood, and *repeated*<sup>1</sup> till it is graven on the memory, or rather brought into the habits of the mind and incorporated into the very elements of the soul; this is the great secret of successful education. *Festina lente*, make haste slowly, do nothing in a hurry, should be the teacher's motto. Railroad travel is not the best method of exploring a country, neither can a field be surveyed by a single view from a single point of observation.

6. Socrates had the right idea of *education*, as a *drawing out* or *development* of what is within, rather than a communication of something from without. He even went so far as to deny the possibility, for himself at least, of *teaching* anything, as if it belonged only to the Creator to impart knowledge to him who had it not, while all that he claimed or aspired to do, was to aid the young in the development of the powers and the ideas, which the Creator had implanted. Hence he declined to assume the title of teacher and professed not to exercise the office. It was rather his office, like a spiritual midwife, to aid those who came to him for such assistance, in giving birth to the ideas, the sentiments, the elements of thought and action, which were conceived within them, and, after having examined the birth to see whether it were a living, proper child or a mere abortion, according to the result of such examination, to cast it away or to assist them in nursing and cherishing it.<sup>2</sup> The process of education, thus understood, is less easy both for the teacher and the taught, than that of simple instruction. It is much easier to receive impressions and learn facts, than it is to develop ideas and principles, as it is easier to receive

---

<sup>1</sup> See the instructions of Jahn, Gesenius, Wytenbach, Stuart, and other distinguished philologists, on the best method of *learning languages*.

<sup>2</sup> Plat. Theol. 150 B. C.

and hoard money, than it is to dig the gold out of the earth and fashion it into the current coin. But the one process makes the strong man, the other the helpless miser; if the latter happen to lose his hoard, which he has received by chance or by inheritance, he is ruined, he has nothing left and no capacity to acquire more; whereas the former has in himself, in his vigorous limbs and industrious habits, an unfailing resource, an inexhaustible fortune. To carry out the illustration of Socrates, the birth-throes of his disciples were severe and in themselves unwelcome, but they were soon forgotten in the gush of joy that attended a new birth and the warm affections that clustered about a new existence. Who has not felt the difference between the pleasing but calm satisfaction which accompanies the communications of an unknown fact, and the thrill of joy, the *syzyxa* of triumph, which springs from the origination or the self-discovery of a new birth? The former transfers to you an inheritance, the latter presents you with a new creation. A self-discovered truth lies not in the memory but lives in the reason and imagination, in the understanding and the heart. A self-developed idea is evermore part and parcel of the man himself, dear to him as the apple of his eye and prompt to do him service as the muscles of his hand.

It has been urged as a reproach against Socrates and his followers, against the whole of Grecian philosophers, that they discovered no useful truths and arrived at no valuable results. The allegation is false as a matter of fact. Truths in moral philosophy and natural theology, which are, of all others, most useful and most sacred, but which were overlooked by previous inquirers, stand out in the discourses of Socrates and the writings of Plato with a clearness and distinctness, with a moral grandeur and moral power, which are hardly surpassed by the ablest ethical and theological writers of our own day. But suppose it were not so. As teachers, aiming at the discipline and culture of their pupils, their course would still admit of a sufficient vindication. In education, the process is worth more than the result. A good education is more valuable than the greatest fund of knowledge, as a good farm is more valuable than the largest crop of corn. A well disciplined mind is more than any amount of learning, as the man is more than all his property, as "the life is more than meat, and the body than raiment." And it is just here, that Socrates and Plato manifest their characteristic power and excellence. It was their constant aim and strenuous endeavor to discipline the mind, to oblige it to think, to discover and originate truth for itself. To this end, the often indirect and purely negative method of Socrates and

Plato, approaching the subject, then wandering away from it, then returning to it on another side and leaving it at last, perhaps, without any positive solution, was admirably adapted. They thus set their readers and hearers to thinking for themselves, sharpened the edge of curiosity beyond the possibility of patient acquiescence, and stimulated them to the utmost exertion of their faculties. And thus they made, not mere scholars and bookworms, but thinkers, reasoners, philosophers, men. The knowledge, the acquisitions, the results would follow as a matter of course. But even if they should not, a *man* without knowledge is preferable to knowledge without a *man*.

