

**LITTLE JOURNEYS TO THE
HOMES OF
GREAT PHILOSOPHERS;
SPENCER, PP. 95-127**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649314317

Little Journeys to the Homes of Great Philosophers; Spencer, pp. 95-127 by Elbert Hubbard

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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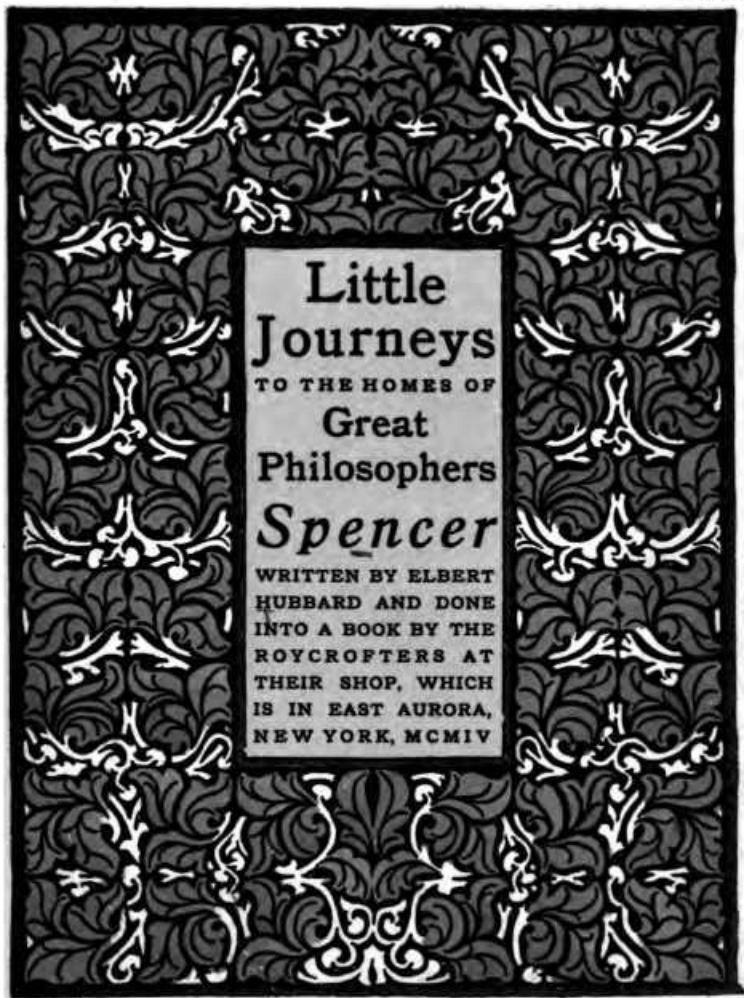
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ELBERT HUBBARD

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HERBERT SPENCER

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WHAT knowledge is of most worth? The uniform reply is: Science. This is the verdict on all counts. For direct self-preservation, or the maintenance of life and health, the all-important knowledge is—science. For that indirect self-preservation which we call gaining a livelihood, the knowledge of greatest value is—science. For the discharge of parental functions, the proper guidance is to be found only in science. For the interpretation of national life, past and present, without which the citizen cannot rightly regulate his conduct, the indispensable key is—science. Alike for the most perfect production and present enjoyment of art in all its forms, the needful preparation is still—science. And for purposes of discipline—intellectual, moral, religious, the most efficient study is, once more—science.

Essay on EDUCATION.

SHR. ✓

HERBERT SPENCER



N Derby, England, April 27th, 1820, Herbert Spencer, the only child of his parents, was born. His mother died in his childhood, so he really never had any vivid recollection of her, but hearsay, fused with memory and ideality, vitalized all. And thus to him, to the day of his death, his mother stood for gentleness, patience, tenderness, intuitive insight, and a love that never grew faint. Man makes his mother in his own image.

