Theory and Practice in Education.

In the process of education we find two great parts—one treating of material and the other of immaterial things. Immaterial things are studied by means of the mind alone, while material things are most successfully studied by means of the mind in connection with the five senses. Now it is with these material things that the great mass of mankind are constantly working. Agriculture, manufacture, and commerce are but different methods of treating tangible things, and it is natural, therefore, in order to satisfy material wants, that the first step towards education should be to become acquainted with the common things of the world—to understand our relation to them, and their relation to each other. To form this acquaintance, what is necessary? Isn't enough that students should study about things? Certainly not, for with...
material things as with members of a community, in order to form a thorough acquaintance, it is necessary to associate with them. Education as begun by nature fully illustrates this. After a child has begun to notice things, it next wants to get hold of them. Tell it as often as you will that a hot stove will burn the hand if touched, no natural-born American babe is satisfied with the theory until it has proved it for itself. The method should be followed by all students, old and young. No one should be satisfied with a theory, but should insist on handling the substances about which he is studying, and if he gets burnt in the process, he will remember it all the better.

Great educators too strongly impress that a diligent use of the mind is all that is necessary to make an education a success. This seems necessary because the mass of laborers use their brains so sparingly, but another effect is produced.
many young students to believe that fortune is easily made by a simple use of the mind. Now brains, to be sure, are in great demand in the industries of the world, but they are useless in satisfying material wants, unless properly applied to making things. Pure study about things can never cause production. To produce, prepare or distribute requires something more than thought. It requires the assistance of the hand, either to produce or to construct something that will produce. To understand all the principles of music does not make a musician; nor will a knowledge of right make an honest man. To know and to tell others is usually easier than to do. Everyone knows better than he does, but others will forever measure his knowledge by his actions. What is needed is to get those who are constantly theorizing to apply what they know, and those who are making failures by trying to apply the theories of others to learn something for themselves. At present there is too
great a separation between brain-laborers and hand-laborers. The one class has the theory, but the other is getting all the practice. The educator keeps calling to the farmer to put more brains into his work, and the farmer modestly replies, "That's the theory, but please come and show me how it is done."

But many men of large brains and deep thought, who can boast of the number of languages they can speak, or carry on long discourses about the theories of creation, criticize a practical education, saying its sole object is to provide for the wants of the body, man's animal nature. Education, they say, has a higher object, that it should be more exalting, should elevate the mind, fill the heart, and make man more like his maker. To be sure it should, but the wants of the body must first be satisfied. To be sure education should fill the heart, but this is impossible as long as the stomach is craving to be filled. When we know that nine tenths of the people of our country are working long and hard to
scurvily supply bodily wants, and need the aid which education alone can give, who has a right to live off the produce of the land, and pronounce a practical education common or unclean. Whenever education is made a means of enabling some to enjoy the highest privileges while they are being supported through the manual toil of those they look down upon, it must fail of its object. When so used, as it too frequently is, it serves only to separate mankind into two great factions—the enlightened, well-born consumer, and the ignorant, suffering producer. In order to produce its best results, education must be made a means whereby the mass of laborers can more easily supply their bodily wants in order that they may have time for self-culture. In this way society as a whole will be elevated, and all who will may enjoy the privileges of a higher education.

Colleges are often unjustly criticized for educating youths above the station which they are expected to occupy.
by in after life. The criticism is just, however, not because of too much education, but because it has been wrongly distributed. Higher education is a glorious thing, but only so when it rests upon the foundation of a practical knowledge of common things. If it has not such a foundation, the structure is too heavy and sure to fall, unless impossibly supported through the manual toil of others. Increasing wants are emblematic of progress, but unless one can, by his own efforts, satisfy his increasing wants, he must live at the expense of others. Schools, then, it may be said, are promoters of crime, whenever they educate scholars up to wants and appetites and do not put within their hands a means of satisfying such wants and appetites.

This educating of scholars above the common labor of life, giving to them an idea of self-importance, is what makes graduates in general as objects of jealousy and contempt. Laborers often look upon a graduate as one who is trying to get his living off the labor
of others; as one who is seeking, through
the recommendation of a diploma, a position
with a large salary and little work.
Men of business say: “Oh, he is a stu-
dent. I don’t want him. He don’t know
nothing except what is in the grammar.
His knowledge is mere theory. Give me
a live energetic fellow with good com-
mon sense, and he’s worth a dozen gradu-
ates.” They do not stop to think whether
the live energetic fellow might not make
even a better business man if given a
college education. It is expecting too
much of a college to suppose that any
one of its graduates has more general
knowledge than the very best individual
that may be found among those who
never attended school. It is not right
to discard schools because some have at-
tended and failed to benefit themselves
thereby, while others have educated them-
selves in the practical school of the
world. Scholars are not made
by schools. To find something profitable
to study is not difficult. Nature furnish
es such gratuitously to all. But to
find some one who will study profitably is not so easy. He who anxiously applies what knowledge he has, is benefited by attending school by being given more that he may apply; but he who can not apply what he has has no need for more.

The true education then must unite the practical and the ideal. Practice is to follow thought and prove its worth.mere theorizing unassociated with motive force is like making resolutions never to be carried into effect. Nature means that the two should work together. Every man is given a head and a pair of hands—the one for thought, and the other for its application. Without thought his labor must be of the lowest type; and without application his thoughts are without value; but with sound thought practically applied man's power is without limit.

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