

**THE
SCHOOL OF LIFE**

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The school of life by Henry Van Dyke

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HENRY VAN DYKE

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BY
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THE
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MANY fine things have been said in Commencement Addresses about "Culture and Progress," "The Higher Learning," "American Scholarship," "The University Spirit," "The Woman's College," and other subjects bearing on the relation of education to life. But the most important thing, which needs not only to be said, but also to be understood, is that life itself is the great school.

This whole framework of things visible and invisible wherein we mysteriously find ourselves perceiving, reasoning, reflecting, desiring, choosing and acting, is designed and fitted, so far at least as it concerns us and re-

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THE SCHOOL OF LIFE

veals itself to us, to be a place of training and enlightenment for the human race through the unfolding and development of human persons such as you and me. For no other purpose are these wondrous potencies of perception and emotion, thought and will, housed within walls of flesh and shut in by doors of sense, but that we may learn to set them free and lead them out. For no other purpose are we beset with attractions and repulsions, obstacles and allurements, helps and hardships, tasks, duties, pleasures, persons, books, machines, plants, animals, houses, forests, storm and sunshine, water fresh and salt, fire wild and tame, a various earth, a mutable heaven, and an intricate humanity, but that we may be instructed in the nature of things and people, and rise by knowledge and sympathy,

THE SCHOOL OF LIFE

through gradual and secret promotions, into a fuller and finer life.

Facts are teachers. Experiences are lessons. Friends are guides. Work is a master. Love is an interpreter. Teaching itself is a method of learning. Joy carries a divining rod and discovers fountains. Sorrow is an astronomer and shows us the stars. What I have lived I really know, and what I really know I partly own; and so begirt with what I know and what I own, I move through my curriculum, elective and required, gaining nothing but what I learn, at once instructed and examined by every duty and every pleasure.

It is a mistake to say, "To-day education ends, to-morrow life begins." The process is continuous: the idea into the thought, the thought into the action, the action into the character. When

THE SCHOOL OF LIFE

the mulberry seed falls into the ground and germinates, it begins to be transformed into silk.

This view of life as a process of education was held by the Greeks and the Hebrews,—the two races in whose deep hearts the stream of modern progress takes its rise, the two great races whose energy of spirit and strength of self-restraint have kept the world from sinking into the dream-lit torpor of the mystic East, or whirling into the blind, restless activity of the barbarian West.

What is it but the idea of the school of life that sings through the words of the Hebrew psalmist? "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go. I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle lest they come

THE SCHOOL OF LIFE

near unto thee." This warning against the mulish attitude which turns life into a process of punishment, this praise of the eye-method which is the triumph of teaching,—these are the notes of a wonderful and world-wide school.

It is the same view of life that shines through Plato's noble words: "This then must be our notion of the just man, that even when he is in poverty or sickness, or any other seeming misfortune, all things will in the end work together for good to him in life and death; for the gods have a care of any one whose desire is to become just, and to be like God, as far as man can attain His likeness by the pursuit of virtue."

Not always, indeed, did the Greek use so strong an ethical emphasis. For him the dominant idea was the unfolding