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EDUCATION OUT OF SCHOOL.

An Address Delivered Before the Charlottetown Teachers' Institute by Mr. W. L. Cotton—Published by Request.

Do not imagine, ladies and gentlemen, that I purpose to disparage education in school. My desire is, rather, to set forth the relationship which education in school bears to education out of school, and the importance of "learning how to learn,"—remembering always that

"All the world's an universal college. And everyone may be a learner here."

As the apple develops, from the bud to the blossom, from the blossom to the fruit, growing and mellowing day by day, till it becomes fully ripe and at last "drops in a silent autumn night"—such is our ideal of human existence in this world, from the cradle to the grave. The life of man is, or ought to be, one continuous process of development. It has, however, been divided by our great poet into seven ages, in one of which "the whining schoolboy, with his satchel and shining morning face, creeping like a snail, unwillingly to school," bears his little part. But for the present argument it may, more fittingly, be divided into three stages: the stage before school, the stage in school, and the stage or age after school.

Of these it will be admitted that not the least important, perhaps the most important, is the stage before school. For in it, that "Divine Afflatus" which makes all the difference between animal and man and between man and man is imparted to the young idea, and in it the twig is bent to the direction in which the tree will usually, and despite all incidental circumstances, be inclined. It is true that there are occasionally seen excellent men and women whose infancy was passed in habits of vice, and that we may perchance have met disreputable, or even criminal, men and women whose earlier years were spent in virtuous and well-ordered homes. But these are the exceptions which go to prove the rule that the first five or six years of life before school are those in which the tendencies of boys and girls are implanted, the framework of the characters which men and women develop is set up. "I too," with Thomas Carlyle, "acknowledge the all but omnipotence of early culture and nurture; hereby we have either a doddered dwarf bush or a high towering, wide shadowing tree,—either a sickly yellow cabbage or an edible, luxuriant green one." In these years, the mother and the father, the nurses and playmates, the playthings and the plays, are the educators out of school:

"Behold the child among his new-born blisses. A six years' darling of a pigmy size; See where mid work of his own hand he lies Fretted by sallies of his mother's kisses,— With light upon him from his father's eyes; See at his feet some little plan or chart, Some fragment from his dream of human life, Shaped by himself with newly-learned art."

Such an one is receiving his first lessons—those early impressions which influence for good or ill his future throughout eternity. I regard it as one of the reassuring signs of the times that the importance of early education out of school is now more generally recognized than it has been in the past, and that to the help of the parents has come the Kindergarten. Nothing can, of course, take the place of the mother's personal care and oversight. No one can, possibly, as the mother can, teach the little one to love the good, and the beautiful, and the true, and abhor that which is false and ugly and bad. No one can, as she, teach the early and all-important lessons of obedience to the voice of conscience and veneration for the word of God. But it is not, in every case, possible for her to fulfil all her duty in this regard; and it is pleasing and gratifying to know that in the Kindergarten her child is surrounded by those good influences which make for the elevation and complete development of human character.

But having passed the first stage, the children come to you, ladies and gentlemen. You get them just as they are,—vigorous and wholesome young plants or weak and dwindling; carefully nurtured or growing up no one knows how; with incipient good characters and incipient bad characters. You get them all. You have before you, day after day, those who have been inspired by the kindling fire of genius, those minds are already brightened by the radiance of talent, those who will, in the future, be rated as plain people of common sense, and those who in their day and generation will be known as noodles. What may you do or not do with them? Do you not sometimes fear and tremble lest you should by any unskillfulness of yours, any misdirected zeal, or lapse into carelessness of word or action, mar, in any way, the delicate material of mind and character upon which it is your high duty and privilege to work? Must you deal with all in the same way? I have noticed that some of the questions out of your box have reference to grades in the schools. This seems to me a matter well worthy of serious attention—in view of the possible effects in after life upon education out of school—of placing clever scholars and dull scholars at the same desk and requiring them to proceed together in their studies at the same rate. It is apparent that in such a case there must be some injustice. Either the clever ones are kept back and allowed to contract idle habits of mind, to be their bane in after life, or those who are not so clever are urged forward beyond their powers. With the competitive system superadded, the tendency is to push forward the bright and ambitious scholars and give to those whose mental development may be slower insufficient attention. This is bad in two ways. The slow ones are not made to understand that which they learn, and

