

SINCERITY.

[A Paper read before the Educational Association Feb. 28th, 1891, by Mr. E. F. Hoffmann.]

There is a time in the life of every one, as he stands amid the wonders of nature, viewing the beautiful, the sublime, and the grand, that nature herself seems to whisper to him: "What are you?" and "What is life?" How he who is thus interrogated receives these questions, how he reflects, and the resolutions he forms sincerely are the index to his future character.

Carlyle says of a hero that "He has this first distinction which indeed we may call the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega of his whole heroism, that looks through the shows of things into things." A man is either sincere in his profession or he is a quack, and the right that all teachers, all teachers, have to make to-day is to keep quackery out of our public schools.

It does not appear rational that a person who has not the welfare of the community or society at large at heart would want to teach the young idea how to shoot, and it appears absurd that a person who has not made the necessary preparations for a teacher should attempt to cultivate the minds of children, "for can you cultivate that which you do not understand?" It is a mistake to employ a teacher who is not sincere to cultivate the child's mind. It does not seem possible that a parent could remain indifferent about his child's education, for surely if there is a wish that a man of family desires it is that his family may be prosperous and honorable.

"Education is cultured growth." The plant absorbs from mother earth its nourishment to promote its growth and sustenance, and if humanity were as perfect as nature, just as to the stately oak each year adds a ring so would the child each year assimilate from the society in which it is placed a ring of the true elements that make a perfect man or woman.

Perhaps it is necessary to mention that the choice lies not between a good education and no education at all, but between a good education and a bad one. Education begins at infancy. The child's first teacher is the mother that nourishes it. Education, then, or developing the genius in the child's mind, begins at home and continues in the school, or the streets and in many places of disputation. Every one, therefore, is educated; the school draws out the better qualities of man, the streets the worse.

Go-crime is beginning to recognize this, and, on the theory that it is cheaper to form the mind than to reform criminals, several of our states are agitating the question of compulsory education.

The superiority of our race over the nomad, the savage and the brute lies in the fact that we are better educated than they and possess more knowledge.

Perhaps nothing can strike the sinners of our age as a sadder omen, or at least blast the hopes of him who augurs a golden age in the near future, than that not only the gamin, the ignorant, and the indifferent idlers are of opinion that a smattering knowledge of the common branches is sufficient for any but those who practice the learned professions, but also some of our so-called sincere citizens are of the same opinion. Such is false sincerity, based upon the mistaken idea that a miserly accumulation of wealth is the end of life. No, the laborer needs a cultivated mind as much as does the lawyer. It is a demand that every government may make, and particularly our government where our liberty lies in the ballot, and the safeguard of the ballot-box is the intelligence of the citizens.

When will men give proper thought to infancy? "Is it not monstrous," says Spencer, "that the fate of a new generation should be left to the chance of unreasoning custom, impulse, and fancy, joined with the suggestions of ignorant nurses and the prejudiced counsel of grandmothers?" Let us next discuss the sincerity of the teacher. No sincere teacher will undertake a work which he knows he is not qualified to do, and no sincere teacher will attempt to teach who does not understand the principles of pedagogy.

He must base his instruction on child psychology. He must be endowed with a large quantity of mental force. If a cannon ball be fired against a stone structure, although it may make no impression, the force is not wasted, but converted into heat. This is based on the indestructibility of physical force. The same theory, however, is true as to mental force. Force is not wasted. I like to think of a teacher in whom there is a great deal of potential energy which he can use to inspire his pupils. The teacher must proceed according to nature. In the different stages of youth there are different stages of mental activity, and the work must be adapted to the child, or the forces of the soul.

It is among our misfortunes that we do not thoroughly understand our organism, and there is not a nobler and more interesting subject for investigation than that of the science of teaching. There is one law, however, that may be safely followed; the same force that seems to run through the entire course of nature—evolution—is one of the fundamental laws of human ethics.

The ideal teacher must realize that the health and character of his pupils depend on him; he must realize that all sane minds can be cultivated; he must teach by example, avoiding all shams and quackeries even in dress. He must realize that "there is no action of man in life which is not the beginning of so long a chain of consequences as that no human providence is high enough to give us a prospect to the end." He must have the courage to tell the people the truth when necessary, for "They are slaves who dare not be in the right with two or three." And lastly, he must set in action the forces that will evolve the results intended to be accomplished, rather than to do the entire work himself. Such a teacher is sincere, and such sincerity is heroism. The evolutionist teacher is the hero teacher.

It is supposed by Laplace that originally all material of which the universe is composed was scattered throughout space in the form of very tenuous matter. If it be granted that this matter began to accumulate, it can be proved, by mechanics, that it would have produced a rotary motion which would have evolved the entire solar system. In the same manner if the teacher but calls the proper forces of the mind into action, the laws of nature will accomplish the results for which a school is intended. Help that so many teachers offer their pupils, that so many pupils expect, and that so many parents think should be given judiciously, for it may obstruct the development of the mind, and by example it teaches intolerance.

And in conclusion it may be well to emphasize, in order to impress it upon the minds of all, that if the psychology of the child be well written, and if by deep reflection the teacher applies its laws in his work, an education will result, which will not only better adapt us to our destination; which will make men depend less on supernatural powers, and rely on themselves; which will thus cultivate energy instead of indolence; which will at once be more rational and more instructive, as it depends upon the development of the child's natural powers; which will, by a gradual evolution, develop a new race not essentially different in appearance from ourselves, perhaps with a more intelligent expression, but wiser in actions, greater as citizens, and more liberal in thought.

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