

The Distinctive Idea of Modern Education
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Introduction: — In considering the aims of modern education, the ends attained, and the means in vogue of attaining these ends, it is interesting to consider its development, the gradual evolution, not only of the methods of education but also of its objects. And this evolution has been as gradual and as sure as our industrial or our commercial evolution. Nor was the beginning any less crude and faulty.

Very early we see the foreshadowing of our modern ideas of education, and it is only little by little that they have come to be realized. Only a review of the history of formal education will show how slowly, though surely, the world has come to a realization of human individuality as the highest goal of attainment.

Oriental Education

Chinese Education: Though one of the oldest nations of the world, the Celestial Empire, has for ages made but little progress in civilization, and has contributed but little to the advancement of the world. The Chinese are very much the same today as

they were more than 2000 years ago. This nation furnishes a most striking illustration of the evils of false methods; a system of education that produces intellectual stagnation, that fails to stimulate national and individual progress, that fosters narrowness and egotism, and suggests negative lessons which the student of education will do well to heed. The result in China furnishes the best of argument against a method of instruction, that appeals solely to the memory.

The Chinese language contains no alphabet, but is merely a conglomeration of symbols. It thus becomes necessary to learn a vast number of signs and characters — a prodigious feat for the memory. The education is very simple. There are no illustrated childrens books, no nursery rhymes to inspire the imagination, none of the bright and useful things so necessary to happy childhood. The child grows up with few playthings calculated to stimulate the powers of the mind. Reading, writing, and the elements of arithmetic occupy the first few years in school. No effort is made to interest the child, and he is simply required memorize and write as many as

possible of the 50,000 characters, and little effort is made to teach him the meaning of the words they represent. Thought awakening is not encouraged, fear, not interest, is the motive that drives the child to study, and memory is the chief faculty to be cultivated.

The purpose of their advanced education is not intellectual development, or even the accumulation of knowledge, but to prepare for a position under the government which can be reached by no other means. Even in this study, memory is the principal faculty brought into play, and without great exercise of this power, the vast amount of material can never be mastered.

Hindu Education: In India conditions are no better. Here we find the Caste system. There are four great castes. Each caste is taught separately, and the individual counts for naught. There is no theory of education among the Hindus, each teacher instructing as he pleases, according to historic custom, and like the Chinese education, the instruction consists mainly in the cultivation of the memory. There is no authority to decide upon the qualifications of teachers, the only requisite being that they shall belong to

the Brahman, the highest class.

Egyptian Education: In Egypt we find a caste system very similar to that of India. But here the individual counts for a little more than in either India or China. Their system encouraged greater respect for woman than other Oriental systems, but took little account of her intellectual training. For the first time in history it made use of concrete methods, at least in writing and arithmetic, and in general tended toward intellectual development. The elementary education however, was non-progressive, the father generally expecting his son to follow his calling. In higher education, however, progress was justly noted, as it attracted wise men from Greece and Rome to study its science and philosophy. The classical countries were materially influenced by Egyptian culture and the way was prepared for the broader and more enlightened interpretation of the purpose of education, on a soil and a more successful of evolution of civilization on soil better suited to that end.

Summary of Oriental Education: To sum up the Oriental systems, they fostered class distinction by furnishing but little enlightenment.

to the lower classes, and affording superior advantages to the privileged few. They were non-progressive, reached no higher ideals, and marked no advance in civilization. Little encouragement was given to free investigation. There was therefore no stimulus toward progress or intellectual growth. The importance of the individual was not appreciated, as his identity was obscured in the masses, and man was regarded as belonging to the state.

Jewish Education: Though defective, both in matter and method, and tending to fetter rather than to free the mind, Jewish education achieved four valuable results: (1) It developed a taste for close critical study; (2) it sharpened the wits even to the point of perversity; (3) it encouraged a reverence for law and produced desirable social conduct; (4) it formed a powerful bond of union among the Jewish people.

