

**EDUCATION:
INTELLECTUAL, MORAL,
AND PHYSICAL. [1895]**

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Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical. [1895] by Herbert Spencer

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HERBERT SPENCER

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INTRODUCTION.

THE publication of four articles on Education in the English Reviews previous to 1860 by Mr. Herbert Spencer produced an impression altogether out of proportion to the very moderate space employed. To say that the thinking world was thoroughly shocked is not stating it too strongly. As a general rule, the best thinkers had nothing to say on primary education—except to counsel patience on the teacher's part and hard study by the pupil; but Mr. Spencer, the foremost thinker of the day, proposed to consider education fundamentally, philosophically, wholly uninfluenced by the enthusiasm imparted by a university course, or by the tendency to approbate the methods usually employed because the persons employing them meant well.

Men who had supposedly attained an ability to discourse concerning education usually were committed to a training in Latin and Greek, the study given to these languages apparently standing out preëminent among the school exercises they had engaged in. Mr. Spencer, after subjecting the causes that produced education to a philosophical scrutiny, came to certain conclusions, among the most important of which are the following:

1. That the knowledge which is most influential in causing education is that which is most needful for the

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student to know—is that which is most closely related to his life.

2. From this he infers that *science* should be made the great subject of study—not the science of books, but first-hand science; that the pupil should be an investigator, an experimenter, himself.

3. That character, the habit of inquiry, the spirit of investigation, and not knowledge, should be the main aim—opposing cramming as an educational crime.

4. That rewards and punishments should be natural and not artificial.

5. Whether the pupil is pleased and happy in learning lessons he considers of the first importance: if the subjects of study are properly chosen he believes he will be.

The book is very suggestive and has produced a remarkable influence already on educational thought; it cannot but change the mode of teaching on a single reading. Mr. Spencer, it must be understood, defines education very broadly: he means by the term the effect which environment produces upon mental power, influencing it to acquirement—and not mere acquirement, the usual definition.

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EDUCATION.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT KNOWLEDGE IS OF MOST WORTH?

In Dress the Ornamental Precedes the Useful.—It has been truly remarked that, in order of time, decoration precedes dress. Among people who submit to great physical suffering that they may have themselves handsomely tattooed, extremes of temperature are borne with but little attempt at mitigation. Humboldt tells us that an Orinoco Indian, though quite regardless of bodily comfort, will yet labor for a fortnight to purchase pigment wherewith to make himself admired; and that the same woman who would not hesitate to leave her hut without a fragment of clothing on, would not dare to commit such a breach of decorum as to go out unpainted. Voyagers uniformly find that colored beads and trinkets are much more prized by wild tribes than are calicoes or broadcloths. And the anecdotes we have of the ways in which, when shirts and coats are given, they turn them to some ludicrous display, show how completely the idea of ornament predominates over that of use. Nay, there are still more ex-

treme illustrations: witness the fact narrated by Capt. Speke of his African attendants, who strutted about in their goat-skin mantles when the weather was fine, but when it was wet, took them off, folded them up, and went about naked, shivering in the rain! Indeed, the facts of aboriginal life seem to indicate that dress is developed out of decorations. And when we remember that even among ourselves most think more about the fineness of the fabric than its warmth, and more about the cut than the convenience—when we see that the function is still in great measure subordinated to the appearance—we have further reason for inferring such an origin.

In Mental Acquisition the Ornamental is more Valued than the Useful.—It is not a little curious that the like relations hold with the mind. Among mental as among bodily acquisitions, the ornamental comes before the useful. Not only in times past, but almost as much in our own era, that knowledge which conduces to personal well-being has been postponed to that which brings applause. In the Greek schools, music, poetry, rhetoric, and a philosophy which, until Socrates taught, had but little bearing upon action, were the dominant subjects; while knowledge aiding the arts of life had a very subordinate place. And in our own universities and schools at the present moment the like antithesis holds. We are guilty of something like a platitude when we say that throughout his after-career a boy, in nine cases out of ten, applies his Latin and Greek to no practical purposes. The remark is trite that in his shop, or his office, in managing his estate or his family, in playing his part as director of a bank or a railway, he is very little aided by this knowledge he took so many years to acquire—so little, that generally the greater part of it drops out of his memory; and if he

occasionally vents a Latin quotation, or alludes to some Greek myth, it is less to throw light on the topic in hand than for the sake of effect. If we inquire what is the real motive for giving boys a classical education, we find it to be simply conformity to public opinion. Men dress their children's minds as they do their bodies, in the prevailing fashion. As the Orinoco Indian puts on his paint before leaving his hut, not with a view to any direct benefit, but because he would be ashamed to be seen without it; so, a boy's drilling in Latin and Greek is insisted on, not because of their intrinsic value, but that he may not be disgraced by being found ignorant of them—that he may have "the education of a gentleman"—the badge marking a certain social position, and bringing a consequent respect.

Especially True of Women.—This parallel is still more clearly displayed in the case of the other sex. In the treatment of both mind and body, the decorative element has continued to predominate in a greater degree among women than among men. Originally, personal adornment occupied the attention of both sexes equally. In these latter days of civilization, however, we see that in the dress of men the regard for appearance has in a considerable degree yielded to the regard for comfort; while in their education the useful has of late been trenching on the ornamental. In neither direction has this change gone so far with women. The wearing of ear-rings, finger-rings, bracelets; the elaborate dressings of the hair; the still occasional use of paint; the immense labor bestowed in making habiliments sufficiently attractive; and the great discomfort that will be submitted to for the sake of conformity, show how greatly, in the attiring of women, the desire of approbation overrides the desire for warmth and convenience. And similarly in their education, the immense prepon-

derance of "accomplishments" proves how here, too, use is subordinated to display. Dancing, deportment, the piano, singing, drawing—what a large space do these occupy! If you ask why Italian and German are learnt, you will find that, under all the sham reasons given, the real reason is that a knowledge of those tongues is thought ladylike. It is not that the books written in them may be utilized, which they scarcely ever are; but that Italian and German songs may be sung, and that the extent of attainment may bring whispered admiration. The births, deaths, and marriages of kings, and other like historic trivialities, are committed to memory, not because of any direct benefits that can possibly result from knowing them, but because society considers them parts of a good education—because the absence of such knowledge may bring the contempt of others. When we have named reading, writing, spelling, grammar, arithmetic, and sewing, we have named about all the things a girl is taught with a view to their direct uses in life; and even some of these have more reference to the good opinion of others than to immediate personal welfare.

The Reason of This.—Thoroughly to realize the truth that with the mind as with the body the ornamental precedes the useful, it is needful to glance at its rationale. This lies in the fact that, from the far past down even to the present, social needs have subordinated individual needs, and that the chief social need has been the control of individuals. It is not, as we commonly suppose, that there are no governments but those of monarchs, and parliaments, and constituted authorities. These acknowledged governments are supplemented by other unacknowledged ones, that grow up in all circles, in which every man or woman strives to be king or queen or lesser dignitary. To get above some and be