

THESIS.

Subject, *The Highest Aim in Education.*

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Before we undertake to discuss the highest aim in education, let us endeavor to describe what is meant by this term. In doing this we know no better way than to take the definitions of our leading educators and from them to ascertain what has been the popular idea in regard to this subject during the past ages.

Plato says: "The purpose of education is to give to the body and to the soul, all the beauty and all the perfection of which they are capable."

Mill says: "The aim of education is to bring us nearer to the perfection of our natures."

Herbert Spencer says: "Education is the preparation for

complete living.

Through all of these definitions we see running the central thread or idea of breadth. They all agree that, in order to be educated, a man must be educated physically, intellectually, and morally; but they disappoint us in that they fail to tell us which of these three leading factors is the most important. Our desire is to approach nearer to this problem. What is the highest aim in education?

Let us look into our public schools and see what is the leading impulse in the work done there. We see, with scarce by an exception, that the attention of the schools is given

to the acquisition of the knowledge derived from a vigorous exercise of the faculties. The great majority of schoolmen have for their motto: "Knowledge and Mental Discipline." And yet they know that this is not the highest aim in education. It is scarcely necessary for me to say here that a person may be thoroughly equipped in this line, and still be a criminal.

There is not a parent in the land who does not seek for the very best thing obtainable for his children; nor is there one who, on close investigation, would not pronounce the

prevailing system faulty in the respect just mentioned. And yet, - "Men dress their children's minds as they do their bodies, in the prevailing fashion."

If education is to bring us to the perfection of our natures, if it is to fit us for complete living, it must have for its central theme and for its highest aim, morality. What mother if asked what she desires for her son will not say that he may be good and great, and if limited to one attribute will not drop the great and retain the good? This is a question that concerns not only the home and

parents; but it is one of vital importance to the nation. From the home grows the nation, and the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.

A nation may be composed of the most highly civilized, enlightened, and refined citizens; she may be known to all the world on account of her learning as was Greece. And yet like Greece if her morals become corrupt she will fall into ruin and disrepute. Yet we see in the Greek education an element which is very essential to moral development; namely phys

ical culture. It may seem strange that physical training aids in the development of morality. It is nevertheless the case. The child with a delicate, or deformed body is inclined to have a delicate temper and a deformed intellect. The child with a robust body will not have his intellectual faculties handicapped as those of the delicate one. Therefore let us remember that in order to obtain the best results morally, we must be very careful about the child's health and his physical development.

Having carefully consid

ered the matter, we feel safe in saying that education without morality is like a locomotive, without an engineer, and sum up the whole matter in the words of Mr. McMurray, "Quality of personal character is the highest conceivable product of our activity."

After deciding that morality is the highest aim in education, we shall endeavor briefly to consider how it may be obtained. We have made moral character the clear and conscious aim of education. How shall we obtain it and what relation shall it bear to the

other studies? Shall we have
 all of our teachers models
 of moral character and
 set them up as examples
 to be followed by the children?
 this would be as impracti-
 cable as it would be un-
 desirable. There has been
 only one man during the
 cycles of time of whom we
 would desire our children to
 be exact counterparts. No!
 we would have them imi-
 tate no mortal man. True
 we want, we demand, teach-
 ers of the highest attainable
 development of character;
 but we do not want them
 merely as models. We want
 a teacher who is capable of

seeing the beauty and true worth of a study. We want a teacher who can come to the level of the children's comprehension and from this standpoint, like Goldsmith's Village Preacher, "Allure to brighter things and lead the way."

The responsibility which rests upon the school is immense. When the child enters the school at six his character is practically undeveloped. When he leaves it at sixteen it is stamped.

History, literature, geography, chemistry, physics, botany and zoology can be taught as pure memory

branches. But the only true way to teach the first two is to teach the children to study the characters, to get into sympathy with them as with living beings, and to draw from them, the true lessons of life. And the highest ambition of the teacher in teaching the last five branches should be to have the children look through nature up to nature's God.

Let us then realize the immense responsibility that rests upon us as teachers and determine that the characters which we help to form shall be such that we can feel our work well done!

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