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THE

HISTORY OF EDUCATION

ITS VALUE TO TEACHERS

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The History of Education.

ITS VALUE TO TEACHERS.

OUR present standpoint of educational attainment is obviously the result of past efforts. Our entire stock of effective appliances, of approved methods, of tested and confirmed principles, and of valued schemes of organization, has its roots in the past, and often a very remote past; as have also the various branches of learning which are used as means of intellectual training. So, too, the means which are suited for the higher and more important work of developing character, have been discussed and tested by our predecessors; their fitness, and the conditions under which they are useful, have been in some degree ascertained; and the limits of their efficiency have been measurably determined.

Viewed, therefore, in the most general way, we should reasonably expect that an acquaintance with the History of Education would be of great value to all teachers who aim to be something better than mere slaves of routine,—and, happily, the number of such teachers is rapidly increasing. Not only is it true that “the better one knows the rules and principles of his art, the more boldly he practices them;” but also it is certain that the more thoroughly one understands as teacher the history of the methods he uses, of the principles that he applies, and of the branches that he teaches, the bolder, more intelligent, more ingeniously varied, and more efficient will be likely to be all his operations, and the greater the probability of beneficial improvement; whilst the possibility that he may be tempted, by a false notion of originality, to the repetition of discredited experiments will be reduced to a minimum.

1. What is doubtless the most valuable and essential service that may be rendered to teachers by familiarity with the History of Education, is one that is but too likely to be overlooked, viz: the enhancement of the ability to take a broad and unprejudiced view of pedagogical questions. The acknowledged tendency of the teacher's vocation is to produce a certain limitation of ideas to a narrow circle, and to foster prejudices in favor of certain familiar lines of work, or certain usual modes of doing work. This

tendency is incident to the very nature of his calling, which brings him into intimate contact chiefly with immature minds, and usually limits his professional activity to the elements of a few branches, which, when they become familiar, seem to the narrowed vision to fill the entire round of desirable knowledge. From this limitation of view, since narrowness is proverbially zealous, spring an abundance of pedagogical treatises, discussions, and polemics, which too commonly are pretentious rather than valuable, and which, by their distortion and exaggeration of some phase of truth, produce all the effects of error. Such works have given occasion to a writer, in a recent issue of an influential journal of education, to say, with some display of bitterness, in treating of "Low Tone in Teachers," "There is another incubus upon us that may be noted in a word, and that is *pedagogical literature*. The educational psychologists offer us the most dreadful impositions upon simple-minded teachers who are not learned in philosophy. . . . Of books on general pedagogy, almost all should be eschewed: the attempt to read them is purely injurious." It is to be hoped that this statement is a pedagogical exaggeration,—an illustration of a tendency to exaggerate so strong as to display itself even in a rebuke of the results of distorted and one-sided views.

The most effectual corrective to the tendency in question is to be found in such an enlargement of the horizon of thought and of the limitations of individual experience, as is likely to be gained by a thoughtful study of the History of Education. There we may see depicted gropings after improvement and conflicts of opinion, which were, possibly, no more futile or causeless than those in which we are actors. In its pages we may, with unprejudiced vision, see mirrored the images of struggles wholly analogous to our own "conflict of studies" and of ideas,—the struggle of scholasticism against the noble monuments of classic literature; the struggle of Latinists against the growing literary use of vernacular tongues; the struggle against the cultivation of mathematical science in old European universities; the stolid resistance of the barbaric methods of mere memory cramming, which, in the witty words of Montaigne, made of boys "mere asses loaded with books, to whom, with blows of a whip, was given a pocket-full of science, not to *use* but to *keep*," to all efforts to utilize the youthful instinct for a knowledge of nature, and so to gain access to the memory through the understanding; in brief, the perennial warfare which

in every age is waged by a narrow conservatism entrenched in prescriptive use, against even the most enlightened efforts for a closer conformity to nature in methods, or for a truer conformity to the present state of culture in the choice of the subject-matter of studies. If such a study should serve as a salutary warning against our reluctance to reconsider and, if need be, to revise our means and methods of instruction, and against our natural disposition to think that what we are accustomed to is part of the necessary scheme of things ; if it should dispose us to take a broad and unprejudiced, yet not hasty, view of all educational questions, a view in which self counts for little and the advancement of our profession for much ; if it should incline us to lay a less exclusive emphasis on attainment and more on the development of character ; and if, furthermore, as in all other vocations which have to deal with vital human interests, it should confer that justness of judgment, that unerring sagacity, that openness of mind to consider all questions impartially on their merits, and that far-seeing comprehensiveness of intelligence which views subjects in all their bearings, thus making teachers truly statesmen in all that concerns their calling ; who will say that the History of Education would not do to our profession a service of the greatest possible moment ?

