

CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

LECTURES AND PAPERS ON

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TENTH SERIES.

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CHRISTIAN THOUGHT.

THE ULTIMATE AIM OF EDUCATION.

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IT IS an old saying that a man's hand held close before his eye will cover a mountain in the distance. It is one of the unfortunate limitations of the human mind that breadth of vision can only be gained at the cost of closeness of inspection ; that to give minute attention to anything inevitably shuts out of our view a thousand other objects of equal importance. So true is this, so much are we limited by the things which thrust themselves upon us, so completely do we become absorbed by the routine of life, that those things which are ultimate and final, which are the results of tendencies, rather than the fruit of daily tasks, are soon lost sight of, and we come to think that perhaps after all there are no such things.

The fairy tale of our childhood, the poetry of our early manhood, lose all attractiveness to us. We cease to think of anything as being real which is not tangible; of anything as being attractive which is not within the experience of our bread-earning years. It may be that these things are due to the practical tendencies of our race,—the practical tendencies which have reduced our laws to a dependence upon precedent, our manners to a regard to etiquette, our beliefs to the formulas of dogma. Or it may be that all of these things are really due to a want of leisure ; to the overwhelming importance of each day's task ; to the necessity of working ten months before we can rest two, and then of working doubly hard those two months in the pursuit

of health, energy and stimulating ideas, in order that we may teach the succeeding ten months. The treadmill of life goes on so unceasingly that we are glad enough to adopt some sufficiently satisfactory plan for the teaching of to-day, and trust the ultimate things to the shaping of a philosophy which we deny, but at the same time actually trust, though it be but the stoicism of those who really do not care, the fatalism of those who do not know what to do, or the pessimism of those who have given up trying.

But this land of ours is too young and too vigorous, and withal too hopeful, to yield to the fatigues of a life of struggle ; and it is too providentially practical to try to build a house without a plan. Of course it is easy to proceed on the idea that we are succeeding if the children advance from the primary departments to the secondary grades ; if they graduate with credit at the high school and enter the colleges without conditions. And there is an additional element of satisfaction if, in the complex life of the college, where the students of so many schools are brought together, our pupils distinguish themselves. But when they are done high school and college life, when they enter into business and into professional careers, what is going to be the outcome of our teaching ? What has been done for them and who has done it and why have these results been produced ?

There is a tendency in this generation to reduce all educational inquiries to the category of science or of art. Science is more spoken of, but art is more practised. Science deals with the system, the regulation, the development of method ; art deals with the application. Those who have developed this or that theory of the science of education have won to themselves enthusiastic followers. Happily the leaders have been, as a rule, thinkers ; but in most cases those who follow have grasped only a part of the system, and have put into practice at once so much as they have grasped, or so much of what they have grasped as they have found practicable. Every schoolhouse to-day has its "theory of education" ; but not every schoolhouse has its "practice of education." There is something delightfully humorous, and yet withal pathetic, in the bright young teacher who has got some distinctive feature of some elaborate

system and is heroically seeking to put it into operation, apart from its fundamental ideas, and without reference to its ultimate trend. We hear a great deal of talk about the various methods of education—about humanism, realism and naturalism; about the various highly esteemed masters and their methods; about Comenius and Pestalozzi and Froebel, about Milton and Locke and Rousseau, about Herbert Spencer and Comparyé and a host of others whose names are apt to be like X —equal to an unknown quantity. But there seems to be comparatively little discussion of the philosophical aspects, whether we take philosophy to mean the general study of relations, and consider the relation of education to the results to be obtained when the scholar puts his education to use as a philosophy of life, or narrow the meaning of the word philosophy, and consider the relation of education to the development of the purely mental processes of the child.

On the other hand, parents and children in a crude groping way are always after the philosophy of education. As the lawyers say, there is never an agreement between teacher and parent because the minds do not meet. They are proceeding upon the same problem from different points of view and seeking a different answer. The teacher rightly judges that his method is essential to the solution of the problem, but he insists on regarding it as an end and not as a means. Education to him is a great end; to the parent it is only a means. Naturally enough, nearly all of the greater names in modern educational progress have not only sympathized with the parents' point of view, but they have become radical reformers all along the line of conforming all teaching to the philosophy of education. But in most cases they have become so radical that they have overturned much that they were unable to replace, and eventually have become wedded to the methods which were originally established for the very purpose of overturning any too strongly fixed method, and substituting for it the dominance of end over means.

