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 children's 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 she is simply required to memorize and write as many as
possible of the 50,000 characters, and little ef-
fort is made to teach him the meaning of the
words they represent. Thought awakening is not
encouraged, year, 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 accumu-
lilation of knowledge, but to prepare for a posi-
tion 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 she
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
prerequisite 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 respecting his son to follow his calling. In higher education however, progress was justified, 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 paved 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 not 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 ferocity; (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 textbook to the school,
both depending upon their memories for the
texts to be discussed. The storing of the
memory was the first concern; the cult-
ivation of intellectual subtleties 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 in-
sight shown. We can have no clearer ex-
emplification 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 sev-
eral senses. Visual, auditory, and muscular
memory were all called upon to assist in
the retention of the impression. In the
'treatate 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 remember phrases
conveying some moral injunction. The fact
is, that Jewish methods of education
Passed from the Jewish school of Alexandria 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 defects in this education: narrowness, formalism, virtual hostility to science, and the like. It may be said that Jews never founded a free state or rose to civic freedom, whereas 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 one's 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. 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 Persians, succumb to military despotism
and supernatural priesthood. On the contrary they never submitted to the Thebanian priesthood. In this way the Greeks escaped the tyranny of the priesthood 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 Homer's 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 is this that we, the people of today, find ourselves far more at home in it than in the class remote from middle ages. Homer, Behaim, though gifted with but little knowledge, are far advanced in ethical
culture and refinement. Bravery, prudence, faithfulness, loyalty, kindnesses, 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 slavery 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 Russian wars, and the rise of philosophy or reflections. The former showed the value of the free, civic individual, as against the despotic 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.

There 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 dispersed. 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 existant as existant and of the non-existant as non-existant." 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 moments
event ever took place. As presented by Plato
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 grounding and condi-
tioning them, that is, the world of completed
theses, 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 his-
tory.
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 this former education aimed at subordinating the individual to the social whole, or its only task now is to free the individual, to give him validity in the face of all institutions. If this task is only slowly becoming 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 medieval world she belonged with his body to the state, with his soul to the church, and it was through the latter that she finally conquered for herself, a sphere independent of the former. The most unworldly element in Christianity, viz., mysticism was the great barrier of individual freedom.

It is easy to find fault with medieval science and medieval education, and from one 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 disputations, 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 that of the ancient world. In a word, it saved Europe from moral suicide, ignorance, and fleshliness. And it did more. By training men minds in logical method, it paved the way for
modern research and science. Thence 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 instilled by Socrates, has been education for subordination. With the decay of mediævalism, 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 development of freedom and individuality. Neither the Reformation nor 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 clung to tradition, not to nature and experience for truth. The same may be said of the Renaissance. It merely substituted one authority for another. Never the less 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 Conscience the course 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 slightly, by denying eternal life, it insists upon making the most out of this life, holding it to be a phase of the other, preparing for 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 and soul and spirit.
 Pestalozzi: The first man who took a notable step forward in education toward mature an 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 lofty morality and sense of duty, and he succeeded in infusing 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 servitude.
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:** Herbert's 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 the 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 that the
practical conclusions from this insight.

Kosminski. Kosminski's work may be re-
garded as a combination of Herbart's theory
of perception, with Froebel's doctrine of
education as ordered evolution. His distin-
guishing merit is his insistence that there
is a definite order of perception.

Herbart, Froebel, Kosminski—by these
men the foundation of modern education
for national 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
time educators do see that education is
conscious evolution of the entire human
being, through ever closer relations, intel-
lectual, 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
seriously established. Even this question is already partially answered and will be more fully answered in the future.

Horace Mann: This new education has perhaps celebrated its noblest triumph 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 way 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 shrewd 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 satis-
faction, pride, and hope, upon the condi-
tion 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 common education. C.S.E.