HABIT AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN EDUCATION: AN ESSAY IN PEDAGOGICAL PSYCHOLOGY

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HABIT

AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN EDUCATION

An Essay

IN

PEDAGOGICAL PSYCHOLOGY

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF
DR. PAUL RADESTOCK

BY

F. A. CASPARI

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION.

Dr. Paul Radestock, the author of this work, already favorably known by several other psychological monographs, has, in scarcely less degree than Ribot in France or Sully in England, the happy faculty of absorbing the literature of a large scientific field and re-stating it in lucid, untechnical, and condensed form. He has read widely in anthropology and morbid and experimental psychology, and in this work, which is here translated entire, he has rendered his chief service to education.

He assumes that, so far as education becomes a science, or teaching a profession, it will rest more entirely upon psychology. Education he regards as progressive habituation, and good habits as even more important than good principles. What makes the novice a master is the power of the brain to lay up earlier stimuli in the form of dispositions. Habit not only lays down the trunk lines of association, and thus gives direction, but it furnishes momentum of mind and will. We have truly learned, not what we can be examined on, but what has become second nature or habit. Memory must lapse to custom, and sometimes to fixed reflex action or "will-memory," before the assimilation of instruction is complete. The stages in this process, from the residual trace left by the first act, which is the

germ or point of departure for habitude, the excitation by "organic phosphorescence" or memory of all that favors, and the suppression of all colliding or diverting acts or impressions, the fusing of similars widely scattered in time and space in the sharpest possible focus of attention, till the raw material of memory is summated and gradually digested into faculty, and at-oned in instinct and intuition, — this is the story of these pages. If we assume with Aristotle that the process of habituation may be extremely accelerated by right methods, or retarded by wrong ones, or with this author that more men are made not only bad but ignorant by education or habit than by nature, the practical bearings of a work like this will not be underestimated.

Habit steadies and gives strength. Harmonious ideas are reënforced and discordant ones fade out. Character is slowly defined; tact and taste take the place of memory and labored consciousness, as we turn over to our automaton what express volition had to do before. This residuum and deposit of schools and books, and even of experience, is the measure and standard of all educational values, and is even physically transmissible to succeeding generations.

Radestock does not overlook the fact that extreme habituation is fraught with dangers. It may diminish the many-sidedness of our interests, and even make the new incomprehensible or intolerable to us. It may so conventionalize us as to weaken the will and enervate the feelings. This is the danger Rousseau feared in urging that a child must be accustomed to nothing, not even to the predominant use of the right hand, or to eating and sleeping at the same place or time, etc., lest the