In other words, education is worthless except as a preparation for life, and by life we mean individual life; and so long as men are complex in nature and divergent in occupation individual lives must continue to be not merely different, but of in-

finite variety. At the same time there is a common element, a common tendency, and a common destiny. The life that is to be led is the life of a man, and education must be directed to creating a symmetrical manhood. In all cases it is safe to say that up to a certain point all should be taught the same things; it is equally safe to say that all cannot be taught the same things by the same methods, and of the things which they are to be taught the most important is not, as has been asserted by so many, knowledge of the world and the things in it, but knowledge of self and how to make use of the various elements of character which each possesses in differing degree.

A child, we are constantly told, must be taught to think. But what is it to be taught to think? How many of us can give a satisfactory definition of what thinking is, or a true analysis of the various processes essential to thought. The mind is so complex, and thought is so dependent upon the just and even action of every faculty of the mind that if some faculties are developed at the expense of others, proper thinking is impossible. Of course we know how common it is for one child to have memory developed to such an inordinate degree as to practically interfere with the proper exercise of the reasoning faculty; others will undertake to supply the deficiencies of other faculties by the use of the imagination—oftentimes at the expense of truth; while yet others, possessing really remarkable powers of penetration, and this I fancy is more common than is oftentimes understood, fail to exercise it in connection with the proper aid from the memory. This is peculiarly so in all logical processes where it is important to remember premises once obtained, and processes once performed, so that a conclusion once reached needs only to be suggested to be remembered in its completeness. This higher form of memory, memory by correlation rather than contiguity, is one of the first and best fruits of early education—an education which, however, it seems to me is too early, when properly taught, to be within the field of the schoolmaster, and belongs properly to the domain of the mother, but cannot be expected to be universal until more mothers are properly educated for this field of instruction.

Of course the second step in this first process, which is talked

about endlessly in connection with the so-called disciplinary studies, is properly appreciated but rarely succeeds in practice unless the antecedent training is adequate.

The old schools, the humanists, the classical school, and above all the Jesuit school, exaggerated, at the same time that they by their practice depreciated the value of disciplinary studies. The realist school, on the other hand, equally exaggerated and equally injured the place of knowledge of things in the domain of education. What we really want is to combine the two and to combine them in such a way as to produce the best result upon those taught.

The first thing which we have to consider in any philosophy of education is the nature of the person to be educated. In considering the nature of the child, to be practical rather than theoretical and direct rather than exhaustive, we must consider him, first, with reference to his nature—and here we may observe with old John Ascham, whose wise observations in his "Schoolmaster" never grow old, that the child is made up of two parts, body and soul, and we cannot separate them. In the second place, we must consider him with reference to his destiny. And his destiny is conditioned by his nature. There is his bodily destiny, which is mortal, and his spiritual destiny, which is immortal. But these two cannot be separated; for though he must play the part of a man in the world—a mere commercial animal, if you will—he cannot play that part without being not merely a moral being but something far more and far higher—an immortal being whose future is conditioned by his present. This nature and this destiny is the complex problem with which we have to deal, but its complexity is no excuse for its neglect.

We cannot assume, as so many do, that the destiny of man is, as Iago said, but to "put money in thy purse." Alas! too many people estimate a man by his money-making capacity, and a method by its commercial value. Mr. Carnegie reproaches colleges because they are not the high road to great commercial enterprises, and not merely is the trail of the serpent upon the man, but he is stained with the soot of the forge—too often with the more indelible stain of dishonest financial speculation. It is not that a man should not be a successful business man; it is

not that he should not be a leader in industrial enterprises that we complain of this estimate, but it is because this is made not merely an end but the *summum bonum*. What we insist upon is a clear appreciation of the fact that men must be made successful in all business and professional careers without leaving out of sight the fact that they are above and before all else to remain true to their higher destiny.

This problem with its interaction of forces, with its attractions and repulsions, presents difficulties which discourage inferior minds: but difficulties which are but a stimulus to superior minds. We may liken it to the problem presented by our solar system to astronomers. How many are the influences, the impulses, the tendencies to be calculated, balanced and determined in fixing a planet in its place! How simple is the system when we understand it; how complicated was the system when it was misunderstood! How extremely ingenious and ingeniously absurd was the old explanation, which seemed not merely a good working hypothesis but a demonstrable theory! This old-fashioned, complicated, infinitely ingenious system reminds us not a little of some of the over-ingenuous systems worked out to explain man's destiny and the proper preparation for it. But how these systems fall to pieces when we at length come to see man in his proper relation to the one great Centre of the system, suffering from a tendency of his lower nature to fly off at a tangent with the centrifugal force generated in his own career, drawn aside by many a fellow-creature, making his orbit less and less a perfect circle, but still yielding to the superior power of the central luminary.

