

Literature as a Factor in Education

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In order to think of any one of the factors of an education, as related to all others, we must have for a foundation, a definite understanding of the end to be sought, and the benefits to be derived therefrom.

In general we understand education to be a process of development of the intellectual faculties; an unfolding of the latent capabilities of an individual; the bringing out and learning to know, and the development of the true self. This true self Mr. Hiram Carson in his "Aims of Literary Study" talks of as an innermost being, a very small part of which we can ever become conscious of in this life; but which is influenced in its development by our thoughts and actions, and in turn prompts our thoughts, directs our actions, and guides our lives here, and determines our course in the great eternity which follows, along the line of its greatest development.

Each of the many branches of education tend especially, to develop some one, or few, of the several different powers, or different faculties of the mind. But what one study so much as that of literature touches all points, and especially this essential "innermost of the innermost" of man? While the laws of nature, as found in science, do have a close connection with physical and moral laws, this relation is not so evident but that it may be passed unnoticed. The untrained mind would hardly discover it. But spirits as well as matter, are mutually attractive." As in water face answerseth to face, so the heart of man to man." As one has expressed it, "Companionship with gifted minds is in itself a liberal education." And next to a personal acquaintance is an association with them as they have given themselves to the world in their published works. The great and noble in them speaks through their books and the great and noble in the reader is awakened.

Literature probably has a greater influence on the formation of individual and national character than anything else. A study of it brings us in touch with the "thoughts, feelings, impulses, and passions of the foremost men of all time." And we cannot doubt the statement that, "The destruction of all literature would relegate us to the values of savage life." And certainly man has left to man, no richer gift than the literature of ages past and gone.

Wordsworth calls poetry "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge, the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science." And Mr. Cassan again says, "Literature, especially poetic and dramatic, is the expression in letters of the spiritual, cooperating with the intellectual man." "Spirit" in this sense includes all emotions, the susceptible, impressible, sympathetic, and intuitive parts of man. Such a study, in combining the spiritual and intellectual culture, gives the most vital kind of knowledge.

There can be no true literary study, no literary training, except as the soul is stirred with lasting impressions. And it is the study of such literary works as reveal the good, and the highest culture of the past, that excite the loftiest ambitions and hopes in the present age, and to a great extent determine the future.

So great and determining an influence in the education of an individual, should certainly begin when education itself begins: for then it is that character formation begins. Among the first things a child learns is to like, and dislike. Tastes are being formed, and such tastes are much easier formed aright, than corrected when once wrongly formed. Great care, and ever tact tact, is certainly required in selecting the books which are to become the personal friends of a child. But certain it is he will find some kind for himself, if they are not chosen for him. The young mind should be carefully guarded from the acquaintance of any author

who might be distasteful, until more capable of judging and choosing; otherwise a dislike might be formed for all books. Again, the mind to develop perfectly, must be allowed to do so by its own natural steps, just as a flower must have its own time and way for opening, to be perfect in form. Great masterpieces of literature can do no good, indeed may do great harm to the infant intelligence. But of bright, sparkling, pure and simple, classical literature there is an abundance. And by contact with such literature, suited to it, the young mind is influenced just as the more mature mind is by the more mature literature: it is broadened, stimulated, and more perfectly developed. It is the human sympathy, passion and feeling, found in good literature that is necessary to move the will, and touch the sensibilities of the child and awaken in it an interest. Reading from good authors enlarges the vocabulary, by giving a knowledge

of the shades of meanings in words, as no definitions ever could. And when the mind is just learning to think, if the superior spirits of the good authors can lead it into right lines of thought, and teach it something noble to be thought of, it means a great step in the education of that individual. It means that those great minds, through books, have done much toward giving power and value to the thoughts of more mature years.

Schools of all kinds can at best only open and outline some great fields for students, and especially in scientific branches they can lay only a very general foundation. So we need some studies that bear more directly upon the moral life; that touch heart and conscience; awaken sympathy and kindle imagination. "Studies that recognize the visible world as a symbol of the invisible." Relatively too much attention is given to intellectual business.

Narrowness and meanness may exist with mental sharpness and vigor.

Deep scientific study may sharpen, quicken, and and strengthen, yet not exalt the mental powers, nor suggest any social or civil duty. The aim of literary study is moral elevation and inspiration through beauty and sublimity. Then such studies should be selected for their inward grace, purity and power, as well as their outward perfection of form.

De Quincy classifies literature as the literature of power and the literature of knowledge. True literature is that of power, or that which speaks from heart to heart. All science belongs to the literature of knowledge, which leads farther and farther ahead, but on the same plane; while the emotional and imaginative, the literature of power, elevates with each step.

Encyclopedias require frequent revision, and finally become useless. So with all knowledge of simple facts. But the works that guide, inspire, train the human passion, and kindle and sustain lofty sentiment is

unchanging, is universal in its effect. It is this class of literature then, that we select to study. Not to analyze, pull to pieces, work over, and criticise; but to read, interpret, and absorb for the helpful and pleasing sentiment it contains; to make our hearts acquainted with the hearts of the writer. To learn to sympathize with, and profit by the experiences of that other human soul. So we may have books for friends to whom we may go, not only for profit, but for pleasure and comfort. One has said "It is the business of a book to give us enjoyment, or teach us endurance in life." Literature exists to please. - To lighten the burdens of men's lives; to make them for a time forget their burdens and their sins, their silenced hearths, their disappointed hopes, and and their grim futures." How worthy an office to fulfill in the education of an individual!

The training of the imagination is no small part of the benefits derived

from literary study. "In the imagination of man exists the seeds of all moral and scientific improvement." Coleridge says, and it is this imagination which helps to lead us onward and upward. The chief work of every school, and every branch of education should be to create and maintain in every student the highest ideal of human life. And there is no study like that of the best literature to form and glorify such an ideal. "It reveals possibilities, touches to finer issues, broadens the thought, kindles faith, sets the soul free, quickens and gratifies as nothing else can." If one can be made to see as the great authors have seen, one's life is greatly widened. Thomas Arnold said he had rather his son should believe the sun moved around the earth than that he should be entirely deficient in knowledge of beauty, of poetry, and of moral truth. But in a well rounded development, in a well balanced education, we need both kinds of knowledge. And their relative

importance in business life may be considered. A literary education does not lack in strength because it excels in the cultivation of the emotions, tastes, and passions; indeed a cultivation and control of these powers is one of the greatest proofs of strength of the truest kind. Some of the strangest men of the past have been literary men. England's foremost man of the present age, William E. Gladstone, is a man of letters. One of America's greatest lawyers, William M. Evarts, bore away the highest literary honors at Yale. History is full of such examples of powerful men who owed much of their ability to the study of literature. One student and writer on this subject even believes that the most valuable preparation one who intends to enter active service in the cause of humanity, can make is a study of the greatest works of the greatest authors. And that he who will thoroughly master the Bible, Shakespear, and Milton will have a better business education than nine tenths of the

College graduates, for he will know human nature, which is a better preparation for success "than a knowledge of all the laws of matter, of the process of machinery and tricks of trade".

But a business education is not all we want, nor is it the most desired. Lowell says "If such a study as military does not help us earn our bread, it surrenders all we do get." But even this is not of first importance, for our duty in life is not simply to get all the sweetness we can for ourselves, but to be able to give it out to all the world. The special object in all study should be always to approach perfect manliness and womanliness; and the chief joy that accompanies such a study is the association with heroic manhood and angelic womanhood: and the best result is unselfish service enriching mankind."