

**PRACTICAL EDUCATION;  
INDUSTRIAL EDUCATION, AND  
DRAWING AS ITS BASIS;  
TECHNICAL EDUCATION;  
LECTURES BY C. C. PERKINS**

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Lectures by C. C. Perkins by Walter Smith & C. C. Perkins

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**WALTER SMITH & C. C. PERKINS**

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# PRACTICAL EDUCATION.

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PAPER READ AT THE ESSEX COUNTY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION  
MEETING, HELD AT SALEM, APRIL 12, 1878,

— BY —

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In the present and recent times there has been, and is, great uneasiness felt by the friends and foes of education upon the question of whether we are giving our children such instruction as will best fit them for practical life ; in other words, the best practical education.

The subject is of the highest interest to us all, whether as parents, teachers or citizens, in one capacity or in all, and when we share this interest in all three capacities, it becomes somewhat exciting ; for then we have as parents to incur the responsibility of having our children prepared for practical life, as teachers the responsibility of administering this education, and as citizens the responsibility of paying for it.

Many of us here to-day have this threefold interest in the matter, some have a double share, and all have at least one right to be heard and to vote in discussing and deciding it.

So, as a competent jury, let us take counsel together concerning the best practical education that could be given in our common schools. It will be recognized without discussion, by everyone who maintains a careful outlook over the whole educational field, that the leaders and followers, the pioneers and the hangers on behind, school committeemen, school superintendents and supervisors, head teachers and the rank and file beneath them, parents, tax-payers and the conductors of the public press, are all in a very restless and uneasy condition just now about the efficiency of the education given in our public schools. People who are utterly unfit to form an opinion or give judgment concerning the subject, are as anxious to discuss and be heard upon it as

those whose long experience and mature judgment would give them the right to be considered authorities, if any authority in education were recognized here. Remembering this general interest in the matter, and the need that something should be done to allay this restlessness and give peace to this spirit of enquiry and discontent, I claim it to be the duty of teachers to participate in the discussion, to give their fellow citizens the benefit of their experience and knowledge about it, to bear a hand in the navigation of this ship called Education, as part of the crew, and *not* as passengers or as freight; just as in times of political danger every citizen, without distinction of sex, should consider it a duty to be counted in the ballot-box, a duty greater even than that of being heard in the caucus.

And I feel moved to say this because it is noticeable in this age and in this country, that if an able man should decline or abandon the practice of a profession, to follow what is called the vocation of a teacher (a most unusual occurrence), he thereby reduces his social influence by many degrees, because his manly independence has declined almost to zero — he has become the servant of servants.

When one thinks of the mighty interests the educators of the human race hold in their hands, and how necessary it is for the good of society that the biggest brains and the ablest hands should direct and hold the reins of education, it is somewhat sorrowful to see how few men, possessing these highest qualifications, can be induced to remain in the public service for education, even when they have begun life as teachers. *Annual elections* of teachers are responsible for this, a childish political dissipation, which takes the bright manliness out of our men and the happy independence out of our women, if they happen to be teachers: for through it those who seriously undertake a life-long duty have the same uncertainty of tenure in office as the small log-rolling politicians who are hungry for a year's notoriety, and get it.

I have formed a very high opinion of the capacities and abilities of American teachers, and think it is a great blessing for society that the lifelong interests of our children should be committed to their care; but this blight of annual elections takes much of their virtue out of them. How sleek and respectful and well-behaved school teachers are expected to be, previous to this annual ordeal, and how smiling and grateful afterwards!

Against this abomination, which if it does not exist everywhere does exist in too many places, every free man who values his freedom, and every competent teacher who has fairly earned his professional knowledge, and respects his honorable vocation, should make perpetual pro-

test, and therefore I gladly contribute this my shot and shell in the bombardment of this pirate ship called *Annual Elections*, conscious though I am that those who think as I do, and think with gun-powder and grape-shot, must, in the ever-famous words, be ready "to hang together or to hang separately."

That a great deficiency of the practical element exists in our schemes of public school education is testified to by the efforts now being made, in an experimental manner, to add classes or schools in which the use of tools can be acquired and industrial arts be taught. Thus there exists in Boston now, besides the Russian system of teaching the mechanical arts at the Institute of Technology, classes for modelling and carving, and practical carpentry for children, and the latter have been quite recently established.

Without expressing an opinion of the exact value of these efforts, I consider them all as experimental remedies for a disease it would be better to prevent, for prevention is better than cure.

It is of very little use to shut the door after the steed is stolen, or to catch the boy just escaped from the Grammar School and teach him the elements of practical arts, the first instruction in which should be given in the Primary Schools. Plant in the Primary School the seeds which shall germinate and grow with the physical growth and bear fruit in the workshop, and continue planting all through school life the elements of all industrial arts. A definite proportion of school life, from its first day to its last, should be devoted to physical exercises having in ultimate view the occupations of after life. In the Primary Schools, the kindergarten exercises for the very young, and a development of them with additions for the older pupils, would be the beginning of this work.

In the Grammar Schools (after a committee of experts had decided upon elementary technical courses), two or three workshops should be fitted up in the basements, conducted by skilled workmen who can teach, and embracing the working in wood, metal, and perhaps one other material; also a small chemical laboratory, and models of constructions. In these practical class-rooms I would have every boy above ten years of age spend from one-third to one-half of his time at school.

