APPERCEPTION: OR, THE ESSENTIAL MENTAL OPERATION IN THE ACT OF LEARNING. AN ESSAY ON "A POT OF GREEN FEATHERS" PP. 5-58

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APPERCEPTION

OR

THE ESSENTIAL MENTAL OPERATION

IN THE

ACT OF LEARNING

AN ESSAY ON

"A Pot of Green Feathers"

BY

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This work is published at the suggestion of W. T. Harris, LL.D., Commissioner of Education, who said of it at the recent Pedagogical Conference, at the Johns Hopkins University:

"The idea of 'apperception' is the most important fruit thus far developed by the study of the psychology of pedagogics. R. H. Quick, the eminent English authority, refers in the highest terms to a short monograph on pedagogics which he has recently discovered, entitled *A Pot of Green Feathers*."

PREFACE

As the title of this paper seems a little strange a few words are necessary to explain its meaning. Some years ago I was listening to an object lesson given to a class of very young children by a pupil teacher who chose for her subject a pot of beautiful fresh green ferns. She began by holding up the plant before the class and asking whether any child could say what it was. At first no child answered, but presently a little girl said, "It is a pot of green feathers." Thereupon the teacher turned to me and said, "Poor little thing! She knows no better."

But I fell a thinking on the matter. Did the child really suppose that the ferns were feathers? Or did she rather use the name of a familiar thing to describe what she knew to be different, and yet noticed to be in some respects like?

This train of thought led me to put together what I knew of perception, and the following is the result of my labors. The principal authority which I have closely followed is Dr. Karl Lange's "Apperzeption," but I have derived much help from Herbart's "Psychology," Bernhard Perez's "First Three Years of Childhood," Romane's "Mental Evolution in Man," and the lectures of the late Professor T. H. Green.

THE POT OF GREEN FEATHERS

What do we know of the outer world? Of that which is not self? Of objects? How do we know *anything* of the outer world? We receive impressions from it; a table feels hard, a book looks brown in color, oblong in shape, and we say it is thick or thin. Are we simply receivers of these impressions,—hard, brown, oblong? Are our minds inactive in the process of getting to know these impressions? Or are they active? Are lumps of the outside somehow forced in upon our minds entire, without corresponding action on the mind's part?

No! our minds are not passive, the opposite is true. Through the senses the mind receives impressions, but these contributions from the senses would not be objects of knowledge, would not be interpreted, would not be recognized unless the mind itself worked upon them and assimilated them converting the unknown

stimulus from without into a sensation which we can hold in our thoughts and compare with other sensations within us. The mind converts the unknown stimulus from without into the known sensation. The outer world then is no more wholly the outer world when you know it. In our knowledge of the outer world there is always something contributed by the mind itself.

The truth that the mind adds to and changes the impressions which it receives through the senses is illustrated by the very different conceptions which exactly the same landscape gives rise to in different people. The geologist can tell you of the strata, the botanist of the vegetation, the landscape painter of the light and shade, the various coloring, and the grouping of the objects; and yet, perhaps, no one of them notices exactly what the others notice. A plank of wood, again, seems a simple object, and able to tell one tale to all, but how much it tells to a joiner, concerning which it is dumb to a casual observer.

Or again, visit as a grown man the school