7. "The Socratic method" of instruction was singularly appropriate to the idea of education, of which we have been speaking. The method of question and answer, beginning with some simple principle which was well understood and acknowledged by both parties, and progressing, step by step, through unforeseen stages to an unexpected but unavoidable conclusion, in all which process the minds of both teacher and pupil are not only awakened to their utmost activity but act and react upon each other in direct intercourse and perpetual intercommunion; this method, if not originated by Socrates, was conducted with such consummate skill to such brilliant results, that it has ever since been called "the Socratic method." Socrates knew that influence to be deep must be living and personal, that instruction to be effective must be appropriate and direct. He knew that if he would mould the character and conduct of the young to his liking, mind must grapple with mind, and heart beat to heart, and spirit interpenetrate spirit. This could be done only by oral communication. This was done, and done effectually, by the Socratic method. "When I heard Pericles or any other great orator," says the pleasure-loving yet aspiring Alcibiades,<sup>1</sup> "I was entertained and delighted, and I felt that he had spoken well. But no mortal speech has ever excited in me such emotions as are kindled by this magician. Whenever I hear him I am, as it were, charmed and fettered. My heart leaps like an inspired Corybant. My inmost soul is stung by his words as by the bite of a serpent; it is indignant at its own rude and ignoble character. I often weep tears of regret, and think how vain and inglorious is the life I lead. Nor am I the only one that weeps like a child and despairs of himself. Many others are affected in the same way." No book can speak with such power to the heart and conscience of the student. No mere text-book teacher ever exerts such

<sup>1</sup> In Plato's Banquet, 216, A. I have given the passage as rendered in the Encyclop. Americana, Art. Socrates.

an influence. He must first digest his books — all books, the books of men and the books of God — in his own soul, and then infuse himself into the souls of his pupils. And before he can do this, he must enter into their minds, draw them out and absorb them, as it were, into himself. Then he can understand them and insinuate himself into them. Then they can understand him and accept his teachings and receive his impress. It must be a mutual process, action and reaction, question and answer. Such was the Socratic method.

Socrates made little use of books in the immediate work of instruction. He had used them before, till he had appropriated their wisdom and exhausted their treasures. And now, when he came in contact with his disciples, he was himself the living book, the living lesson ; and he wrote himself, stamped himself, daguerreotyped himself in lines of living light on their hearts. He wrote no books for future generations. His pupils were his books, living and acting, imperishable and immortal like himself. He lived in them ; and, through them, he lives forever. And when his disciples came to write books, so deep and abiding was this characteristic feature of his instructions, that their writings assumed, to a great extent, the form of dialogue. Not only did the dialectic method of Socrates, more or less perverted from its original purity, reign in the discussions of the schools, but the publications of all the schools were, more or less, Socratic Dialogues. And it is the great merit of the dialogue as a form of written discourse, especially of the dialogue as it assumes the perfection of its written form in the writings of Plato, that it leads to self-reflection, self-inquiry and self-discovery of the truth, that it constrains him to work out the problem for himself, that the pleasure and profit of the solution as well as of the result is, in a great measure, his own.<sup>1</sup>

Instruction, both oral and written, is ordinarily too much a dead letter. Authors find their thoughts in books, and they leave them in books. They do not fully appreciate and master the idea themselves, and of course they do not communicate it to their readers. Teachers do not work out the great problems of literature and science for themselves, and they do not lead their pupils to work them out. It were greatly to be desired, that books, in our day, had more of the lifelike reality of Plato's Dialogues. And it were a still greater desideratum, if men who would teach, men who would exert an influence, understood better the Socratic method. Teachers, whether in

<sup>1</sup> See Schleiermacher's General Introduction. Also Ast's Life and Writings of Plato.

the primary school or the academy, the college or the professional seminary, always have been, and always will be, successful and useful, honored and great, just in proportion as they approach towards the truth and naturalness, the warmth and vitality of the Socratic method. The man who has a good mind and a warm heart, and will bring it into direct communication with the minds and hearts of others, will be sure to spread light and heat all around him. And he who can write his name in the hearts and lives of his own generation, has no occasion to fear that it will be forgotten in future ages. The name of Socrates had power to command faith, reverence and obedience among all the contending sects of Grecian philosophers for succeeding ages. And it still has a charm to win the heart. His wisdom still speaks from the printed page of his early disciples, still drops from the lips of his more numerous and scarcely less devoted admirers in islands and continents, whose very existence was then unknown.