2. The study of educational history can hardly fail to enhance in every true teacher, his sense of the dignity and importance of his calling, in its relations, not merely to the welfare of individuals, but to the elevation and true greatness of societies and states. It will reveal to him how closely every advance in civilization has been correlated with a corresponding advance in the education of youth,—a correlation so intimate that it would be difficult to determine which is effect and which cause. This relation is shown, not merely in the effects of education, recently somewhat studied, in increasing the efficiency of labor, and in diminishing those twin blots on civilization, pauperism and crime ; but, on a broader scale, in the entire history of civilization and of education. In this it becomes manifest that the depth and validity of any civilization can be truly estimated only by the thoroughness with which all social ameliorations and humanitarian developments reach and permeate the masses of the community through an efficient education. For a civilization may easily be very brilliant, and yet exceedingly superficial. It may exhibit a high degree of perfection of social arrangements, the benefits of which may reach but a very limited class ; it may be adorned by many individual examples of

refinement and elevation of sentiment, and of nobleness of character ; it may be made illustrious by a brilliant and enduring literature ; and yet beneath this shining exterior may seethe a vast mass of popular ignorance, superstition, and semi-barbarism. Such civilizations, whose benefits are limited to a small educated class, either perish from their own limitations, or are forced by intestine convulsions to educate and elevate the masses as a condition of their own continuance.

The vital influence of education on national welfare, which the Germans have embodied in the well-known maxim that whatever you would make deeply influential in a nation's life, you must first embody in the education of a nation's youth, is no discovery of modern times. Plato and Aristotle, the two greatest philosophers of antiquity, show their thorough comprehension of it by incorporating their weighty views on education in treatises of political philosophy, of which they clearly saw that it is an essential part. Plato was so deeply impressed with its importance, that in two remarkable passages of "The Laws," he proposes that the education of all citizens of both sexes should be made *compulsory* ; and, despairing of the stability of states on any other terms, he would even fix its subject-matter by unalterable laws.

This lofty view of education as the twin sister of civilization, and as the most vital factor in the elevation and transformation of societies and states, needs to be deeply impressed on the consciousness of every teacher, that he may rise to the full dignity of his calling ; and in no way can it be so effectually inculcated as by a thoughtful study of the History of Education : for here as elsewhere, the well-known maxim of Seneca holds good, "Longum iter est per praecepta, breve et efficax per exempla." Already we are beginning to utilize this powerful reformatory influence, in instruction on the nature and effects of stimulants, in impressing on young minds the importance of the preservation of forests by the exercises of Arbor Day, and in inculcating respect for labor by some training in constructive work. We shall do our duty in these and other respects more efficiently, the more deeply we are penetrated with a sense of the far-reaching effects of all impressions made on youthful minds.

3. Akin to what has just been considered, is the value of the historic lesson, that education like civilization has been a *gradual* evolution, whose progress has been marked by a growing adaptation of man, at first to his physical, and then to his social and

spiritual environment. The course of this evolution may indicate to the educator along what lines future efforts for improvement should be made, and how they may be made successful. It should teach him not to undervalue physical development and a familiarity with nature's laws, through obedience to which alone, man has been enabled to make nature subservient to his will. It will assure him that when he habituates children and youth to social requirements, and to obedience to justly exerted authority, he is taking no mean step towards their complete spiritual development and emancipation. So too, the slowness of progress, in which the Divine will has determined that every advance step shall be fixed by heredity, and made permanent only by the slow lapse of time, may serve to restrain his impatience when his duty calls him to labor, as it often must, amidst ignorant and relatively undeveloped surroundings; and may give him the needful courage to work in God's own way, patiently elevating one generation, if but a little, that the succeeding generation may start from a somewhat higher level.

4. Again, if the past has taught any lesson with more than usual clearness, it is this, that the hopes of our race for a brighter and happier future depend solely on the increasing culture of the largest possible number of its members; and that this culture must receive its impulse from the higher centers of learning. Nay, more; it teaches that every step of educational progress has resulted, not from the efforts of ambitious ignorance to struggle upward, but from a helpful influence reaching downward from what is highest in education, and aiding to lift towards itself masses otherwise inert and unprogressive; and that hence the chief hope of mankind for intellectual and spiritual elevation must be found in the spread and activity of high-class schools. And this is precisely what might be expected; for, without such stimulus, the average unlettered man is but dimly conscious of his limitations and of his higher needs, if indeed he has any consciousness of them at all. Feeling keenly only the wants, and knowing only the enjoyments, which appeal to the lower side of his nature, unless some impulse comes to him from above, rousing him to an ennobling discontent, and pointing him to gratifications for the higher nature that is dormant within him, what hope can be found for his elevation? Give now to this man even no more than the ability to read fluently, and at once the horizon of his life is enormously enlarged and his pleasures elevated, by bringing him into a possible communion

