INTTELLECTUAL EDUCATION.

CHAPTER I.

GENERAL VIEWS.

Few subjects have attracted more attention in the present day than that of education, and on few subjects also has public opinion undergone more change within a comparatively short period. The old prejudices which so long opposed it have been abandoned one by one, and we seem in more danger of looking upon classes and class-books as the panaceas for all national evils, than of disputing the universal necessity of education. Discussion now turns on a more perplexed and complicated question, namely, what shall the education be? And there is but one way of deciding that point, which is by first establishing what is the ultimate purpose of education. To judge from debates in Parliament, discussions on competitive examinations, plans for popular instruction, &c., we are far enough from having come generally to any clear views on that point.

It is not my purpose to enter into those wide and intricate questions of national education and the results of school and college training, but the tone of opinion prevalent concerning them affects also female education in every class. The same errors which there give rise to such in-terminable disputes clog our progress also, and make mental cultivation among women a question of fashion or individual taste.*

* The opinions advocated in the present work, and especially the general principles of education which are considered in this and the following chapter, have already been set forth and explained in their reference to woman's life and influence in a former work—Thoughts on Self-Culture, addressed to Women, by Maria Grey and Emily Shirreff. I trust, however, that the different scope and purpose of my present undertaking may cause a partial return over the same ground, and save me from the charge of mere repetition. We then addressed ourselves to young girls, with a view of assisting them in their attempts at self-improvement; I now address mothers wishing to undertake the education of their daughters, and often too young and inexperienced, and too carelessly educated themselves, to know the full extent of the task before them. But in both works alike it was necessary to start from those same principles which lie at the foundation of all education deserving of the name.
The source of these errors I believe to be the habit of looking upon intellectual education as simply the means of imparting knowledge, without inquiring whether it has not also a work to perform in disciplining the mind, in impressing on it those habits and tendencies which in youth the half-developed nature is docile to receive, and which give to the man the full command of his faculties for whatever future labour he may undertake. Perhaps a glance at some points in the history of intellectual education in modern times may enable us to perceive how this view was obscure even while more and more attention was given to the subject generally.

What were the views of education held by those great men who, in the first dawn of modern civilization, established the system of university studies, it is difficult now to determine. The question was very simple then compared to what it has become since. During many ages learning consisted solely in the knowledge of what the Greeks and Latins had done before us, and of the theology of the Fathers. There could be no doubt, then, that this information was indispensable to every man pretending to education. But as time went on the boundaries of knowledge enlarged more and more. Modern languages and literatures sprang up by the side of those ancient languages to which men had so long devoted all their energies as to the sole depositories of science and philosophy. Physical science began to rear its giant growth, and drew off the minds of multitudes from the old paths of scholastic learning. The relations of society became more numerous and complicated. New interests, distant undertakings, and far-reaching commerce, gave an extension to political science and jurisprudence which rendered necessary an amount of information undreamed of in earlier times; while the accumulation of wealth, the immense increase of population, the spread of luxury, made life a fierce competition to all who could not afford idleness, and men felt more and more that their success must depend on the activity of their brains and on the available resources of their knowledge.

One consequence of these great changes was a disposition to examine the old uniform system of education, and to ask whether it could still be considered fit for times of progress. And here the error began under whose evil influence we are still labouring—error, not in proposing the question, but in the method of considering it. The public mind, newly awakened to the value of knowledge, cared little about principles of education. The inquiry into the value of the established systems was solely directed to the obvious results of book knowledge attained at a given age; and that was manifestly inadequate to the exigencies of modern life.
In vain did men well versed in the subject dwell upon the proper office of education in drawing forth the full capabilities of the human creature, rather than in fitting him for some peculiar calling; the so-called practical man wanted fruit in seed-time, the necessities of life gave plausibility to the outcry, and popular clamour seemed to be fighting the battle of knowledge against schools and universities. From the contempt for principles, want of purpose and method in the details naturally followed. With one set of persons physical science was the great object, with another modern languages were all important; one class objected to the study of mathematics, another thought the classical languages useless; nor, in the absence of any presiding idea, is it possible that this confusion should cease. Dr. Donaldson justly remarks that 'the causes of all the unprofitable discussions which have arisen respecting the utility of particular branches of study are to be sought in the vague and erroneous manner in which we use the terms education, information, knowledge. We are in the habit of speaking of mere information as if it were exact knowledge, and we still more frequently allow special or professional knowledge to assume the honours which are due to general education.' Further on he continues, 'We must distinguish between education, properly so called, and professional training. The former is designed for the cultivation of the intellect and the development of the reasoning faculties; the latter is intended to adapt a man for some particular calling, which the laws of society and the principle of the division of labour have assigned to him as an individual member of the body politic. Now the training of the individual for this particular purpose is not an education of man as such. . . . . It was for this reason that the clear-headed Greeks denied the name of education (παιδεία) to that which is learned, not for its own sake, but for the sake of some extrinsic gain, or for the sake of some work, and distinguished formally between those studies which they called liberal or worthy of a free man, and those which are merely mechanical or professional. In the same way Cicero speaks of education properly so called, which he names humanity (humanitas), because its object is to give a full development to those reasoning faculties which are the proper and distinctive attributes of man as such. (See Cicero Pro Archia Poeta, i. De Oratore, i. 9. Aut. Gellius, xiii. 16.) . . . . The test of a good education is the degree of mental culture it imparts; for education, so far as it is scientific, is the discipline of the mind.'