8. Socrates insisted on definite ideas and exact statements; on carrying everything back to its first principle or cause, and reducing all knowledge to a scientific form. For this purpose, he resorted continually to explicit definitions,<sup>1</sup> which he required his pupils to express at the outset in the best way they could, and, in the progress of the discussion, to vary the language, to narrow or widen the compass of the definitions, till they answered all the demands of the subject, till they expressed the thing, the whole thing, and nothing but the thing under consideration. He introduced the logical use of the terms *genus* and *species* (which had previously meant family and form),<sup>2</sup> and applied them (as no sophist or philosopher had done before him, but as all the schools did after him, and as scientific men have ever since done), to the due distinction, subordination and classification of all the objects of human inquiry. Hitherto, even the Greeks had inquired very little into the exact significance of those words and terms which were in common use to denote common things, and which they, therefore, thought they perfectly understood, though, for that very reason, they had never made them the subject of any careful examination. Socrates constrained them to stop and think, to reflect and analyze the meaning of these familiar terms, to resolve these natural and universal ideas into their essential elements. What constitutes knowledge, what is the nature of virtue, what is the essence of truth and beauty and goodness, what is the true idea of law and

<sup>1</sup> Xen. Mem. 4, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Grote. Chapter on Socrates.

justice, of wisdom and holiness and their opposites, what is the beau ideal of a State and a statesman, what of an army and a general ; these, and such as these, according to the practical Xenophon even, were the habitual topics of his conversations ; these the questions which he propounded, and to which his hearers, to their great surprise and chagrin, found it not an easy task to return a satisfactory answer. And the dialogues of the reflective and imaginative Plato exhibit him to us, under a more speculative and ideal form indeed, but still the same man discussing the same great questions with the same fixed purpose of arriving, if possible, at the last analysis of each idea, and thus referring each to its proper place as related to other ideas and to the science of human life. In so doing, he constantly accompanies the processes of analysis and instruction by the enlivening and elucidating process of analogy. Mastering ethical and political science, not, as we do, by appeals to the physical sciences, for these, in his day, were even more unsettled and undefined than ethics and politics; but by habitual reference to the principles and practices of the special trades and professions. "He was the first to see," says Grote<sup>1</sup> (and the idea pervades all his speculations), that, as in each art or profession, there is an end to be attained, a theory laying down the means and conditions whereby it is attainable, and precepts deduced from that theory, such precepts collectively taken directing and covering nearly the entire field of practice, but each precept separately taken liable to conflict with others, and therefore liable to cases of exception ; so all this is not less true or admits not less of being realized respecting the general art of human living and society. There is a grand and all-comprehensive end, the security of all persons, so far as practicable, of each and all persons in the society ; there may be a theory laying down those means and conditions, under which the nearest approach can be made to that end ; there may also be precepts prescribing to every man the conduct and character which best enables him to become an auxiliary towards its attainment, and imperatively restraining him from acts which hinder it ; precepts deduced from the theory, each one of them separately taken being subject to exceptions, but all of them taken collectively, governing practice as in each particular art. Socrates and Plato talk of the *art* of 'dealing with human beings,' 'the art of behaving in society,' 'that science which has for its object to make men happy,' and they draw a marked distinction between *art* or rules of practice deduced from a theoretical survey of the subject-matter and taught with recognition

---

<sup>1</sup> History of Greece, Vol. VIII. Chap. 67.

of the matter, and mere artless, irrational *knack* or *dexterity* acquired by simple copying or assimilation through a process of which no one can give an account."

Not content with bringing educated men up to the definite aims and exact methods of the special trades and professions, he labored also to carry back the practitioners in those trades and professions to first principles, to a more distinct and conscious *recognition* of the true theory of their respective arts. He conversed with artists in their studios, with handicraftsmen in their shops, and endeavored to lead them to a definite understanding of the essential nature and design of painting, of the true theory of sculpture, of the principles and methods proper to the armorer, and of the distinctive office and aim of the several mechanic arts.

The perfection to which the mathematics and physical sciences have been carried in our day, afford peculiar facilities and excellent models for the wider application of this part of the Socratic method. It is one of the great advantages attending the introduction of these sciences into our systems of academic education, that they tend to promote definiteness of conception, orderly arrangement and precision in the use of language. An extension of the same methods and habits to the study of rhetoric, politics, ethics and theology, to all the branches of moral and social science, would greatly further the advancement of those sciences and improve the prevailing systems of education; and it would be but a carrying out of the Socratic method to its proper application and practical results.