Instruction was carried on apparently by the dialectic, or conversational, method, and the Talmud enjoins that the pupils' questions should never become too much for the teacher. Neither teacher nor pupil it would seem brought any text-book to the school,

both depending upon their memories for the texts to be discussed. The storing of the memory was the first concern; the cultivation of intellectual acuteness came later, and from a certain point of view was of secondary importance. One of the most striking features of the Talmudic literature, is the keen psychological insight shown. We can have no clearer exemplification of this insight than completeness with which they recognized the condition most favorable for retention, and the skill with which they sought to secure these conditions. They sought to secure the maximum of intensity of the impressions by the simultaneous affection of the several senses. Visual, auditory, and muscular memory were all called upon to assist in the retention of the impression. In the 'tractate Shabbath' an interesting description occurs on a lesson on the alphabet. Words are selected of which the consecutive letters of the alphabet are the initials, and the words are grouped in easily remembered phrases conveying some moral injunction. The fact is, that Jewish methods of education

passed from the Jewish school of Alexander into the Christian 'catechetical' schools, and thence into the schools of the Middle Ages and of Modern Times. But it is easy to point out defect in this education; narrowness, formalism, virtual hostility to science, and the like. It may said that Jews never founded a free state or rose to civic freedom, whence they have often been ranked as barbarians. One valuable and interesting characteristic of Jewish education, and one that tended most of all to bring out individuality, was the fact of personal responsibility to God for ones conduct.

Classical Education

Greece: The Jews, though rising to the civic ideal of individual worth, self-determination, and responsibility, never attained to that of complete moral autonomy. Tho the same thing is largely true of the Greeks in the earlier part of their historic career, yet, in the course of time, they rose to the higher position. Indeed it is just this rise that gives them their unique importance in history. The Greeks did not, like the Iranians, succumb to military despotism

and supernatural priest-craft. On the contrary they never submitted to the Turanian priesthood. In this way the Greeks escaped the tyranny of the priest-hood altogether, and that of the military class to a large extent. It is this fact more than anything else that enabled them to rise to the consciousness of free individuality and to introduce civic life into the world. For priestly and military organization is everywhere the foe of free reflection.

The education current in Homers time may be summed up in these words: "For this end he sent me forth to teach thee all these things; to be a speaker of words and a doer of deeds." It was wholly practical. There were no schools in those days because there were no books. In spite of this the Homeric world is a highly educated one. Perhaps the highest type of civilization without book learning that is known to us. So true is this that we, the peoples of today, find ourselves far more at home in it than in the less remote ^{world} middle ages. Homers Achaeans, though gifted with but little knowledge, are far advanced in ethical

culture and refinement. Bravery, prudence, truthfulness, loyalty, kindness, hospitality, female chastity, are among the virtues practiced by them. And among them we find many characters which the world refuses to forget. The Achaian family and social life is sweet and tender. Woman is free and occupies a high place. Polygamy is unknown. Slavery exists, but the slave is a member of the family and is well treated.

Under the old education the man and the citizen had not been distinguished, and no place had been left for the former as such — for individualism. But the day came for that also, a day heralded by two events, the Persian wars, and the rise of philosophy or reflections. The former showed the value of the free, civic individual, as against the despot ruled mass, and led the democracy; the latter turned the attention to the facts of nature and life, and away from myths by which the meaning of these had been distorted. In a word, to science, and away from theology. The former brought external, the latter internal, freedom to the individual.

as such.

Thus arose in the Greek mind, the distinction between necessity, the basis of science and philosophy, and convention, the basis of mythology, or in a word between science and theology — a distinction which slowly ripened in a conflict, going on to this day. Greek philosophy was originally an appeal from particular subjectivity to universal objectivity. Nature was supposed to be independent of human feeling or desire. Nothing is more interesting in the history of human thought, than the process by which this came to be disproved. In short the history of the pre-Socratic philosophy ended with the two famous sayings of Protagoras: "About the gods, I can not know whether they are or not." and, "Man is a measure of all things, of the existent as existent and of the non-existent as non-existent." The former abolished the gods and theology, the latter nature and science. All that remained was universal individual subjectivity or universal convention. Thus for the first time in the history of the world, individualism made its claim to absolute validity. No more momentous