INTELLECTUAL EDUCATION.

It is not that a formal preference has always been given to the professional over the liberal education, but the extreme anxiety for useful, in other words, for directly practical knowledge with reference to the mode of life to which individuals were destined, sufficiently indicates that the distinct objects of the two educations have been confounded in the public mind. And it is this error which has vitiated our views of popular education, and of the education of women, and introduced disorder into both. Fortunately, however, this very confusion leads to the detection of the error, for by showing us a false theory pushed to its consequences it enables us to ascertain its weak points.

So long as the education of boys belonging to the upper and middle classes of society was alone under consideration, the mistaken method of viewing the subject might easily pass unobserved by all who were not accustomed to look somewhat deeply into these questions, and for this reason, that knowledge which was erroneously made the test of their education was really of great practical importance to them. Though we ought to be content that the boy should know little if he have acquired the power of learning much, yet the learning sooner or later cannot be dispensed with. It is required by the whole business of life, and we cannot wonder, when so high a market value attaches to knowledge, that it should be forgotten that education has other duties than to impart it.

But when the subject began to be considered with reference to a wider range of persons, the omission became evident. When women, for instance, began to seek education, and when that of the people became a political necessity, the question incessantly repeated was, ‘What can be the use of such or such knowledge to them? what will they want with this or that for their domestic avocations, or their lives of constant labour?’ To this question there was no answer, according to the ordinary views, and consequently the limits of popular education are yearly discussed, with every variety of opinion concerning the immediate practical value of what is taught, while women’s education fluctuates without any principle at all, according to the fashion of the day.

The reason is evident. Knowledge has no practical value, using those words in the sense commonly attached to them, of money value, to women, or to men tied down to manual labour. To the latter, indeed, it may afford a hope of escaping from such labour to a higher sphere of employment; but to women it holds out no worldly inducement whatever. So long, therefore, as education is tested by the amount of knowledge acquired at a certain age, and needed for certain immediate purposes, female edu-
GENERAL VIEWS.

cation may be tolerated as a harmless fashion, but it has no real purpose or importance.

But if, when those great questions of school and university teaching were first mooted, another method had been followed; if, instead of asking simply, ‘What is taught—how much knowledge does this system impart?’ the question had been, ‘Why is it taught?—to what does it fashion the young minds subjected to its influence?’—the result would, I conceive, have been very different. The old system might or might not have been condemned; but assuredly some definite principles would have been laid down for the new.

Now, the fundamental truth to start from appears to me to be this—that education, apart from all secondary objects (that is, all objects which have reference to peculiar circumstances or positions), has one and the same purpose for every human being; and this purpose is the systematic and harmonious development of his whole moral and intellectual nature. It follows that the elementary principles must be the same for all. The means necessarily vary according to circumstances, position, and the spirit of the times. The exigencies of life may force us to leave the work incomplete; but the foundation must be the same, the aim alike in every case. The human creature, whether man or woman, a peasant or a prince, is born with the germ of certain faculties—capable in some degree of moral feeling, of responsibility, of forethought, of reason, of judgment—and it is the business of education to train those faculties for use. We know no other way of doing this than by exercising them in the guidance of conduct and the acquisition of knowledge, thus facilitating their action by the power of habit. It is a wholly separate—I might almost say an irrelevant—question, how far the knowledge acquired in the course of educational study will be available hereafter. That cui-bono cry, which an eminent man of the present day has denounced as the bane of the philosopher who seeks knowledge for its own sake, is the true touchstone by which we may discern whether the fundamental principles of education are understood or not.

