

**SYMMETRICAL EDUCATION,
OR THE IMPORTANCE OF
JUST PROPORTION IN MIND
AND BODY**

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Symmetrical Education, or the Importance of Just Proportion in Mind and Body by W. Cave Thomas

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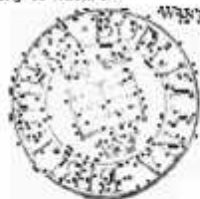
THE IMPORTANCE OF JUST PROPORTION
IN MIND AND BODY

BY

W. CAVE THOMAS

*'This is an art
Which does mend nature,—change it rather:
But the art itself is nature'*

WESTER'S TALE



LONDON

SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE

1873

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260. f. 67.



PREFACE.

IT HAS often been remarked that the present intellectual tendency is to level all the old ramparts—formal restrictions as they are called—in politics, education, literature, and art—not, as the writer believes, from any wanton and destructive spirit, but because the nature of the errors, the extremes they were intended to guard against, and the whole substratum of theory on which they were raised, have long since been forgotten. The old school forgets that the public mind has been brought more and more into contact with scientific enquiry during the last half century, and hence has gradually acquired a taste for exact demonstration, and for probing to first principles. It therefore distrusts those dicta and generalizations which are dogmatically tendered for its

guidance. It desires to know more about their foundations before consenting to be led by, or coerced to observe them.

The principles of morality, education and art now in vogue are for the most part dogmatical ; we know not the how, the when, or the where, they were obtained. Nor ought the few who by education or an intuitive feeling think and act in conformity with the old-fashioned rules and teaching, to complain of the revolt, seeing how few there are of their own school who can give the reasons for the faith that is in them. This modern irreverent seeming towards ancient formula does not proceed from any permanently rebellious or dangerous disposition, but rather from a praiseworthy desire to find some surer scientific basis for thought and action than the teachers of the old régime are disposed to afford. It should be recollected that our æsthetic education has for centuries been based upon pagan models, and that the contempt for the ancient forms of literature and art which has of late grown up in England and America is only one of the many manifestations of a wide-spread iconoclastic indiscriminating dissent—of the rude virtue of protesting—which will some day be moderated and moulded to grand results. The aborigines of

a new world of ideas, as of a newly discovered country, are inevitably barbarous; they refuse to submit to the restraints and hamper of fashion, prefer their own primitive nakedness, and to readjust and build up their principles anew, and for themselves—wattle and mud though their wigwams may be. Such a state of things may shock, does shock, the classically cultivated intellect; nevertheless there is much in all this rude vigour to console the earnest thinker, viz., that there is a desire to seek the true foundations on which to rebuild. A great poet once observed to some coxcomb who was bemoaning the 'small Latin, and still less Greek,' of Shakespere: 'Sir! the more to his honour, he went to the well-head. We may rather consider ourselves fortunate that his great intellect was never fettered by classical learning.' And this admonition from a poet to a poetaster ought to be taken to heart by Snobdom, for we are great only where we have built upon independent foundations—for ourselves, instead of upon precedent.

Now the theory that quantity is the fundamental form of phenomena, relativity, experience, is the ultimate form of cognition, appears to afford that enduring, immutable basis on which to reconstruct our principles, re-establish science; for the quantita-

tive theory leads to exact, definite statements in all branches of enquiry ; the setting forth of principles in those forms in which the greatest exactitude of expression is possible, measure and number. And not only are the advantages of the quantitative theory not confined to the means which it affords for exact enunciation, but it enables us to detect common principles obtaining in every department of investigation, laws which alike rule in the planetary system and human nature—laws of just proportional relation which hold equally good in ethics, politics, education, æsthetics, physics, &c.

We should, nevertheless, note that this 'barbarous,' 'irreverent,' 'iconoclastic' crowd, however prone it may be to reject ancient dogma it cannot fathom, still looks forward with a reserved reverence towards an ideal manhood. Now the constitution of this regal or ideal humanity, which these destructives, as they are called, indistinctly perceive enthroned, is that which has to be clearly defined, and which the education of the future has to develop. The quantitative theory enables us to define this ideal humanity. But it would be useless either to talk about its definition or development, unless human

nature were plastic and capable of being materially *modified, remoulded, reformed, rectified* intellectually and physically. I shall, therefore, endeavour to show in the following chapters how human, like other organic nature, is capable of being gradually developed to a purpose, that purpose being its symmetrical or proportionate reconstitution. How both the intellectual and physical natures may be deteriorated and deformed by neglect and injudicious training, or rectified and symmetrically proportioned by a right system of education.

Do not imagine that, in writing of a prevalent irreverence towards old forms, restrictions, or conventions, I myself believe them all to be wrong. I believe, on the contrary, that many of them are perfectly right, and that the world will in due course be of that opinion too; but there is a very great difference between receiving with an unquestioning obedience, working upon dead formal precedents, and working with living, self-earned principles, derived from an independent and careful study of nature. In disparaging as it may have seemed classical and venerable precedents, I have only conformed my expressions to the general *pose* of modern thought—I