9. Socrates insisted on that symmetrical education which results from, or consists in, the culture of all the powers proper to the nature of man, in their due order, connection and proportion, with the rightful subordination of the physical to the mental, and the intellectual to the moral powers. "I go about," he says to the Athenians in his *Apology*, "doing nothing else, than persuading you, both young and old, to take no care either for the body or riches, prior to or so much as for the soul, how it may be made most perfect, telling you that virtue does not proceed from riches, but riches and all other human blessings, both private and public, from virtue." "Punish my sons," he continues after his condemnation, "punish my sons, when they grow up, O judges, paining them as I have pained you, if they appear to you to care for riches or for anything else before virtue." In his lower nature, the body, man is allied to the inferior animals; in his higher nature, the soul, he is kindred to the gods.<sup>1</sup> The subjection

<sup>1</sup> Xen. Mem. 4. 3, 14.

of the soul to the body reduces him nearly to a level with the brute; the subordination of the body to the soul raises him almost to the rank of a god. To be free from bodily appetites and passions is divine, and to have as few bodily wants as possible is next to the divine; the divine is the best, and the nearest to the divine is the nearest to the best.<sup>1</sup> Temperance, or self-control in the government of the appetites and passions, is therefore the foundation of all personal excellence.<sup>2</sup>

It is also the basis of all good conduct, in other words, of wisdom and success in the regulation of human life.<sup>3</sup> The man who is able to control himself, is competent to govern others; and he who can govern both himself and others, can accomplish whatever he will. He, on the other hand, who is incapable of self-control, is incompetent to everything else; so far from regulating aright his own affairs, or taking the lead in the affairs of society and the State, he is the veriest slave in the community and should pray for nothing so earnestly as that he may fall into the hands of some wise and good master.<sup>4</sup>

The highest bodily health and strength and enjoyment are to be acquired only in the implicit obedience of the rational to the dictates of the rational nature, which alone has the intelligence to guide the body to the attainment of its own proper perfection and highest pleasure.<sup>5</sup> The same subordination is also essential to the largest measure of intellectual attainments and enjoyments; for the mind is quite incapable of the highest action or the most delightful contemplation, while joined in unholy wedlock with clamorous appetites and ungoverned passions. Temperance, therefore, or self-government, is equally conducive to bodily and mental health and education, and is the first of the virtues.

Moreover, moral culture should take the precedence, both in order of time and in order of importance, of mere intellectual discipline or professional training. In the simple language of his ancient biographer and disciple, "he did not push forward his associates zealously to become expert in speech and action and the business of life, but prior to these, he deemed it essential, that virtue, soundmindedness (*σωφροσύνη*), a good moral character be formed in them; for men of capacity in these, without integrity of character, were only the more capable of injustice and evil-doing.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, it was his prior and paramount endeavor to inculcate the principle and the practice of piety

<sup>1</sup> Xen. Mem. 1. 6, 10.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 1. 5, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 4. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 1. 5, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 2. 1, 28—33.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 4. 3, 1.

towards the gods and justice towards men, as the rule and guide of life. In their own imperative nature and intrinsic excellence, these claim to be the ruling powers, the governing principles in the human soul. No other motives have the power, nor other principles have the right, to command implicit and universal obedience. And in the supremacy of these principles, not only the conscience exercises its inalienable right, but the intellect acquiesces and rejoices in its noblest impulse, its only unerring rule, its only proper and worthy end. Man never can arrive at the great end of his whole being, except as he travels in the highway of right under the guidance of heavenly wisdom. To take any other path, for the sake of avoiding difficulties and trouble, were to run into them, and to follow any other leader were to choose a blind man for a guide.<sup>1</sup> To do right is always expedient. It is far better to suffer wrong than to do wrong; and better to be punished for doing wrong than to do wrong and not be punished for it.<sup>2</sup> The only respect in which a man can be really injured or benefitted, is in the depravation or the improvement of his character.<sup>3</sup> To obey God is always wisdom; to disobey him, under whatever apparent inducements, is always folly. In the Socratic ethics, wisdom, virtue and happiness are all the same.<sup>4</sup> True knowledge and right conduct are one and inseparable. No one but he who loves and obeys the truth, knows it. And whoever really knows the true and the beautiful, the good and the right, will certainly do it, as certainly as he who is master of any other art, will put it in successful practice.<sup>5</sup> His language bears a striking resemblance to that of the sacred writers. "Whosoever will do his will, shall know of the doctrine. Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?" The doctrine which the Scriptures teach as a great practical truth, Socrates boldly assumes and earnestly defends as an ethical theory. Wisdom, piety and happiness are inseparable, nay identical. So are folly, sin and misery. The good man is the wise man and the happy man. The bad man is the fool and the wretch.