with the brightest spirits of all times ; and every added enlargement of his mental and spiritual culture, by increasing his capability of deriving a larger pleasure from the best stores of the past and present, and by enhancing his sense of personal dignity, diminishes measurably the temptation to satisfy himself with low and sensual enjoyments. But this elevating stimulus comes always from the highest culture of the times. Thus Solon and Socrates, Plato and Aristotle in Greece, the emigrant Greeks in Rome, the Saracens in their great Spanish schools, the scholars whom the early universities of Italy, France and England sent widely over Europe ; Luther and Melancthon, Sturm and Comenius in Germany, Erasmus and Ramus, and Montaigne and the self-sacrificing LaSalle in France and Holland, and Bacon, Milton and Locke in England, - not to mention less prominent worthies, nor those of more recent days,—all men endowed with the best learning which their times afforded, have scattered the beneficent seeds from which has sprung the widely diffused culture that we enjoy, a culture whose fruits reach, or may reach, the humblest homes.

From this, the teacher, versed in educational history, may gain a higher motive, not only for cherishing and defending secondary schools when he hears their interests assailed on the low grounds of supposed present utility ; but for reverencing all higher seats of learning, and hailing with joy their advancement, being assured that as they rise they will not only elevate with them the entire system of schools below, but will illumine a wider horizon with a brighter radiance.

5. To these highly valuable yet, possibly, somewhat remote considerations which the study of educational history will be likely to press upon the attention of teachers, may be added some of a more immediate character, in the way partly of suggestion, partly of caution. Assuredly the history of Greek education should direct our attention forcibly to the need of a greater care in the cultivation of our vernacular, and in familiarizing our youth with the treasures of its literature. We shall learn that the Athenian schoolmaster bestowed admirable care on securing purity of pronunciation, of accent, and of rhythm in his pupils, and promoting an exact and harmonious use of their native tongue ; that the poems of Homer were their inspired reading book, to which were added the works of the cyclic and lyric poets, and other gems of their national literature ; and that, from the lack of books, much of this literature was firmly imprinted on the memory of youth, there to ger-

minate and bear its fruit in an unsurpassed national taste. A large part of the scholastic training of boys was thus in the literature of their language ; and Plato deemed the careful selection of this literature of so great moment, from the permanence of the impressions made on young minds, that he devotes a considerable part of the Second and Third Books of the "Republic" to an exposition of the principles that should govern the selection of reading for the young. He plainly indicates, both here and in "The Laws," that the multitudinous writers whose books infest all the highways and bypaths of modern literature, warping the ideas and lowering the taste of youth, would have had but a sorry reception in his ideal state, in which the teacher was expected so to preoccupy the minds of the young with what was best in both poetry and prose that there would be no encouragement for the writing of trash.

The practice of the Athenians, and its well-known results, should suggest to us the expediency of early directing the minds of children to such of our best authors as are most nearly level to their comprehension, trusting that if at first they do not clearly understand, they may at least *feel* their excellence, as was said by the erratic Rosseau of the literature by which his young fancy was nourished. Indeed, it should be said that more mature minds even, meet many things in the best books which they *feel* rather than fully *understand*, and which must await the chance of some favoring experience for their complete elucidation. Should the Athenian example need a more recent enforcement, it may be found in the well-known prevalence among educated Frenchmen of a keen sense for literary form, due largely no doubt, to the continuing influence in the best French schools of Rollin's "Traité des Etudes," in which the careful teaching of the mother tongue with exposition of its best literature, is strongly emphasized and clearly illustrated.

I, of course, know full well that a movement in the right direction has already been initiated amongst us ; and that, as is usual, it has received its most vigorous impulse from our higher institutions of learning. How much of depth or extent this movement has, many of you have good means of knowing ; but it is certain that it is accompanied by the discouraging intimation that our teachers are unable to present fitly the best specimens of our literature, without the aid of editions stuffed to twice or thrice their original bulk, with explanatory notes, mostly on points that should need no explanation. A distinguished professor of English litera-

ture very recently said to me that such editions are admirably fitted to repress all literary taste. Let us hope that our teachers may soon vindicate their ability to present the literature of their mother tongue without such adventitious aids. Probably few things that may be taught in our schools are of such transcendent importance as the inculcation of a taste for good reading ; and none seems to be more generally neglected. The example of the ancient Greeks may teach us a most valuable lesson in this regard.

