

THESIS.

Subject: *The Automatic in Education.*

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Man has been defined as a machine that can think, feel and will, or in other words he is, to a certain extent an automaton. As we here speak of the automaton, we mean the automatic movements of the mind. Since the automatic is of inestimable value to us, it is necessary that it should be cultivated. That automatism has a large share in the life of every human being cannot be doubted.

Automatic movements of mind as well as of body

are found in all the vocations of life. Nature, herself, seems to have provided that each individual shall become automatic in some of his habits. Were it otherwise the mind would be continually crowded with the minor details of life, and would be forced to continual work. The burden thus borne by the brain would necessitate continual exertion, and, in time, the brain would be overcome by incessant labor. By turning these minor details over to the automaton, we relieve the mind from its burdensome task

and it seeks other beneficial knowledge which, in turn, when it has been thoroughly mastered will sink into the automatic. This illustrates Parker's great principle: "The struggle of development consists in acquiring knowledge and skill so thoroughly that it can sink into the automatic, thus leaving the mind free for new attainments."

That education which tends to sink all knowledge into the automatic is best, most lasting and beneficial. We should, in seeking for new knowledge,

endeavor to reach an automatic foundation. When our knowledge is based on the automatic, immediate conception is followed by action, as the belief or disbelief of some rather startling fact, — the mind conceives and immediately acts, reforms an opinion.

Every effort that tends to produce automatism should be encouraged, and fixed by repetition, and every unsuitable action should be repressed; until the entire sequence comes to be automatically executed at the

first touch of the suggesting
spring which expresses the direct-
ing will.

The automaton is entrusted
with the care of the daily habits.
Carpenter says, "It is impossi-
ble not to recognize the influence
of habit - that is to say of the
voluntary repetition of similar
acts under similar circum-
stances - in establishing a con-
dition of the nervous appara-
tus which leads to the automatic
performance of such acts."
Habits are classed under acquir-
ed or secondary automatism.

This acquired automatism should interest the teacher most; since he is to labor for that end. From the dawn of intelligence, when the child first takes cognizance of material things, it is forming, of itself, habits of observation, comparison, and generalization, which are to constitute the basis of all subsequent intellectual activity. It is this tendency to contract habits which gives such plasticity to the minds and characters of youth, and which really underlies the power and office of education; for what

we call training is nothing more than the guiding and regulating the formation of habits. Good habits should be established at as early a period as possible; because experience shows that, when thoroughly established in childhood or youth, they continue, with more or less strength, through life. We should so govern our system of habits that they shall exhibit a constant progress of development into greater freedom.

In the young child,

the attention and consequently the observation, seems to be purely automatic as it is determined by the attractiveness of the object presented; and its likeness or unlikeness to some other object. By automatic fixation of the attention on the sense-impressions received from the external world, the infant is enabled to effect that marvelous combination of visual and tactile perceptions, which guide the whole subsequent interpretation of its phenomena.

A familiar example of automatic attention is shown

in many great writers, who, during some composition, become engrossed in their subjects; ideas follow one another in rapid and continuous succession, clothe themselves in words, and prompt the movement by which the words are expressed in writing; and this automatic action may continue uninterruptedly for hours without any tendency of the mind to wander from the subject, the Will being only called into play when the feeling of fatigue, or the distraction of other subjects renders it dif-

difficult to keep the attention fixed upon that which has previously held it by its own attractive power.

Children are prompted by ideas and feelings which automatically succeed one another in uncontrolled accordance with the laws of suggestion. A suggestion that is kindly and skillfully adapted to the child's automatic nature, by directing the turbid current of thought and feeling into smoother channels, and guiding its activity, forms one of the

mightiest attributes in the training of the child.

The great thing then in all education, is to make automatic and habitual, as early as possible, as many useful actions as we can, and to guard against the growing into ways that are likely to be disadvantageous to us, as we should guard against the plague.

The more of the details of our daily life we can hand over to the infallible and effortless custody of automatism, the more our higher powers of mind will

be set free for their own proper work. Without unbroken advance there is no such thing as accumulation of the ethical forces possible, and to make this possible, and to exercise us and habituate us in it, that we may be wise, thoughtful, and useful men — clear-headed reasoners, profound thinkers, — is the sovereign blessing of regular work.

Automatism oils the wheels of life and makes them run without hitch or creaking.