Let us hold fast to the one simple theory that every philosophy of education must regard man in the two-fold aspect of his physical and temporal, and his spiritual and eternal welfare. This is necessary not only for the pupil, but the teacher himself for his own effectiveness must also keep this fact steadily in view. Indeed the real purpose of this paper is not to deal with the problem of instruction so much as with the problem of the personal life of the teacher. If our philosophy of teaching is to be carried out and the children are to be dealt with more from the individual than the collective standpoint, the method be-

comes subordinate to the end and the most important thing for the teacher to know is the world, and to be is a man of the world.

The phrase, "a man of the world," has suffered degradation in our speech. But it has a meaning which is high and noble, and we should not suffer it to lose it. There is no future for the man who goes through the world with his eyes shut, and the first business of the teacher is to open the eyes and awaken the interest of the scholar. How he shall do this is the problem. But how can he possibly do this without he himself is awake to the problems of the world in which he lives? It is not what he teaches, but how he teaches, that determines his success, and it is not the theory which he embraces, but the knowledge which he brings to bear upon that theory which determines the success or failure of it. Minds are so different that it is not possible to require all to use the same method. The question is: Is the method, be it what it may, vitalized? does the teacher put life into it? has he any definite aim and object before him? and does he do everything with a view to that object? As it was true in ancient times that all roads led to Rome, so all theories must lead to some ultimate aim, and as it is true that while all roads led to Rome one man would travel one of those roads and reach Rome, while another travelling the same road would daily find himself further and further away from the Eternal City, so some of us upon the right road are travelling in the wrong direction.

Conviction is the first equipment of the teacher: conviction of truth. It is fashionable to-day not to be sure of anything, except perchance that it is impossible to be sure of anything. Such men are not fit to teach anybody or anything. Conviction, and conviction of the truth, and of the importance of truth to all, is fundamental.

Human nature is naturally more or less indifferent. Accuracy is one of the hardest things to inculcate, and it is impossible for any one who has not a very high regard for the overwhelming importance of truth to succeed. Approximations are so easy, and so delusive and so fatal in their tendency. The uncertain schoolmaster goes astray often on the side of dogmatism. He gets a book and he trusts that book, and while he may doubt his

own judgment he will stake everything upon a favorite book or author. Hence the next qualification in a teacher is breadth—a capacity to see the world from more than one point of view. If he does not possess this quality himself, how can he sympathize with the differing points of view which he will constantly meet with? How will he be able to weigh and determine the more complex problems which meet him in his teaching?

There is a curious tendency to misunderstand the disciplinary values of what we call the higher branches of learning. In these days mathematics in all its departments has its methods memorized rather than thought out, and as they are all capable of exact demonstration, demonstration comes to be valued as the highest argument and the original processes employed in every demonstration are neglected. Language comes to be treated in much the same way. Paradigms are learned as if they were the only correct forms and others are called irregular and treated as linguistic criminals. Their personal equation is condemned rather than commended on account of their individuality and independence. Little inquiry is made as to how and why, and even the meanings of words are dealt with in a dogmatic method which tends to make a dictionary as infallible as the Pope, instead of being, as it should be, but a standard of the temporary tendencies of a language. It is really sometimes amusing to find that a person is condemned for using a word because it is not in the dictionary, instead of the dictionary being condemned because it does not contain a word which is respectable in conduct and pedigree.