6. This same Athenian example may also serve, both to diminish somewhat our confidence in the efficacy of mere grammar study in promoting practical skill in the use of our language, and to lessen the emphasis with which we are wont to demand the study of other languages, not only for their utility and as a means of intellectual culture, but also as well-nigh indispensable for the mastery of our vernacular, and for assuring correctness of taste. For, it was long after Greek literature had passed the meridian of its splendor, before the first Greek grammar,* or indeed any formal grammar, made its appearance. The grammar of the Greek school-boy was literary study, without any formal separation of words into classes or analysis of their relations, things which even the wisest philosophers had not yet fully conceived. They learned to use their language correctly by persistent practice ; they acquired delicacy of taste by familiarity with good models. Likewise the Greeks neither knew nor cared to understand any language but their own ; and yet, knowing only their own language, their poets, orators, and philosophers are still considered almost unapproachable models of literary excellence.

Here let me not be misconceived by any enthusiastic grammarian or *polylinguist* ; nor let a covert attack upon favorite branches, which is by no means intended, be read into this paragraph. Probably few who hear me value such studies more highly than I, for their undeniable merits. They are, when rightly employed, a very effective means of intellectual discipline ; and, in the case of many, they become essential as sources of valuable knowledge ; but the assumption that their study is indispensable to the formation of a correct and delicate taste, or to gaining the mastery of one's vernacular, is shown to be untrue, not merely by prominent individual examples, but by the history of a nation remarkable for its literary excellence. Such a fact should lead us all to a truer estimate of

* See Karl Schmidt, *Geschichte der Pädagogik*, Vol. 1, p. 714, 4th ed.

the value of our mother tongue, and to a more discriminate and effective use of its resources, not only in the attractive presentation of its literature, but also in securing from pupils its correct use, and its enrichment during the entire period of their school life. In this respect, our German brethren, orthodox classicists as they are, could teach us a valuable lesson. It is poor educational economy, to say the least, to bestow so much time on the study of formal grammar, which is only a means, as to leave little or none for those exercises that serve to rectify and enlarge the pupil's use of speech, which is the end ; or to neglect the literary treasures of our own language, that we may impart to pupils a knowledge, too often very imperfect, of some other language.

The very proper and reasonable time limit fixed for such dissertations as this, will preclude me from doing more than hint at some further suggestions which the perusal of educational history will be likely to convey to intelligent teachers, without going into even the small amount of illustration that has thus far been attempted. I will therefore mention a few points very briefly.

7. Much emphasis is just now rightly laid in many quarters on the teaching of Civics in our schools. The History of Roman Education in the better days of the Republic, illustrates well the importance of such instruction ; both Plato and Aristotle strongly enforce it as essential to good citizenship, as do also our own Milton and Locke, and not a few others.

8. The advocates of Manual Training will be pleased to meet the views of their early friends, in the proposal of Sir Wm. Petty, 1647, and in the works of Comenius and Locke, Rousseau and Pestalozzi ; and to note the well-omened and successful efforts of Ferdinand Kindermann, 1771, to elevate the condition of the Bohemian peasantry by introducing into the schools which he established, rural employments and feminine handiwork.

9. The power, and the extent of influence of moral and religious ideas, which will be found to give a strong coloring to all educational systems, and even to condition their form in many oriental nations, should rivet the attention of teachers on the necessity of sparing no pains in the development of a right type of character, a duty of the very first importance, and yet which they are but too apt to neglect amid the wearing preoccupations of the school-room.

10. We are repeatedly reminded how much for success or failure depends on the personality of the teacher, until the well worn les-



son falls on unheeding ears. With what new force then does not this lesson strike us, when it is embodied in the life-history of men like Ratich and Basedow, both gifted with unusual ability, and the originators of great and promising educational projects, yet both doomed to failure by the defects of their moral organization; or, when we see Pestalozzi emerging from the ruins of all his undertakings,—ruins caused by his various “unrivalled incapacities” and limitations,—his head crowned with a garland of victory by virtue of “his inexhaustible love for the people, his pure heart, his glowing enthusiasm, and his restless efforts and sacrifices for human welfare through human culture.”

11. A caution against supposing that all that is now worth knowing should be crowded into our school programs, may be conveyed to us by the history of all earlier schools, in which men so disciplined their powers as to become wise and great, by diligent attention to a list of studies which we would think meagre,—possibly finding it even an advantage that subjects were so few as to leave the current of their progress to an untroubled flow.

12. And, finally, the pains-taking care that we may see exercised in more recent times, by the wisest and most experienced educators, in weighing, selecting, proportioning, and arranging the schemes of study for great communities, should be, to those among us who are charged with the administration of schools, both an aid and an encouragement, in the discharge of their difficult and perplexing duties, inspiring them to labor zealously and prudently in building up what will ultimately be a great American system of schools,—the best and most effective, let us hope, that the world has hitherto seen.

Such, then, are some of the aids, the suggestions and the inspirations which the History of Education can offer to all teachers who will study it aright. Will they not richly repay the trouble of securing?

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