Wordsworth's Theory of Education.

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The Scottish author and critic, Dr. Moir, says of Wordsworth: "Never, perhaps, in the whole range of history, from Homer downwards, did any individual, throughout the course of a long life, dedicate himself to poetry with a devotion so pure, so perfect, so uninterrupted as he did. It was not his recreation, his mere pleasure. It was the main, the serious, the solemn business of his being. It was his morning, noon and evening thought, the object of his outdoor rambles, the subject of his indoor reflections, and as an art he studied it as severely as ever Canova did sculpture, or Michael Angelo painting." He was a master of his art, giving to the world his message of love of Nature, God and Man through the realm of beautiful verse. Poetry was the channel through which the stream of noble thoughts and sentiments flowed from the still, placid waters of his own deep mind to the generation of today.
idea that a poem should bear a lesson. To
him, poetry was but the expression of
enraptured beauties. Wordsworth claims that the
poets function is to
"help life onward in its noble train."
He tells us that his purpose was "to teach the
young of every age its arts, to think, and there-
fore to become more securely virtuous." Writing
to Sir George Beaumont he says, "The poet
is a teacher. I wish to be considered as a
teacher or as nothing."

To Wordsworth, learning meant the growth
of the body, the development of the soul, and
the unfolding of the spirit. Growth is gradual.
The body and mind attain their perfect
proportions by slow and even processes; the de-
velopment of the soul keeps pace with the
physical and mental growth; and the unfold-
ing of the spirit, in all its majesty and power
is complete only when the mind and soul
have reached their zenith. This development
is largely a matter of environment and
training. While it is true that in many
respects environment is relative to individual
investigation has proved that certain conditions
are far more favorable than others in the
growth of the delicate organisms of the human body, and the undeveloped cells of which the childish brain is composed. What are these conditions, and how shall we proceed to attain the perfect development of the body, mind, and soul?

William Wordsworth, the Priest of Nature, has given us a theory of education as broad and yet as simple in its conception that the vast majority has failed to grasp its power and significance. He arrives at his conception of the processes of mind growth by the study of his own development. In the Prelude

"...the discipline
And consummation of a poet's mind,
In every thing that stood most prominent
Have faithfully been pictured."

The basis of his theory is nature. Born in the beautiful lake region of the Cumberland hills, from his very infancy he was subjected to the direct influence of nature in her wild and rugged grandeur, in her soft and tranquil beauty. Her ruggedness became his strength, her sublimity his deep, calm mind, her grandeur his noble, lofty soul. What better exponent of natural educating power could
we find than he whose whole being is permeated with her divine influence? Looking upon this finished product of her rustic school, can we hesitate to place our children under her care and guidance?

Wordsworth says,

"The child is father of the man."

This is a physical, mental, and moral truth. The child with the healthy body, the clear mind, and the pure heart will be the man of strong physical, mental power and of noble life - to rejoice in the world for good. It has been found by scientific experiment that the development of animals is relative to the amount of space available during the growing period. The city with its want of room, pure air, and sunshine can not be conducive to the best development of the countless thousands of little bodies and souls within its walls.

To the country then we must turn with Wordsworth. With its unknown boundaries, its untold beauty, its warmth of life and color, its wealth of light and shade, its swift-changing panorama of seasons, the country appeals to the senses as the city never can.

There is a freedom from restraint an-
unfolds its activity which Nature alone can give. Wordsworth grasped the elementary truth of the philosophy of education—that the mind develops only by its own activity. That the individual must be free in a school contrary to confinement, and that the unfolding of the faculties of the mind follow a natural order, a natural method. This is true of the body and soul as well as of the mind. Without activity there can be no growth in any line. The body or mind unexercised cannot expand, but must become dwarfed and useless. How Wordsworth asks, could the little meadow flower unfold its lovely blossom to the warm sun of the sun if it were not so free as the air above it, and as fearless as the bird which sings in the boughs above it? The grandeur of the forest tree—could that be attained by casting in a formal mold? No, it can only grow in beauty and strength by virtue of its own divine vitality.