Of course the teacher, looking outward and upward at first, comes after a time to be so cumbered with much serving that he begins to look downward and inward and to be content if he can keep his school and keep along with the growth of his community. This is human nature, but like most things which are cursed with a similar connection, it is to be eliminated and reformed. Progress is the first condition of success. The teacher is not merely to keep ahead of his scholars, not simply to teach year after year the same thing, to use the same illustrations and the same anecdotes; but illustration and anecdote should be varied day by day and year by year by the inevitable influence

of a broadening mind and extending inquiry. So many of the older generation of schoolmasters were driven back upon themselves by the developments in science of this generation that they lost all touch with the progress of the world, and instead of directing the change of view, opposed all change, and destroyed their influence when the tendency of the time became too strong for the prejudice of the schoolroom. Scientific careers when they were opened up for the people ought to have met at once the eager aspiration of the schoolmaster as well as the pupil. The schoolmaster should have grasped the fact that the most thorough education was needed to fit men to continue to be leaders in these departments, and should have seized upon the opportunities of mental stimulus placed at their command, instead of practically antagonizing a great many of their patrons and students by treating these professions as of inferior dignity.

It goes without saying that Latin and Greek are as desirable as a training for a civil engineer, or an electrician, or a chemist, as for a doctor or a lawyer or a minister, because these things are taught principally as discipline and have proved themselves unrivalled in this direction. But parents, after the scientific revolution began, got the idea that they were not so indispensable, since these languages were not used in the practice of these professions as in the practice of the so-called learned professions, and the average teacher, substituting assertion for argument, awoke opposition where he should have awakened conviction, and the decline of scientific secondary training and the ridiculous inferiority of requirements for admission to scientific schools resulted.

It is the duty of the schoolmaster to keep himself posted with regard to the progress of science, and to have his nature and his mind illuminated by these things ; nor is it asking much to ask this in a generation when journals of a reasonable price bring these things within the reach of all.

But as we advance to the higher departments in which demonstration gives way to the operation of judgment, almost inevitably the secondary schoolmaster fails. His dependence on authority is apt to be fatal. "Culture" once rightly defined the process necessary for these departments. It was a training in its more literal sense, and didactic methods wholly

failed in this sphere. Culture alone describes the method by which, first, the logical judgment operates by induction ; secondly, the æsthetic judgment by the use of taste, and, generally, the judgment discriminates between the same facts under different circumstances, and finds that there is a law of variation which has equally certain results with a law of fixity. Were you to ask half a dozen critics to select for you half a dozen passages from Shakespeare of superior excellence they would very likely hit upon the same passages, and yet they would probably, after the manner of experts, provoke infinite merriment if they were to attempt to justify their judgment before a jury. Were you to ask a half dozen historians their judgment upon certain tendencies in history they would doubtless all agree, and yet those judgments might seem to be conflicting on account of being postulated on different theories which the human mind has adopted at various stages of its development. We would excuse, for instance, conduct on the part of Cæsar which we would not tolerate in President Harrison; we would applaud an act on the part of a Spartan which we would condemn even in a modern Turk.

So complex and so varied are these things that we feel oftentimes as if they were illusive, uncertain and unreliable. But these are the very things which teach us how to judge men, how to discriminate character, and how to influence youth. Young men love expansive natures—natures which are certain, sure, confident, but which are also certain that we were not made to be all alike in this world ; sure that a bright face may be as pleasant as a solemn one, and confident of the ultimate excellence of a mischievous boy, even though he may perpetrate many unwholesome pranks upon an unsuspecting principal.

The plea which I would make, and the plea which I think needs most to be made to-day, is for greater breadth in the views of the teacher—breadth which shall not sacrifice confidence in the things which are accurately and sufficiently determined, but which shall seek to include all the sympathy that the human heart can afford for all the developments of our civilization, and, since boys are to become men, and youth is the time for the acquisition of broad interests, the tendency of the schoolmaster's

influence should, as far as possible, be extended as widely as possible. One of the great virtues of the classics consisted in the broad point of view occupied by the writers of those works which have come down to us. Men who were learned in those days were acquainted almost to the degree of mastery with every department of learning that was known—and cultivated men, even so late as Bacon, could profess without lack of modesty to be the masters of all the learning of their time. Their illustrations were, therefore, drawn more widely and indicated a wider interest than is common to-day, and I sometimes think that they were greater men from the fact that their sympathies were more widely extended and, therefore, their influence more broadly felt.

The aim, the ultimate aim, the end, of all our teaching, is to make men. Let me iterate and reiterate this. Nothing is so important, after the making of Christian men, as the making of men whose lives shall be full of the power of wide knowledge and of extended interest. To move men we must above all else be interested in them. Otherwise men will not trust the tendencies of our efforts. Self-absorption, self-seeking and self-conceit are all barriers to the extension of human influence. But interest in the affairs of others—kindly, earnest, constant—is essential to all, but most essential to the teacher.