event ever took place. As presented by Protagoras himself, this claim undermined the entire basis upon which Greek political and ethical life, and education rested, and the result threatened to be complete monarchy. There seemed to be nothing stable anywhere. If anything of the sort existed, it must evidently be sought where it had been least expected, in man himself. Here Socrates sought and found it opening up a new career for philosophy. He discovered, that while all sensation, or feeling, as such, is subjective and individual, the world of essences or things, which we place behind the bundles of these, as grasping and conditioning them, that is, the world of completed thoughts, or ideas, is objective, virtually the same in all men. By this discovery he was able to vindicate the claim of the individual to absolute validity, and at the same time to reconcile that claim with political and moral life. In a word, Socrates discovered free personality and moral freedom, and made the greatest of all epochs in the world's history.

Mediaevalism.

The education of the dark ages, or rather the absence of education, affords little interest, and no argument for our present educational methods and ideas. ~~When~~ education revived in Europe after the darkness of the eighth century, it was no longer among the Latin peoples but among their conquerors the Germans. With these an altogether new phase of education begins. If thus far education aimed at subordinating the individual to the social whole, or its ruler, its task now is to free the individual, to give him validity in the face of all institutions. Of this task it only slowly became conscious. Indeed it is only partly conscious of it now.

The history of the Middle Age and to a large extent, even that of Modern Times, is a record of the struggle between Roman coercive organization and German individualism, and the end is not yet. But with all her Roman tendency to coercion, the Church almost in spite of herself, contributed powerfully to the development of the higher rational individualism, by dividing allegiance.

In the ancient world the individual belonged soul and body to the state; in the mediaeval world he belonged with his body to the state, with his soul to the church, and it was through the latter that he finally conquered for himself, a sphere independent of the former. The most unworldly element in Christianity, viz., mysticism was the great breeder of individual freedom.

It is easy to find fault with mediaeval science and mediaeval education, and from our modern point of view they cannot but appear very faulty. The former was authority-bound and blind to nature, the latter consisted mostly of memory work and subtle disputation. And yet they were exactly what the times needed. Scholasticism was necessary in order, first, to correct the mystical tendencies which were sapping the energies of Europe and withdrawing the best men and women from the life of the world; second, to put Europe in possession of the rational thought of the ancient world. In a word it saved Europe from moral suicide, ignorance, and fleshiness. And it did more. By training mens minds in logical method, it paved the way for

modern research and science. Thereby to be sure digging its own grave, as all things temporary in their nature must do.

Thus far, all education, with the exception perhaps, of that inculcated by Socrates, has been education for subordination. With the decay of mediaevalism, which carried this subordination to its highest point, even into the conscience of the individual, a great change took place, henceforth, education will tend, more or less consciously, to the developement of freedom and individualism.

Neither the Reformation or the counter-Reformation, took any decided step forward in education — any step towards science and freedom — and the latter even took a step backwards. Both left education in the hands of the clergy; both retained the principle of authority and looked to tradition, not to nature and experience for truth. The same may be said of the Renaissance. It merely substituted one authority for another. Nevertheless it did pave the way for better things. It opened up the speculations of Greek science, and taught men to speculate on and ultimately to investigate the facts and processes of nature.

When they did this a new era began.

Modern Education

We now have the beginning of modern education and modern science. Men now begin to insist that all science must be based upon experience and induction. The need of universal education was seen and emphasized, as the essential condition of universal freedom. With Comenius the cause of truth and freedom in education, was virtually won. Authority and tyranny had yielded to truth and sympathy.

The aim of the old education was to prepare for another world, for a life after death. The aim of the new education is very different. While by no means setting lightly, by or denying eternal life, it insists upon making the most out of this life. holding it to be a phase of the other, preparatory to all other possible phases. The more completely we unfold our powers and perform our duties, personal, domestic, social, political, in this life, the better prepared shall we be to enter upon the joys and functions. Hence the new education sets up as its aim, the highest development of the social individual, in all the faculties of body soul and spirit.