In the High Schools the pupils, whether boys or girls, ought to spend quite half of their school time in the study of science or art, unless they are preparing for professions which ignore both. It would be conducive to the usefulness of women and the happiness of society, if the graduating girls of the grammar and high and normal schools were required to present themselves for their diplomas in garments made



entirely by themselves, their boots only being the work of other hands. This, however, is entering into detail more than I intended. The experience of the world, and of its most successful nations, is before us and at our service. If five distinguished educators were appointed on a committee, or as a commission, to inquire into and report on such a question as this: "Do the public schools prepare the pupils in the best attainable manner for practical life?" and also to solve some such problem as this: "In an industrial and manufacturing community, where apprenticeships to trades and crafts are not in existence, what can be done in the public schools to remedy the lack of skill in workmen arising from the non-existence of apprenticeships?" then some light would be thrown upon this question. This is a matter of national importance. If the United States government were to appoint a paid commission of the five most progressive and experienced educators in the country, to examine into and report upon this subject of practical education, taking, say, two years for their task, I believe we should obtain information and suggestions from their labors that would enable us to double the value of our public school education, without increasing its cost. And if each State appointed a State commission to collect information and report concerning local needs, resulting from the occupations of the people, the national commission would be thereby greatly assisted, and we should finally be enabled to adapt the general information thus secured, to the wants of particular localities, and frame schemes of practical education for our schools that would be both general in principle and local in their application.

At present our enquiries, experiments and criticisms, are disjointed and ephemeral, and individual effort is overwhelmed by general apathy. It seems to me that teachers should not resent the charge that the schools are not what they should be, but allow it, and be ready and anxious to take their full share of the work and responsibility of making them just what they should be. Before any improvement can be made we must recognize the existence of evils to be removed, and then put our shoulders to the wheel with a will. That the schools have not kept up with the industrial necessities of the people is *not* the fault of the teachers, unless their being afraid to speak has been the cause, for I notice that the last persons to be consulted on educational matters are educators and teachers, as they are supposed (in this very practical age) to know nothing of the subject. They cannot, therefore, be blamed if the educational wagon gets into ruts, when even the ruts are on the wrong road. How does this ignoring of professional skill in education compare with experience in other occupations?

I know of no other profession which invariably takes counsel and direction from people not in the profession, or vocation, as we ought modestly to call it, though this is the rule in school management; nor do I believe that there exists under the sun an office which needs greater educational experience, wisdom or forethought, than that of the school committeeman, nor a subject which demands these qualifications in its administrators more than education.

It is singular how inconsistent many people are in their treatment of this matter. Few persons, who are neither theoretical nor practical sailors, would consider themselves competent to give advice to the officers of a ship concerning its navigation; and some few who are not in the medical or surgical professions would hesitate to direct a surgeon how to perform a delicate and dangerous surgical operation in which human life was at stake. But I venture to say that all the people so conspicuous for their modesty in these matters, would consider themselves as eligible candidates for the school committee; and teachers would have to bow to their decisions on educational problems without a murmur, or be *dropped*.—I believe that is the correct phrase. This seems strange to one who is not "to the manor born," but it is infinitely more disastrous to society than strange to individuals; for ships may be sunk and crippled men may be butchered, as a pastime, by amateur sailors and surgeons, without doing a tithe of the murder or mischief that amateur educators can inflict.

Fellow teachers, society is not alone to blame for this. Have we set an example to other people of respecting our profession and maintaining its rights, just as if we were lawyers or physicians? If not, it is never too late to mend. A poetical gentleman once wrote,—

"Who would be free  
Themselves must strike the blow."

and considering the sentiment as poetry, it is unusually true. Other people may emancipate a slave without his co-operation, and he will become an emancipated slave. But if he emancipates himself, he becomes a man! To become men and women we must emancipate ourselves from annual elections, and other people cannot do it for us.

It is not to be wondered at, if the changed condition of society, resulting from material progress and scientific invention, as well as from the increase of population and expansion of territory, should demand many changes in the nature of popular education, to adapt it to present needs. The education in school of persons who were to be employed

at agricultural occupations, and inhabiting a thinly populated country, is not the same either in amount or character as that which is needed by the artisans and mechanics of a crowded manufacturing community. What was sufficient education to fit a man to work on a farm or to raise cattle, a hundred or more years ago, in a primitive age, when the popular pastime of some cities was to hang or burn witches, is not adequate to-day,—the era of the telegraph, the locomotive, the steamship and the factory. Yet the exercises of the school-room have not so much been changed to adapt them to the necessities of a community transformed from the agricultural into the manufacturing, as they have been prolonged on the same old lines.

As a consequence the farms are deserted and impecunious by a generation of people educated above the demands of manual toil, though below the requirements of industrial, productive skill. As another consequence, both agriculture and manufacturing industry are alike in a low condition, for the literary gentlemen we produce in our schools, who are too cultivated to touch the handle of a plow, are too ignorant to grasp and wield the handle of a brush or a hammer. It cannot be denied that the education of the public schools, excellent as it may be to prepare a small number of persons, such as clerks, shopmen and the like, for the distribution of industrial products, is out of joint with the needs of a vast majority of the people, who have to become engaged in the production of industrial wealth in a manufacturing community. It must be acknowledged that this majority have not had the practical education which would fit them for work in the workshops, and alone would enable them to achieve success. The counting-houses and offices are overcrowded by people qualified to carry messages or to count, whilst the farms and the factories and the mechanical trades are languishing for want of skilled labor, or precariously supporting themselves by rude industries. The times are changed, and we have not sufficiently changed with them. We need no longer actually or figuratively to train men to drive stage coaches, but to educate them to drive the locomotive; and the builder who can erect nothing but a log hut is not so much in demand as one who can construct a bridge or erect a city.

The great need of this country is the development of its natural resources by skilled labor applied to agriculture and mechanics; that is, the raising of all kinds of food and the raw materials of the industrial arts; and secondly, the creation of skilled mechanical and artistic labor, which shall in the future make the country independent of foreign importation of manufactures, and itself self-sustaining. In other words,