

**THE ELEMENTS OF
GENERAL METHOD;
BASED ON THE
PRINCIPLES OF HERBART**

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The Elements of General Method; Based on the Principles of Herbart by Charles A. McMurry

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BY

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Pres. C. W. Eliot

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PREFACE.

THE Herbart school of Pedagogy has created much stir in Germany in the last thirty years. It has developed a large number of vigorous writers on all phases of education and psychology, and numbers a thousand or more positive disciples among the energetic teachers of Germany.

Those American teachers and students who have come in contact with the ideas of this school have been greatly stimulated.

In such a miscellaneous and many-sided thing as practical education it is deeply gratifying to find a clear and definite leading purpose that prevails throughout and a set of mutually related and supporting principles, which in practice contribute to the realization of this purpose.

The following chapters can not be regarded as a full, exact and painfully scientific account of Herbartian ideas, but as a simple explanation of their leading principles in their relations to each other and in their application to our own school problems.

It gives me pleasure to acknowledge the friendly encouragement of Dr. Wilhelm Rein, Professor of Pedagogy at the University of Jena. It is the author's judgment that his lectures, practice-school, and Seminar furnish the

best opportunity for the study of common-school work both theoretically and practically.

"Die acht Schuljahren," of Dr. Rein, an extensive work covering the eight grades of the public school, are a rich fund of materials from which I have freely drawn.

In the last chapter extensive extracts from Rein's "Das erste Schuljahr" and Wiget's "Die formalen Stufen des Unterrichts" have been incorporated.

Normal, Illinois, July 11, 1892.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHIEF AIM OF EDUCATION.

What is the central purpose of education? If we include under this term all the things commonly assigned to it, its many phases as represented by the great variety of teachers and pupils, the many branches of knowledge and the various and even conflicting methods in bringing up children, it is difficult to find a definition sufficiently broad and definite to compass its meaning. In fact we shall not attempt in the beginning to make a definition. We are in search not so much of a comprehensive definition as of a central truth, a key to the situation, an aim that will simplify and brighten all the work of teachers. Keeping in view the end from the beginning, we need a central organizing principle which shall dictate for teacher and pupil the highway over which they shall travel together.

We will assume at least that education means the whole bringing up of a child from infancy to maturity, not simply his school training. The reason for this assumption is that home, school, companions, environment and natural endowment, working through a series of years, produce a character which is a unit as the resultant of these different influences and growths. Again we are compelled to assume that this aim, whatever it is, is the same for all.

Now what will the average man, picked up at random, say to our question? What is the chief end in the education of your son? A farmer wishes his boy to read,

write and cipher so as to meet successfully the needs of a farmer's life. The merchant in town desires that his boy get a wider reach of knowledge and experience so as to succeed in a livelier sort of business competition. A university professor would lay out a liberal course of training for his son so as to prepare him for intellectual pursuits among scholars and people of culture. This utilitarian view, which points to success in life in the ordinary sense, is the prevailing one. We could probably sum up the wishes of a great majority of the common people by saying, "They desire to give their children through education a better chance in life than they themselves have had." Yet even these people, if pressed to give reasons, would admit that the purely utilitarian view is a low one and that there is something better for every boy and girl than the mere ability to make a successful living.

Turn for a moment to the great systems of education which have held their own for centuries and examine their aims. The Jesuits, the Humanists and the Natural Scientists. They all claimed to be liberal, cultivating and preparatory to great things, yet we only need to quote from the histories of education to show their narrowness and incompleteness. The training of the Jesuits was linguistic and rhetorical, and almost entirely apart from our present notion of human development. The Humanists or Classicists, who for so many centuries constituted the educational élite, belonged to the past with its glories. Though standing in the present they were almost blind to the great problems and opportunities it offered. They stood in bold contrast to the growth of the modern spirit in history, literature and natural science. But in spite of their predominating influence over

education for centuries there has never been the shadow of a chance for making the classics of antiquity the basis of common, popular education. The modern school of Natural Scientists is just as one-sided as the Humanists in supposing that human nature is narrow enough to be compressed within the bonds of natural science studies.

But the systems of education in vogue have always lagged behind the clear views of educational reformers. Two hundred fifty years ago Comenius projected a plan of education for every boy and girl of the common people. His aim was to teach all men all things from the highest truths of religion to the commonest things of daily experience. Being a man of simple and profound religious faith, religion and morality were at the foundation of his system. But even the principles of intellectual training so clearly advocated by Comenius have not yet found a ready hearing among teachers, to say nothing of his great moral-religious purpose. Among later writers Locke, Rousseau and Pestalozzi have set up ideals of education that have had much influence. But Locke's "gentleman" can never be the ideal of all because it is intrinsically aristocratic and education has become with us broadly democratic. After all, Locke's "gentleman" is a noble ideal and should powerfully impress teachers. The perfect human animal that Rousseau dreamed of in the *Émile*, is best illustrated in the noble savage, but we are not in danger of adopting this ideal. In spite of his merits the noblest savage falls short in a hundred ways. Yet it is important in education to perfect the animal development in every child. Pestalozzi touched the hearts of even the weakest and morally frailest children, and tried to make intellectual culture contribute to heart