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# The Knickerbocker.

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## THE INFLUENCE OF EDUCATION ON THE FORMATION OF CHARACTER.

BY TIMOTHY FLINT.

WHAT causes the moral and intellectual difference of character in our species? What is the object and the result of education? On these two queries we propose to make some brief remarks in the following essay.

I. What causes the difference of moral and intellectual character? The disciples of a popular and growing school affirm, that education is the single and entire instrument of this difference; a dogma which gains favor at universities and popular seminaries, because it adds estimated value and consequence to what these institutions can impart. At the head of this school we find one of our ripest scholars, a gentleman to whom literature is largely indebted, and whose standing in the American republic of letters attaches much influence to his dicta; and whose errors, touching this dogma, if we shall find them such, are so much the more likely to have an injurious effect.

In an address lately delivered before the leading literary society at Yale, and afterwards redelivered before a similar literary society at Harvard, we are told, (for we have not seen the printed address) the fundamental position was, that the moral and intellectual difference in our species is owing wholly to education. We pass the acknowledged eloquence and splendor of the address, only regretting, that they had not been employed to embellish and illustrate truth, instead of error. The fundamental position is all that belongs to the questions in hand. In our admiration of this gentleman, we would not allow ourselves to animadvert even on this dogma, if it were a mere harmless position, a popular flourish, *ad captandum*, unintelligible, inefficient, and without bearing, like the dicta of schoolmen and theologians. But this is a doctrine which comes home to our business and bosoms, and touches our most vital interests. It seems to be favorable to education, by attributing to it an omnipotence of mastery over the mind. But every error, however flattering, however plausible, will be found to be injurious, just in proportion to the importance of the doctrines on which it bears.

Nothing is useful, nothing beautiful upon this, or upon any other subjects, but the truth.

With that gentleman we agree, that no price can be put on the importance of education; that it ought to be 'first and last, and midst, and without end,' in all our designs for the amelioration of our race. It is the more important, therefore, that we should have just ideas of its efficacy and object. Let us place the lever that is to move the moral and intellectual world on the right fulcrum. Let us not misapply and misdirect this power, so beneficent in its right use, so terrible in its misdirection. To plant the germs in a wrong soil is not to sow on the barren wave, nor the sterile sands. It is to rear a rank luxuriance, worse than useless. Whatever is done in conformity to the laws of nature is useful, or at least innocent. Whatever is done against those laws, whatever semblance it may have, is positively noxious.

Is it true then, that the difference of character is owing wholly to education? In the import of the term we include its most extensive meaning—to wit: the whole influences, that surround the subject from birth to death. Even philosopher Owen, the very doctor of circumstances, allowed more honor to the Creator than this doctrine. His theory was, that moral and intellectual character was formed out of two elements—*Temperament and Circumstances*, in other words education. He allowed very much to temperament, though he affirmed, that education was the chief instrument in forming character.

That education is the sole instrument in forming character, we deny *in toto*, as false in theory and practice, injurious in its effects, tending to misapply and misdirect its efforts, and as directly militating with the laws of nature, and the physiology of our species. In so doing, we would wish to exalt education, by pointing out what it can, and what it cannot accomplish, and the direction in which it will be useful or worse than useless.

If this dogma can be traced to any source, we suppose it must be to the doctrine, that the mind is a passive receptacle of external impressions, a *blanca charta*, on which the efforts of education are written, as character are impressed upon paper. No matter who put forth this doctrine. Truth is more omnipotent than Locke, great as he was. The whole doctrine, along with the quiddities about *innate ideas*, *instincts*, the *passiveness* of the mind in receiving knowledge, the soul residing in the *commune sensorium*, a term merely invented to cover utter ignorance, and much idle assumption of the same kind, was founded in the grossest misapprehension of the nature and powers of the mind, and ought long since to have been consigned, with the lumber of the schoolmen to the moles and the bats. The flippant and weakminded will ask, Who are you, thus to estimate the teaching of the metaphysicians? Our anta-

gonist, who is a gentleman and a scholar, will only ask, Is it true?

What then is the human mind? While we believe it to be an immaterial and immortal spirit, we admit that we know, and can know nothing about its nature and essence with our present faculties. But about the physical organs of thought, by which the soul acts, and through which alone we can have any knowledge of it, we do, and can know much. Are these organs passive, *blanca charta*—a uniform sheet, on which external influences are impressed? Are minds equal, uniform, capable of being educated to be exactly alike? No. To assert it is monstrous, and directly in the face of the whole teaching of nature.

