

**POSSIBILITIES OF A
PEDAGOGICAL SOCIETY. AN
ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE
ST. LOUIS SOCIETY OF
PEDAGOGY, MARCH 11, 1893**

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Possibilities of a Pedagogical Society. An Address Delivered Before the St. Louis Society of Pedagogy, March 11,1893 by William M. Bryant

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WILLIAM M. BRYANT

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Possibilities of a Pedagogical Society.

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE

ST. LOUIS SOCIETY OF PEDAGOGY,

MARCH 11, 1893.

BY

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ST. LOUIS:

PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY OF PEDAGOGY.

MR. PRESIDENT :

We meet to-day for the purpose of considering afresh the central aim of our Society. And at the outset it seems well worth while to remind ourselves of the fact that every association of people, of whatever calling or degree, must of course presuppose some positive purpose. Such purpose may, besides, have either of three possible degrees of development. In the first place it may be merely implicit in the form of a general sentiment. Again it may be explicit but only so far as to be simply apprehended in its most general character ; while finally it may be clearly present in consciousness as a purpose thoroughly comprehended and adequately formulated.

These are, indeed, but the successive stages in the development into maturity of any and every purpose by which human beings are moved to action.

Such in brief is our primary assumption. Following which, with reference to our present purpose, it must lead us to note that a Pedagogical Society implies in its very name a purpose the precise nature of which has already become defined with perfect clearness.

On the other hand the degree of adequacy with which this purpose has at any given time become unfolded in the consciousness of those directly concerned must depend upon a variety of conditions. But there is one thing at least which could not fail to be already

present, and vividly present, to the minds of the founders of such an association ; and that is, that its central purpose must be the investigation of the fundamental principles of education.

And yet while the *immediate* aim is the study of, and contribution to, the Science of Education, it is equally evident that the *ultimate* aim must be improvement in education as an art. Practice, resulting in actual, abiding, concrete degrees of rational *Life*,— that is the true final aim of all educational work.

Nor will any one pretend that this is the announcement of any new thing. Rather the fundamental purpose here indicated has in greater or less measure been present to human consciousness in all ages.

Just now, indeed, this great central purpose of all human effort seems to be attaining a richer and peculiarly fresh bloom of promise in the general consciousness. And it is precisely for this reason that so much is just now being said upon educational themes and that thus so much of criticism is being indulged in upon educational methods.

Hence is it that the functions of such societies as the one here assembled are assuming new significance and that thus there is here also demanded a process of redefining.

It may very well be, indeed, that in such a Society there are latent possibilities not merely beyond those hitherto actually realized, but also beyond those that have thus far been quite distinctly apprehended even by those of us who are directly engaged in educational work. It would be strange indeed were this not the case. For it is only when new points of view are attained that new possibilities appear. It is only in

unfamiliar light that familiar things reveal themselves to us in unsuspected range of meaning.

Nor is this to be taken as in any sense a reflection upon the past efforts or upon the past achievements of this Society. On the contrary, not only has the practice of the Society hitherto conformed substantially to the central aim which should always be its guide, but it is also true that not a few papers of high educational value have had their origin here and that some of these have found their way into current educational literature.

And further, the St. Louis Society of Pedagogy is even now proving the genuineness of the vitality attained through its life thus far by the very readiness of its response to the spirit of the great educational revival which is to-day so conspicuous a fact that it may be said to constitute the leading characteristic of the closing decade of the Nineteenth Century. Just now indeed this responsiveness has taken the special form of a general and rapidly deepening conviction on the part of its members that for the St. Louis Society of Pedagogy itself a new era is at hand. In fact as early as the January meeting of the Society this conviction received explicit utterance through our honored President* who then made formal proposal that a reorganization be effected on a basis promising at once increased membership, greater individual activity on the part of the members, and fuller efficiency as an educational agency on the part of the Society as a whole.

What I have to offer to-day, then, is nothing more than a summary view of what seems to me to be the true basis and method of such reorganization.

* Mr. Walter H. Wilcox.

And first of all it is evident that a society having for its express purpose the investigation of the Principles of Education must presuppose a well-defined conviction as to the nature of *man* as the being to be educated. Unless there is perfect clearness upon this central point everything pertaining to our educational work must remain vague and thus at every step we must be exposed to fatal error.

It is evident therefore that we cannot be too careful in defining our view upon this vital aspect of our theme.

The *nature* of man — in this very phrase we may find a deeply significant clew. For primarily *nature* is but the outer form of *natura*, the great birth-process or process of coming-to-be. Indeed we have here a significant hint as to the thorough-going validity of what is called the "historical method" in the investigation of all questions and above all in the investigation of questions involved in the various forms and degrees of Life.

Hence is it that even in the unconscious, instinctive stages of all serious inquiry the inquiry has always inevitably taken the form of a search for *origins*. You can really know a snowflake or a lily or a star or a soul only when you have traced it to its primal source and in so doing have discovered the process through which it has come to be.

But here again the *form* of the solution will depend upon the mode of mind that has predominated in the inquiry. If in a given case the Imagination is the most matured phase of intelligence then inevitably the form of the solution will be that of imagery; that is, it will be poetic. If on the other hand the most highly

developed phase of the intelligence is that of reflection or thought then the subtler aspects — the inner relations of energy involved in the unfolding of the given unit — will be seized and represented in more or less abstract terminology, which, however "scientific" it may be, must always appear to the imagination as altogether shadowy and unreal.

And, as might well be expected, this contrast of methods has nowhere been more conspicuously illustrated than in the inquiries that have been made concerning the *nature* (including the origin) of man. Broadly speaking, indeed, there have, as we would expect, always been, in one or another degree, two widely contrasted views upon this subject according as the trend of the inquiring mind have been predominantly imaginative or predominantly reflective. Hence there was early developed a poetic solution of the question on the one hand, while on the other, through centuries of inquiry, a more and more adequate scientific solution has come to be unfolded.

In the poetic solution the origin of man is represented in the form of simple imagery easily seized by the imagination. In the scientific solution the representation assumes the form of an elaborate tracing of subtle influences, extending back through an unbroken series, indeed, and yet none the less extending back into a vague, doubly nebulous Past of measureless æons in which all reality seems to merge strangely into what seems very like unreality. The one view gives us a clear, sharply defined, easily apprehended account of the *Creation* of Man. The other offers us a highly elaborate and intricate representation purporting to be a fairly complete tracing of the *Evolution* of Man.

Are these views contradictory, or may they possibly be but different aspects of the same solution?

In the first case the very conception of the creation of man presupposes a Creator, and this means nothing less than a spontaneous, original Energy working in accordance with a perfectly defined method or plan; and this implies necessarily that such Energy is conscious, is a Mind, a *Personal Agency*.

Is the second view inconsistent with this? Let us see. According to the doctrine of Evolution man's origin is to be traced through a complex process of *Heredity* back through ever simpler forms to a primal simplest form of life. The rich sum of characteristics constituting the actual concrete Man of to-day has been slowly evolved through the cumulative process of inheritance, *plus growth*. But this growth must be regarded as the result of individual activity from generation to generation. In other words growth is due to the actual and consistent response of the individual to the total complex stimulus coming to him from the "Environment."

Let us for a moment examine the implications which this very abstract general statement involves.

And first let us note this fact— that the individual of the present generation has inherited a certain complexity of structural, organic form expressive of a given degree and trend of personal character. But this inheritance of his is the resultant of two factors. One of these factors has its ground in the actual growth of character, together with the corresponding physiological modification, on the part of his immediate parents; the growth and modification both being due to the personal activity of those parents. The other