

A Plea for a Practical Education.

As the world grows older, and its inhabitants wiser, the value of knowledge that is practical is more and more appreciated. In our advanced civilization, where a vast majority of the world's artisans receive all the education they have crowded in the brief space of three year's time, we can see the value of placing within that time those things that will be of the greatest value to the greatest number.

All labor is directed by knowledge, and it is the nature of this knowledge that the educator of to-day has to deal with. It will be generally admitted that a laborer should derive much usefulness from the studies he has pursued in his education. But why is it that so many young men and women graduates of Colleges and Universities are unable to earn a living? It is said "they know enough, but can do nothing; they have learning, but no capacity."

It is apparent that all that tends toward a practical education is to a large extent neglected. Education that alone improves the mental faculties is to-day receiving the most prominent attention. Young men and women are taught to think only, and institutions that develop the faculties that deal with the realities of life are rare in our educational system. Man is endowed with physical strength to subdue the earth; then a proper education should include all that tends to make him proficient in his particular calling. I do not object to the superior training of the mental faculties that our institutions afford, but it is the undue prominence given to mental education that is to be deplored. In our superior organization of society, deep thinkers are needed to pilot the ship of state, yet the practical business world needs a development of the senses as well as of the mind. It is only by the united operation of the senses and

the mind that knowledge can arise. We are told that the world is governed by ideas; but of what importance are ideas if not converted into deeds by the hand of man.

Education is partial, one-sided, and a failure, if with the birth of an idea there does not exist the power to give the idea form. Thoughts can be demonstrated only by deeds. Our hands and arms give the body power, and education that does not develop these important members of our body is in a measure wasted. Of such importance are these limbs that it has led a recent writer to state that "were it possible to deprive the human race of hands, and in its stead put a paw or hoof, man would soon find a common level with the beasts, notwithstanding his superior intellect."

Practical education becomes a question of national importance. Millions of dollars are expended annually for the support of public schools, yet

notwithstanding this enormous expenditure we rely upon foreigners for knowledge of a technical nature. If the object of education is to prepare pupils for useful work, it is apparent that our educational system is not of the best. It is the experience of statisticians that the number of well trained workmen among native born Americans is becoming scarcer every year. The natural resources of this country are unparalleled, yet raw materials are shipped from here to England, France, Germany, and Switzerland, there to be wrought into products suited to fashion and taste, and returned to this country at four or five times the original cost. The laborers of this country are not sufficiently educated to turn raw materials into products suited for the market. Because of this fact, laborers across the water derive the benefits of our superior natural resources, and our national wealth is

diminished because of an ill-directed educational system.

The question that confronts educators is, "How many, out of the number of young men who leave school, and who are gifted with every mental and physical requisite of success, and who are also disciplined by the teachings of the public schools, can gain assistance from their education in any practical pursuit they intend to follow? Thousands of skilled artisans are imported from abroad, while American boys are roaming the streets. They are willing to work, but unable to find anything to do. They lack education that will be of practical value to them as the world's artisans.

"How can the state best serve the greatest number? How shall the state educate the people to the best results?" are questions of vital importance, which, if successfully settled, would do much toward the solution of the great problems now confronting us.

The time spent in school is but the apprenticeship of the student, and above everything else his duty as a citizen, his duty to his country, and the relation he sustains to society, are fundamental principles that should not be lost sight of through the whole course of school life. There never has been a time when so many important questions were presented for thought as now. A study of the problems of practical politics is needed— an education that will fit men to deal with the practical questions of to-day. The province of the statesman is a wide one. The blunders of legislation are many, and have been committed by the narrow-minded and uncultivated. What the politician needs is a practical and general education that will acquaint him with the factors of civilization. Then on this broad foundation of a practical education he may turn in the foot-steps of the specialist with

little fear of being bigotted in his ideas. Sounder views of government among the working classes are wanted. Were the upper classes better educated up on the subject of practical politics, there would be little apprehension as to the destiny of our nation. A correct conception of the proper sphere of government is needed, and these principles should be taught the people.

In our larger cities, public spirited citizens have placed at the disposal of educational authorities sufficient sums of money to enable the poorer class to gain useful knowledge that will be of practical value to them. So short a time ago as 1850, it was stated as a lamentable fact that there was not an institution in the Union where a student might receive a thoroughly practical education - an education that would prepare him for bearing the responsibilities of an American citizen if taken from the shop or the farm. The cry then

was for an institution that would be to the farmer and mechanic what the West Point Military Academy was to the soldier. To a certain extent the cry has been heard, and as an outgrowth of the agitation our State Agricultural and Mechanical Colleges were established, institutions that unite practice with theory, and teach the student not only the fixed laws of science, which have been tested and proved by the settled principles of experience, but how to apply them. But here the nationalizing of practical education stops. What we need is a system of training, under direct, government supervision, whereby the student may be taught the duties to his state and the relation he sustains to society.

As a rule, if children are early taught to be industrious, the habit will become fixed, and learning to read, which is the foundation of all book knowledge, should be mixed with some industry that

would train the young to habits that would have an influence on their whole future life. Could not the state better afford a system of education, practical in its nature, than to bear the expense of keeping up its numerous charities? With such a policy would there not be a greater reduction of the inmates of our almshouses and state prisons?

A truly practical education is one that fits a human being for usefulness. It is the only education that acquaints one with the forces of nature about him. There is a symmetry of training, lacking in every other system. It results in the cultivation of the most important faculty of the mind—judgment; judgment in the treatment of facts. Practical education will teach us rather how to think than what to think, rather "to think for ourselves than to load the memory with the thoughts of others," and is the only education that will do men permanent good.

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