It is, then, because those principles have been neglected in the eagerness for profitable knowledge, that we are still halting between different systems of school and university teaching; and that, neither for women nor for the working-classes, is it possible to establish any system at all. There is a strong feeling that the poor ought to be educated, but why, and how far, remains yet to be settled. If we argue upon grounds of mere worldly utility, we never can get rid of petty squabbles as to the
INTELLECTUAL EDUCATION.

amount of arithmetic, grammar, or history, which may or may not turn out to be profitable to them; and it must ever remain an open question whether industrial schools are not better than those of a more intellectual character. But if we take our stand upon the ground that the human being remains a mutilated creature if the capacities of his mind are left dormant, or if, when awakened by circumstances, he has no command over them, then it becomes at once apparent that every study which tends to exercise those powers is useful in the highest sense of the word, and that the only limitations to this mental discipline and to the knowledge which it is good for all human beings to acquire are those imposed by time and means. The education of women has no firm standing on any other grounds. Fashion and custom may make certain acquirements desirable, but the necessity and consequent duty of education lies in that broad principle alone. The same of course holds good for men of the higher classes also; but it is more easily lost sight of, owing to the practical necessity in this case of acquiring knowledge, so that the cui-bono cry gets at least a plausible and intelligible answer.

Men having thus put out of sight what we may call the true human purpose of education, two great evils followed. First: The necessary connexion between moral and intellectual cultivation has been forgotten, or lost sight of, and the development therefore has been one-sided. Secondly: The external, or money-value, of knowledge increasing day by day, its intrinsic worth and beauty has been obscured, and thus the love of truth has kept no pace with the progress of knowledge.

The systematic and harmonious development of the moral and intellectual nature is, as I have stated above, the business of education; but where this truth is unrecognized, or forgotten, the want of a definite purpose entails want of system and harmony. Accordingly, nothing is more remarkable than the absence of harmony or completeness in modern education. The defect is conspicuous alike in that of both sexes; but the mal-proportions differ, and indeed are generally reversed. Intellectual training, for instance, which is acknowledged to be necessary for boys, engrosses the larger share of attention in their education, while their moral development is almost unheeded, left to 'the reproof of chance' and the influence of circumstances. On the other hand, with girls, intellectual cultivation having no distinct purpose, is regulated by caprice or the fashion of the day; but their moral training is conscientiously cared for, and being often admirable in intention, at least, it produces as much fruit as can be expected when it is coupled with
narrow views and undisciplined intellects. In both cases the defect is the same—namely, ignorance or forgetfulness of the necessary action and reaction upon each other of intellectual and moral culture, producing an unnatural divorce between the life of the intellect and the life of action and feeling. The origin of the defect is also the same in both cases. So long as it is supposed that we can, with impunity, choose between our intellectual and moral faculties, and neglect that form of culture which seems least essential to our worldly position and objects, education must remain a mere question of ambition, of fashion, or of policy, into which principle cannot enter. The course that has been pursued is perfectly consistent with this view.

It is because the subject is less encumbered with extraneous considerations when the working-classes are in question, that it is useful to study it in that aspect. We are forced there to go to the foundation of the matter, or give it up altogether. Neither fashion nor ambition comes in to obscure it, and it then becomes apparent that every argument which is brought against over-educating (as it is termed) the classes destined to manual labour tells equally against giving knowledge to women; the two things must be defended upon the same principles, and it is from the tone of the defence that we are made to perceive that the principles are misapprehended. Examine any of the many debates on national education, and what do we find? Long discussions about the use boys or girls will be able to make of this or that piece of knowledge; what they will want with geography while working in a factory; how grammar will help them to plough or make shoes, &c. Are not questions of the same kind raised with regard to giving women any knowledge beyond the circle mere routine has sanctioned? The notion that cultivated intelligence will affect character and the general tone of mind, and therefore the capacity for whatever task the future may bring, is equally left out of sight in both cases.

Moral culture is indeed nominally acknowledged to be necessary for all; but as it is at the same time generally considered to be synonymous with religious teaching, it is either neglected in school education as belonging to the province of the religious teacher of each sect, or else the religious teaching, in which it is supposed to be included, is made the groundwork of the whole system: in either case it is separated from intellectual discipline. The effect of this mode of viewing morals and religion has been to diminish their influence on the minds of men who are engrossed with practical interests; the effect on women, as on the working-classes,
INTELLECTUAL EDUCATION.

has been to lessen the value for mental culture, to make it appear at least a thing apart from all the real duties of the spiritual being. And thus, in proportion as moral education was considered alone important, it lost vigour and consistency.

In early childhood, moral training is almost entirely a matter of feeling and association. It depends on the home influences, whatever they may be, and is therefore the conscious or unconscious work of the parents, and especially of the mother, long before one word of precept or of dogma can be understood. Later, when it becomes also a matter for the understanding, it depends much upon the degree of cultivation which that understanding has received. The same dogmas and the same precepts are taught to all; their reception, and the fruit they will bear, must vary in each individual according to his power of understanding them, of seeing their full scope, of scanning their remote bearings, and of applying their general principles to the particular circumstances of his own case. The more desire to do right, to live morally and religiously, though it may acquit the individual conscience, will not supply the place of sound judgment in discerning real good from specious evil, of foresight, or of reflection, on which depends our power of learning wisdom from experience. Whoever studies the life of the labouring classes, can hardly fail to acknowledge that their sufferings and their vices are in a very great measure owing to their ignorance and want of forethought. Here, then, we see the necessity of mental discipline, which opens up the resources of knowledge, and gives to the mind the habit of looking to something beyond the necessities of the present hour.