Pestalozzi: The first man who took a notable step forward in education toward nature and reason was Pestalozzi. With little learning and less system, but with overwhelming faith in the people, and love for children, this warm hearted devoted man, may fairly be said to be the father of modern popular education. He had great depth of feeling and was inspired with a loft morality and sense of duty, and he succeeded in imparting a new spirit and scope to education in almost every direction. Above all he insisted that education should be extended to the whole people, and that it should relate to things rather than to words, to facts rather than to rules. He aimed to cultivate not merely the intelligence, but also and still more, the affections, the moral judgement, and the will. He insisted that children should learn not only to think but also to do. He not only emphasized the worth of the individual soul, but insisted that that worth should be realized and recognized. It is not too much to say that all modern education breathes the spirit of Pestalozzi. It is education for freedom not for subordination.

The task of education now resolves itself into this; ~~how~~ to construct in the soul of the child such a world that it shall find therein, complete and harmonious exercise of all its faculties, intellectual, affectional, and volitional. Though this great task is still very far from being accomplished the followers of Pestalozzi have already taken considerable steps towards its accomplishment. Chief among these are Herbert, Froebel, Rosmini, and Horace Mann.

Herbert: Herberts mind lacked both depth and system, but for all that, he did excellent work in the cause of education: (1) By recognizing the need of psychology as a basis for it. (2) By insisting as against Kant, that the entire content of the consciousness is due to experience, and therefore can be modified by education. (3) By recognizing that moral life is the end of all education. (4) That such a life depends upon the nature of world organized in the mind and soul, and can therefore, be furthered by education.

Froebel: Whereas Herbert philosophized about education and lectured in universities, Froebel devoted himself to teaching and

finally to the earliest stages of it. He is a prince among educators. He was the first to see and to state clearly that education is conscious evolution, and to draw the practical conclusions from this insight.

Rosmini: Rosmini's work may be regarded as a combination of Herbart's theory of apperception, with Froebel's doctrine of education as ordered evolution. His distinctive merit is his insistence that there is a definite order of apperception.

Herbart, Froebel, Rosmini — by these men the foundation of modern education for rational liberty were securely laid. Each had his faults; each paid his tribute to the unvanquished past; but the defects are such as time and experience are certain to remove as the tribute to the past ceases to be paid. We can now clearly see, and all true educators do see that education is conscious evolution of the entire human being, through ever closer relations, intellectual, affectional, and ethical, to the entire universe, human and sub-human. The only question that remains is: How can these relations be most readily and most

securely established. Even this question is already partly answered and will be more fully answered in the future.

Horace Mann. This new education has perhaps celebrated its noblest triumphs in the United States. For this the credit is due in a very large measure to Horace Mann. From early in the century advocates of popular education had not been wanting, but the first man who fully understood the needs of the nation, and undertook to meet them in large practical ways was Horace Mann, to whom American culture owes more than to any other person. He was distinctly a practical man with deep human sympathy, democratic interest and moral enthusiasm and with a practical sense of, and talent for organizing. He held that education should be a preparation for life, domestic, economic, social, political, and not merely the acquisition of curious learning, elegant scholarship, or showy accomplishments. Its end should be the attainment of moral and social personality. It may be said that Horace Mann is the father of American education.

But that education is already far beyond him. Kindergarten of which he never dreamt are springing up everywhere. Schools, colleges and universities come into existence as if by magic. Already this country possesses more institutions of higher learning than all of Europe. There is every reason to look with satisfaction, pride, and hope, upon the condition and spirit of education in the United States. It is democratic; it is scientific, rapidly shaking off the fetters of authority and dogma; it is free from sectarian bias and confusion. Above all it educates for freedom and not for subordination. Its aim is the emancipation of all the powers of man; physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual. It is the highest type thus far of human education. C.S.C.