But while advocating freedom from restraint, Wordsworth does not imply that discipline is not necessary. On the contrary, it is of vital importance that the impulse of the child shall be carefully guided in the
right direction, toward the formation of a strong character. There is no more suitable path than that of a child of bright, quick intellect losing the opportunity of becoming a power for advancement in the world because he has become a creature of impulse and passion. Wordsworth has clearly shown how sport and play are important factors in education, but he also shows how necessary is discipline.

"The congenial temper that pervades our little years, not wasted, should be taught to minister to works of high attempt—works which the enthusiast would perform with love."

Speaking of his own childhood, Wordsworth says that his soul had fair seed time fostered alike by the beauty of nature in her calmness, and by the fear she inspired in her aspects of power and strength. The narrative of his childhood days is most vivid, realistic, and beautiful, and the mind developed amid such sublime scenes can not but be noble and pure. From the teaching of his childhood he draws the motto of his life, "Plain living and high thinking."

"Our daily meals were frugal, Sabine! More than we wished we knew the Blessington..."
Of vigorous hunger—hence the corporeal strength
Undamped by delicate vains.
Twas this wholesome living, together with an
active life which formed the strong healthy
body that enabled him to give this best to
the world—the work of a mind unfettered by
bodily pain.

Wordsworth condemned severely the methods
of instruction common to the schools of the day.
And the system has improved as little in vital
points even in our day that we may with
profit take his criticisms to ourselves. We had
no sympathy for the methods of recitation and
exercising boards; for the methods which
crushed out the original and poetic spirit by
cramping the mind with mere book instruction.
The ideal education aims to develop an in-
dividuality of mind. The growing mind has
periods of reception and assimilation. When
proper time is given for assimilation of the
knowledge received, the mind strengthens
and expands, and the element of originality
is attained. But the mind crammed with
fact upon fact, processes after process, becomes
marrowed and cramped, and loses all individuality.
The victim of such instruction may be able to
perform astonishing feats of memory, but he has little or no comprehension of the meaning of the knowledge impressed upon his brain at a pattern is stamped upon leather. Wordsworth draws a realistic picture of such an intellectual monotony.

he can read

The inside of the earth, and spell the stars.
He knows the policies of foreign lands,
Can string you names of districts, cities, towns,
The whole world over, light as beads of dew
Upon a gossamer thread.

He paints also a scornful word picture of the cause of this ‘unnatural growth’—they who have solved the future and named it at their bidding; who manage not only books, but things, causing them to react upon the infant mind as the sun upon a flower, first opening the petals wide by genial warmth, then withering and dwarfing by the increasing heat of his rays. It follows, as the night the day, that the mind trained by such a one must have an unnatural development; its power for the best and strongest work destroyed. The mind then becomes a mere machine, doing the routine work done by other minds as trained.
Wordsworth would have us "teach as Nature teaches." Instead of the hourly supervision and constraint described in the following lines,

"... ever as a thought of purer birth

Pries to lead him toward a better shrine,

Some intermeddler still is on the watch

To drive him back, and pound him, like a stray,

Within the purblind of his own conceit."

Wordsworth would substitute freedom of thought and action, with the gentle restraining influences of the Divine law as revealed in Nature. He believed that Nature was given us as a teacher and guide, especially during those years when the mind and heart are most susceptible to the influences surrounding them. In his description of the "unnatural growth," he says,

"Meanwhile old grandam earth is pained to find

The playthings which her love designed for him,

Unthought of, in their woodland beds the flowers

Weep, and the river sides are all forlorn.

By association with Nature, both as revealed in the outside world and in man, the latent capabilities are developed, and the seeds of self-control and self-dependence sown. The real function of the teacher is to guide and direct, but at the same time to throw the child largely upon its own
resources, thereby making it self-confident and independent. As an illustration of the natural teacher, Wordsworth bids us behold the hen with her brood of chicks. She does little more than move about with them in love and watchfulness, "a center in the crotch which they make," now and then scratching up a morsel herself to stimulate and encourage them.

Wordsworth believed in experience as a teacher, that the child should learn the world by actual contact with it—should learn of love and hate, joy and sorrow, peace and pain, by feeling all in their individual lives. He and his playmates were children taught in this way.