Alas, that the combined teaching of Socrates and Solomon, and a greater than Solomon, has all proved too powerless to correct the tendency, so strong in the nature of man, to dissever elements which God hath joined together, and not only to separate between wisdom and virtue, but even to prefer the lower to the higher excellence and to cultivate the inferior nature of man to the neglect of his superior

<sup>1</sup> Xen. Mem. 1. 3, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Plat. Gorg. 474-6.

<sup>3</sup> Plat. Crit. 44. D. Apol. 30. C.

<sup>4</sup> Xen. Mem. 3. 9, 45.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 4. 2, 21.

and only proper self! Education with us is growing more and more intellectual, and, what is still worse, more and more expressly professional. Body and soul are sacrificed to the intellect; and the man is merged in the profession, the all-conscious and immortal man to the unconscious and short-lived profession. Our educated men are too often giants in intellect and prodigies in learning, but pygmies in body, and dwarfs in heart and conscience, and, of course, deformed and distorted as a whole and more or less enfeebled and diseased in every part. They have neither framework nor regulator commensurate with their moving power. The consequence is, that at best their action is unsteady and ineffective, while there is constant danger that they will injure or destroy themselves and spread destruction through the community. Let our young men and their teachers look to a better model. In Socrates, they may see a sound mind in a sound body, and how it is produced, and what are its fruits. One such healthy, hearty, genial, earnest, strong, sound-bodied and whole-souled man is himself a lesson of unspeakable value to the world; and the most precious part of that lesson is the truth, that out of the *heart* are the issues of life, flowing, like the vital current, through every fibre of the body, streaming, like ethereal fire, through every faculty of the soul.

10. In all his teaching, Socrates regarded himself as only an instrument of Divine Providence, an apostle of heavenly truth, a missionary sent by the gods for the instruction of his erring countrymen. He was, as he thought, divinely commissioned, divinely taught, divinely guided, aided and blessed. From his childhood, he had been directed by a sort of supernatural sign or divine voice, and impelled by dreams, visions, oracles, and every other means, by which the will of God is revealed to good men, to engage in and prosecute the work of voluntary public instruction.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, he was led unconsciously and almost irresistibly into this work in the process of examining the wise men of Greece for the sake of interpreting and testing the oracle which pronounced him the wisest of men; and before he was aware, as much to his own surprise as that of his fellow-citizens, he found himself, willing or unwilling, installed in the instructor's chair, and pupils flocking to him from all Athens and from every part of Greece. And the work, which he thus commenced under a Divine impulse, he prosecuted under a constant Divine guidance. He felt his dependence on superior wisdom in the reception of pupils (as

<sup>1</sup> Plat. Diall. passim — especially the *Apology*.

well as in the choice of friends),<sup>1</sup> and in the education of those whom he had admitted to peculiar intimacy. He looked to heaven in prayer for the truths which he should teach and for ability to teach them in the best way to each and all of his hearers. And in the discharge of his appointed duty, he held himself accountable, not to his patrons or pupils, not to the rulers or the people, but to God. He did not receive his commission from men; and the dictation of men, however powerful or determined, could not stop him or turn him aside from his calling. If he had stood at his post, which the Athenian generals had assigned him, and not deserted it for fear of the enemy, much less would he abandon the duty appointed him by God for fear of his countrymen.<sup>2</sup> "And should you even now offer to acquit me, on condition of my renouncing this duty," such is the apostolic boldness of his *Apology*, "I should tell you, with all respect and affection, that I will obey the god rather than you, and that I will persist until my dying day, in cross-questioning you, exposing your want of wisdom and virtue, and reproaching you until the defect be remedied."<sup>3</sup> My mission as your monitor is a mark of the special favor of the god to you; and if you condemn me, it will be your loss, for you will find none other such.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps you will ask me: Why cannot you go away, Socrates, and live among us in peace and silence? This is the hardest of all questions for me to answer to your satisfaction. If I tell you that silence on my part would be disobedience to the god, you will think me in jest and not believe me. You will believe me still less, if I tell you that the greatest blessing which can happen to man, is to carry on discussions every day about virtue and those other matters which you hear me canvassing when I cross-examine myself as well as others; and that life without such examination is no life at all. Nevertheless, so stands the fact, incredible as it may seem to you."<sup>5</sup>