receive little permanent benefit from their studies, and the quick ones are permitted to work at such a rate that their health and even their lives are endangered. If a horseman were to permit a lively colt to travel as fast as it could until tired, and then to apply whip and spur, we should call him a fool; for we know that such treatment must result in spavin, or ring-bone, or broken wind, or perhaps death. But how often do we see our brightest intellects allowed to continue at tension for weeks and months together, and at the end of the term urged on in competitive examinations. These intellects may be vigorous and successful for a few years; but they, soon or later, lose their grip, and those who possess them leave the grammar school, or the college, maimed in mind, with nervous force abated or destroyed, without the power of continuing their education out of school, to sink into early graves or perhaps to continue in life dullards or cranks, or anemic, nearsighted, spectacled-worn creatures, useless to the world and burdens to their parents and themselves. There are many sad things in this world, and one of the saddest is a young man or woman, who ought to be in the bloom of youth and full of conscious power cut down in this way as a result of acting on the fond and foolish notion that by successfully competing for the prizes awarded in school they are exhibiting proofs of the possession of mental power and aptitude for success in the battle of life, which they will (if they live) have to fight out of school. In nine cases out of ten, it is the dull scholar in school who fairly wins the battles of life. Those whom the gods love—those who have been inspired by genius or gifted with talents—die young or are intellectually spavined, ring-boned or wind-galled and so are out of the race. The evil of frequent competitive examinations is not confined to Prince Edward Island or to Canada, but is prevalent throughout the entire English speaking world. An experienced British school inspector discusses this latter day phase of education in school in a lengthy and vigorous article which appeared some time ago in the Nineteenth Century,—and he sums up as follows:

"The quantity of teaching, both in hours and subjects, is damaging the quality; instruction is impeding education. In fact the main feature of the modern system is hurry, and hurry is fatal to all good training. No human excellence in any subject, except it be in the case of some stray heaven-born genius, is attained without prolonged and deliberate attention. When the prizes of life have to be attained before the age of fourteen or nineteen, or at most twenty-two, it is obvious what the mischief must be. Fatigue of mind and and of body engenders either physical failure or that apathy of mind which precludes all further mental progress. If we make haste with our instruction, we are sure, not only to spoil it, but to destroy the education which it ought to convey; moreover to create a new crop of physical and mental evils to take the place of those we are striving to remove. Take the clearest case. Is it a good bargain to have a boy or girl highly instructed and eminently successful in the competition of school, but shattered in health and resulting in a splendid failure? Let it be remembered that there may be innumerable cases not so signal and yet of the same kind—young people damaged in sight, still more damaged in insight, entering the world weary and dull of mind, with all their vigor and elasticity gone. They may get their school scholarships at fourteen, their college scholarships at nineteen, a brilliant degree at twenty-two and then they sink into the rank of some profession having gained no useful habits but to drowse at books. Is this the way to build up the great English race, called to direct the fortunes of a world-empire? Is this the way to preserve the splendid type of man which foreigners criticize and ridicule only because they envy it? Or do we, indeed, desire the next generation to pose as second-hand German? God forbid! We all think ourselves very jealous of our liberty; are we not in real danger of losing it? Is it not being filched from year to year by those pestilent theorists who are enslaving our youth under the false pretence of intellectual discipline?"

This, ladies and gentlemen is the strong language of a practical educator. Some of you may perhaps think that it is too strong; but in my opinion it strikes at an evil which those who have control of our schools ought to abate. This Canada of ours has need of men who have sound minds, in sound bodies. It will be calamitous to the country, as to the individuals who compose it, if the generations as they arise should suffer depreciation as a result of wrong methods of education in school. I say nothing now concerning the wear and tear of those unfortunate teachers of the upper forms who, month after month, quarter after quarter, and year after year, are compelled to the monotonous duty, after school hours, of correcting and valuing examination papers. The toil of teachers, like that of editors, counts for nothing, is not to be thought of, when the good of the public whom they serve is in the balance. Yet it might be worth while to consider whether or not the time and energies of teachers might not be devoted to some better purpose in the education of our youth than in the correction of their frequent examination papers.

(To be continued.)

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JAMES JEFFREY ROCHE.

—Harpers Weekly.

Carter's for Wall Paper

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April 13th, A. D. 1897.

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