Herbert Spencer's father was a school-teacher, and in very moderate circumstances. Little Herbert could not remember when he did not go to school, and yet as a real scholar, he never went to school at all. The family lived over the schoolroom, and while the youngster yet wore dresses his father would hold him in his arms, and carry him around the room as he instructed his classes. William George Spencer was both father and mother to Herbert, and used to sing to him lullabies as the sun went down.

After school there were always walks a-field, and in the evening the brother of the schoolmaster would call, and

then there was much argument as to Why and What, Whence and Whither.

People talk gossip, we are told, for lack of a worthy theme. These two Spencers—one a schoolmaster and the other a clergyman—found the time too short for their discussions. In their walks and talks they were always examining, comparing, classifying, selecting, speculating. Flowers, plants, bugs, beetles, birds, trees, weeds, earth and rocks were scrutinized and analyzed.

¶ Where did it come from? How did it get here?

I am told that lions never send their cubs away to be educated by a cubless lioness and an emasculated lion. The lion learns by first playing at the thing and then doing it.

A motherless boy, brought up by an indulgent father, one might prophesy, would be sure to rule the father and be spoiled himself through omission of the rod. But in the boy problem all signs fail. The father taught by exciting curiosity and animating his pupils to work out problems and make discoveries—keeping his discipline well out of sight. How well the plan worked is revealed in the life of Herbert Spencer himself; and his book, "Education," is based on the ideas evolved by his father, to whom he gives much credit. No man ever had so divine a right to compile a book on education as Herbert Spencer, for he proved in his own life every principle he laid down.

On all excursions Herbert was taken along—because he could n't be left at home, you know. He listened

to the conversations and learned by hearing the older pupils recite.

All out-of-doors was fairy-land to him—a curiosity-shop filled with wonderful things—over your head, under your feet, all around was life—action, pulsing life, everything in motion—going somewhere, evolving into something else.

This habit of observation, adoration and wonder,—filled with pleasurable emotions and recollections from the first—lasted the man through life, and allowed him, even with a frail constitution, to round out a long period of severe mental work, with never a tendency to die at the top.

Herbert Spencer never wrote a thing more true than this: "The man to whom in boyhood information came in dreary tasks, along with threats of punishment, is unlikely to be a student in after years; while those to whom it came in natural forms, at the proper times, & who remember its facts as not only interesting in themselves, but as a long series of gratifying successes, are likely to continue through life that self-instruction begun in youth."

When thirteen years old Herbert went to live with his uncle, the Rev. Thomas Spencer, at Bath. Here the same methods of education were continued that had been begun at home—conversation, history in the form of story-telling, walks and talks, and mathematical calculations carried out as pleasing puzzles. In mathematics the boy made rapid progress, but the faculty of

observation was the dominant one. Every phase of cloud and sky, of water and earth, rock and mountain, bird and bush, plant and tree was curious to him. He kept a journal of his observations, which had the double advantage of deepening his impressions by recounting them, and second, it taught him the use of language. ¶ The best way to learn to write is to write. Herbert Spencer never studied grammar until he had learned to write. He took his grammar at sixty, which is a good age to begin this interesting study, as by that time you have largely lost your capacity to sin. Men who swim exceedingly well are not those who have taken courses in the theory of swimming at natatoriums from professors of the amphibian art—they were boys who just jumped in. Correspondence schools for the taming of bronchos are as naught; and treatises on the gentle art of wooing are of no avail—follow nature's lead. Grammar is the *appendenda vermiformis* of pedagogics: it is as useless as the letter q in the alphabet, or as the proverbial two tails to a cat, which no cat ever had, and the finest cat in the world, the Manx cat, has no tail at all.

“The literary style of most university men is commonplace, when not positively bad,” wrote Herbert Spencer in his old age. “Educated Englishmen all write alike,” said Taine. That is to say, they have no literary style, for style is character, individuality—the style is the man. And grammar tends to obliterate all individuality. No study is so irksome to everybody, excepting