And whoever will in like manner examine the lives of women, will see that most of their faults and their follies, and much of the suffering they endure, as well as of the evils that result to society, spring from the same source—namely, from the ignorance which leaves them a prey to frivolity or ennui; to the mental feebleness which prevents their appreciating their position, with its duties, advantages, and difficulties; and which exposes them to become the victims of enthusiasts, quacks, or hypocrites, under various garbs. The remedy is the same in both cases—knowledge and mental discipline, which will give new vigour to the moral nature.

The moral cultivation of women is due almost exclusively to religious feeling; philosophically they are in general as indifferent to moral as to metaphysical speculation. If the Scriptures were really studied, a far wider system might be gathered from their teaching. Worldly know-
GENERAL VIEWS.

ledge and the saddest worldly wisdom have been recorded in many of its pages; while the expansive nature of the spiritual principles of the New Testament is one of the characteristic points which most peculiarly marks its superiority over all other religious systems. But these things are not discerned by those who are guided by feeling only, nor by those whose 'impius diffidence,' as Bacon calls it, makes them think they do honour to the Scriptures by refusing the aid of other knowledge to interpret them. To the majority of minds the morals of religion are essentially narrow, seldom rising from individual to social considerations, or they are confined at best within a circle which is far from commensurate with the many duties and multiplied relations of life. The utmost individual purity and uprightness, aided by the truest religious feeling, will not save us from doing mischief amid the complicated conditions of our social existence—from exercising a wrong influence, or failing to exercise a right one—unless the mind, purified by religion, has been strengthened by the exercise of thought and judgment, and has acquired by patient labour and study the means of judging rightly. This fact would seem too obvious to need discussion, if the division still maintained in education between moral and religious training on the one hand, and intellectual exercise on the other, did not prove that the former is still expected to be a sufficient preparation for life, for all who do not require to use their intellect for some direct purpose of worldly advancement. It will be admitted that truly excellent persons are ill-judging and narrow-minded, and therefore liable to do all the mischief to society that follows from ignorance and prejudice; but it is not yet generally acknowledged that the only remedy is the early discipline of the intellect—the early formation of those habits of mind by which we become accustomed to compare, to reason, to judge, to act upon system. This discipline can in ordinary life be carried on only by means of carefully-directed studies. The actual subject studied may have little or no bearing on the actual life of the individual; but the mental toil is strengthening the mind for whatever it may find hereafter to do. It is breaking in the faculties to habits which are essential to all future operations, whether practical or intellectual.*

INTELLECTUAL EDUCATION.

Had this connexion between moral and intellectual culture been generally remembered, they would have stood or fallen together. But when moral training is regarded as synonymous with religion, and religion with theology, all that mental discipline which would have braced the moral system, which would have given breadth and clearness of views and strength of conviction, is left out. Whenever such discipline shall be generally held to be necessary in this respect—when it shall be clearly and generally perceived that judgment, prudence, and systematic action, the things we value most in daily life, result from it—and when higher views of morals and religion shall have proved that it is a duty as well as a privilege to every creature born to the inheritance of immortality to cultivate all the powers God has given, and to cherish the love of truth in every form; whenever these things shall be acknowledged, then, and not till then, there will be an end of all disputes, and confusions, and difficulties which still encumber the education of all who do not need to use their intelligence for some end of profit or of ambition. Differences of opinion will always remain about the means and the details, but concerning the general method and purpose of the whole there will be none. Circumstances will confine the education of the majority within very narrow limits, but contentions about an arbitrary limit in any case will be set at rest for ever.

The second evil which I mentioned as resulting from the misconception of the true purpose of education, was that the money-value of knowledge had usurped the first place, and put out of sight its true worth and claims to be sought and loved for its own sake. Female education affords a lamentable illustration of this fact. Women have no worldly use for knowledge; accordingly it has been thought superfluous to give them any. The prejudice that made it seem unfeminine has passed away in great measure; but that we owe the change to fashion more than to principle may be seen by the course pursued in education. Even now, if women really loving knowledge are led to seek it in any unusual channels, they have often more difficulty in giving a plausible aspect to their conduct than had they been led away by the most frivolous folly. I think it must be acknowledged, for instance, that a woman would find it harder to explain her motives, and to procure a patient hearing for them, if she wished to spend fifty pounds in making a geological tour, than if she proposed to throw away twice or three times that sum in attending a series of fetes at Paris or Vienna.

In justification of women, however, we must be allowed to remark,