How much and what objective reality there was answering to this strong inward conviction, has always been a disputed point. For ourselves, we deem it neither heretical nor unphilosophical, neither unscriptural nor irrational, to believe that he may have been, not under proper inspiration, but under a special divine impulse. It cannot surprise us, that he should have thought himself inspired, when we see him fired with a benevolent zeal that could not rest, and at the same time guided by a wisdom that seldom erred. So far

<sup>1</sup> Xen. Mem. 2. 6, 8, and Plato often.

<sup>2</sup> Plat. *Apol.* 29.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 29. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 30. D.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 38. A. The foregoing extract or abstract is in the language of Grote.

from considering it, however, an exclusive, a miraculous, or even a singular prerogative, he insisted that the same divine teaching was within the reach of all; that by humility and faith, prayer and obedience, any man might know and do the will of God and secure his special protection and blessing;<sup>1</sup> and that all men, whatever be their occupation, and the more as their pursuit is more difficult and important, need Divine direction and assistance for the successful accomplishment, even of their worldly ends.<sup>2</sup> In the opinion of Socrates (and it would seem that every man's own observation and experience must inevitably lead him to the same conclusion), there are elements in every subject which lie beyond the reach of human ken and human control; there is a point, where the most obvious truth meets and blends with the most inscrutable mystery; there is a line of demarcation, where the humblest profession or pursuit of man passes out of the province of his limited faculties and goes over into the domain of the providence of God;<sup>3</sup> and it is as impious for the farmer, the merchant, the general or the statesman, not to seek for, and rely on, Divine wisdom within its proper sphere, as it would be for him not to exercise his own powers within their appropriate province.<sup>4</sup> The peculiar difficulty of the teacher's work (for the *difficulty* and *danger* as well as the *nature* of *education* was implied in his favorite comparison), and its peculiar dignity as it was estimated by Socrates (for a man who identified the knowledge with the practice of virtue, could not but attach *all* importance to right teaching<sup>5</sup>), render it especially proper and especially important, that he should recognize this great principle of subjection to a higher law, dependence on a higher power, responsibility to a higher sovereign, than self-will and wisdom or the wisdom and will of the people.

There is a humiliating and painful contrast between the Socratic view of the teacher's vocation, and that which *two* often prevails, even among Christian parents and Christian teachers, in our own age and country, justly proud as it is of its schools and its systems of popular education. Parents honor and reward every other class of men more than the teachers of their children and, of course, often commit them to hands, to which they never would think of entrusting their business. Teachers, in turn, engage in teaching, as a temporary occupation, for its pecuniary emoluments, with no better qualifications than are necessary to pass a not over-severe examination, and with no higher sense of accountability than is requisite to meet

<sup>1</sup> Xen. Mem. 1. 4. 18; 4. 3, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 1. 1, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 1. 1, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 4. 2, 6. 20. Plat. Apol. 26. A. B.

the not too elevated standard of the pupils and their parents. Yet these teachers hold in their hands the character and destiny of the rising generation, the honor and happiness of individuals, the peace and comfort of families, the prosperity and glory of the State, all the precious interests of this life, to say nothing of the infinitely more momentous concerns of an immortal existence. What a contrast to the model of enlightened, disinterested, conscientious, unswerving devotedness of Socrates to teaching as his life-work and the greatest work that is done on earth, greater even than that of the statesman or commander, and superseding, if well done, that of the judge and executioner; a work from which he could not turn aside, if he would, and would not, if he could; a work which reigned in his heart while it laid under contribution every power of his body and every faculty of his mind till the age of threescore years and ten, and in which, however men might flatter or frown, he went forward in the undoubting assurance of the approval and coöperation of God. Like the lamented Arnold of our own day, he has given dignity to the vocation of the teacher. None need deem himself too high to pursue, in any sphere, however low or limited, the work to which such men have consecrated their exalted powers, in which they developed so fully and harmoniously their gifted minds, and in which they secured such results to their country and mankind. A competent supply of such teachers, following *their* methods in those leading features which bear so manifestly the stamp of superior wisdom, but, above all, animated with their enlightened, earnest, devout and philanthropic spirit, would be among the richest boons that heaven could confer upon the American people.