"A race of real children; not too wise, Too learned, or too good; but wanton, fresh, And tainted with and down by love and hate, Not unresentful where self-justified, Fierce, moody, patient, venturous, modest, shy; Mad at their sports like withered leaves in wind, Though doing wrong and suffering, and full of fire Thirsting beneath their life's mysterious weight Of pain, and doubt, and fear, yet yielding not In happenings to the happier exult earth."

And Wordsworth realized the great blessing it had been to have to be reared in Mother Nature's arms.
yet I rejoice

And, — — — — — ñill pour out

Thanks with uplifted heart, that I was reared

Safe from an evil which these days have laid

Upon the children of the land,

meaning the educational system as employed in

the schools.

Wordsworth believed that Nature would
develop not only the desirable traits already
alluded to, but that under her influence the
emotional side of man's nature is strengthened
and purified, and the seed of genius in every
soul find here the warmth and light necessary
to germination and growth. He says that the two
attributes that constitute her strength are the
the gifts of emotion and of calmness which she
bestows upon her followers. These are her
glory. Genius thrives by interchange of moods
of excitation and of peace. Hence he will find
in Nature his truest friend, receiving from
her even generous hand the quietness of mind
which fits him to receive the revelations of
truth which comes to his untrammeled mind,
and the energy by which he throws off the
shackles of routine and conventionality, and
searched even deeper and farther for the real land
Wordsworth had, strong within him, the spirit
of democracy, but he was in advance of his age,
in that he realized the only sure basis of a
great democracy is enlightened citizenship. He was
the first to assert that the best education the state
can give is the right of every man.

"For the coming of that glorious time
when, paying knowledge as her noblest wealth
and best protection, this imperial Realm
shall admit

an obligation on her part, to teach

those who are born to serve her and obey.

Woodworth believed that the good citizen
is the good man: without true manhood good
citizenship could not be. He teaches that noble
thoughts and great deeds are the fruits of an educated
mind, and the country which neglects the education of its
people is in danger. Without cultivation of the in-
tellect there can be no upward and onward
progress. His sympathies were all with the
suffering humanity of France until the reign of
Napoleon began. Then, when he saw how cruel and
bloody an oppression France had become, his anger
and pity turned to the interest of the oppressed nations.

He says: "France at this time that there was
"sensibly a want of books and men."
In his own country he would have every child within its borders educated, enabled to deal intelligently with every question of government.

Wordsworth believed that the ultimate end of education is character, and his ideal of character is a lofty soul. In his "Happy Warrior" we find his ideal strongly pictured, and from this source we find that the prime elements of character were to him, "blind indifference," a Sloveness which should be dignified and self-respecting, honor which could know no dishonor, true affection and true pity.

Character depends on moral nature. There is no wealth, no fame can take the place of this essential to good character—pure morals.

"Who knows the individual home in which his habits were first sown, even as a seed?"

How important it is then that the child be surrounded with all pure and noble influences. How great an influence upon the character Nature can have we find well illustrated in Wordsworth's own life. Pure hearted, noble as well, he a typical child of Nature. What is pure can have but a purifying influence. Nature which is but the breath of God.
"Low desires, low thoughts, had there no place;"

Nature's inspiration to higher thoughts and nobler lives is a theme for long with Wordsworth. In the Prelude we find many tributes to Nature's inspiring influence with himself. Wordsworth was a lover of mankind, ever ready to serve his fellow men, throwing himself into the struggle of the suffering and oppressed with all the ardor of a great heart. And this love he attributes to Nature's influence.

"My thoughts, by slow gradations, had been drawn to human kind, and to the good and ill;
Of human life, Nature had led me on."

"For I have learned to look on Nature, not as in the hour of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes the still, sad music of humanity."

As Wordsworth teaches that Nature, being the outward manifestation of God, communion with her must lead the soul heavenward. A fitting summation of Wordsworth's theory of education is contained in the following lines from the Prelude:

"Simplicity in habits, truth in speech,
Be these the daily strength of their minds..."
"May books and nature be their early joy, and knowledge rightly honored with that name—knowledge not purchased by the love of power."

"But in the mountains did he feel his faith, all things there breathed immortality, revolving life, and greatness still revolving in infinite. There littleness was not; the least of things seemed infinite, and there his spirit shaped new prospects, nor did he believe he saw what wonder if his being thus became sublime and comprehensive."