The mind, as we are capable of understanding it, acts by a wonderful combination of organs, intellectual, moral, and perceptive. They are the works of our Creator. Man, being intended by him to be a social being, in the infinitely diversified relations of society, there are calls for every shade and variety of organization, temperament, kind, and degree of development and endowment of these organs. The head, in which they are placed, is infinitely diversified in its external form. The eye, the expression of countenance, the physiognomy, are the indications of this mental structure in the face. They are the labelling with which it has pleased the Creator to mark all his human samples. The same purpose to create an infinite diversity of minds is manifest, as among all the other parts of his creation. No two seaworn pebbles, no two of the minutest seeds, no two heads, no two human faces ever were formed precisely alike. The omnipotence of the divinity is in no work of creation to us more sublimely conspicuous, than in his having been able, on the small surface of the human countenance, to express such a variety of expression, that, probably, no two of the countless millions, who live, or have lived, were ever such resemblances, that a practised eye could not discriminate the one from the other. The diversity of mind, in its original organization and temperament, is as much greater than that of the forms of inanimate matter, as mind is higher in the scale of his works. Children are born, as every mother knows, with this infinite variety marked upon the structure of their heads, countenances, complexions, and forms. There are the sallow, and the sanguine; the children of black eyes, olive complexion, and black hair; of blue eyes, fair complexion, and light hair; the choleric and the mild; those that never cry from their birth, and those that raise one sustained nursery hymn; those that are timid, and those that are pugnacious; the quick and the dull; the deformed and the beautiful; the embryo poets and philosophers, and the incurable idiots; and yet education can make all these alike—the irascible soul, that was born, lives, and dies with vine-

gar in his veins instead of blood, precisely like the sanguine, easy, good natured saint, who was never angry, because anger was not in his nature. Education can remove the web foot of the water fowl, and make it feed and consort in the barn yard, without evincing a predilection for water, and can teach a fox to love grass instead of poultry! In a word, it allows the Creator to form all the parts of the material universe, and to create bodies, but arrogates to man the higher omnipotence of forming minds!

Tell the mother of a numerous family, she could have trained children, that were the one timid the other fearless, the one quick the other slow, the one with a powerful memory and the other apparently with none, as they appeared from the first dawn of manifestation of mind, to a character precisely uniform!

Tell the schoolmaster, with his fifty pupils, that they can each commit the same grammar lesson, each perform the same operations in arithmetic, and each write a letter with the same ease; that the same discipline which will regulate one, will equally govern the other, and that after the regular process of training, they will all appear alike at the examination! Instruct the music-master that all children of the same age, and under the same circumstances, will become musicians with the same facility. In fine, deny a diversity of endowment and temperament as infinite as the calls of society for such a diversity, and then inform us, what sort of a society that would be, in which education had accomplished what, according to this doctrine is its perfect work, by rendering every member morally and intellectually just alike! Men are not so constituted, that they could by any possible discipline, be so trained; and if they could, Providence would proclaim in the ears of those attempting this reversal of her laws, *Nolumus leges naturæ mutare. He who sitteth in the heavens, would have the whole doctrine in derision.*

The Creator has been pleased to create not only an infinite variety of endowment and temperament in individuals of the same nation and society; but to stamp a marked difference of this kind upon whole races. Who, that has compared either the heads or the characters of the European whites, the Negroes, American red men, Tartars, and Islanders of the South Sea, together, will doubt it? Among the first class, and the highest in this scale, he has formed some with high and bold foreheads, bearing on their brow the impress of intellectual greatness. If they are not born to the advantages of education, they obey a self-training impulse from within, and form themselves to a greatness which the factitious education that opulence can bestow upon its inferior materials, strives in vain to impart; and to confound the arrogant thought that the rich, because they can afford their children leisure and teaching of every kind, can, therefore, form them to propor-

tionate intellectual pre-eminence, these nobles, by the sign manual of nature, quite as often spring up from the cottages of the poor, as the palaces of the rich. By the same inscrutable arrangement, nature forms among the same race incurable idiots, whom we discover at a glance to be such; whom we pity, and pass by, without the preposterous thought, that education can reverse the decree of the Creator, or snatch his high and peculiar prerogative of forming minds out of his hand.

‘But what avails denial,’ say our opponents, ‘if we can cite facts to sustain our doctrine?’ An American sea captain affirms, that he took on board his ship a New Zealander, and that, by a quick training, he became a good sailor. We admit that there may be as great differences of endowment among New Zealanders, as other races. Does it follow, because one such was found, that a sea captain would as soon take a raw hand from New Zealand, as New England? Suppose a single New Zealander has been found to become a quick and a competent scholar, any sea captain can inform us, that among the rudest savages there are as great comparative differences of temper, morals, beauty, intelligence, and aptitude for the different pursuits of savages, as among the educated races. Nature has given them priests, captains, heroes, cowards, ruffians, quick, and dull, as among us. On the doctrine in question, being all formed under similar circumstances, in other words, educated alike, they ought all to be on a footing of the most perfect moral and intellectual equality.

Is it possible, that any one can believe, that Mary Maccinnes could have been trained by any conceivable mode of education, to have become Madame de Stael, or Felicia Hemans? Or that Bowditch and Bryant could have been formed to interchange intellectual character? John Quincy Adams is admitted on all hands to be a highly intellectual man; and he is unquestionably much higher, as a scholar, than Lord Byron. He has evidently struggled hard for poetry. Why is not Mc Morrogh, Don Juan? But why proceed to cite from the innumerable cases, which the slightest acquaintance with our species will furnish, astonishing examples of peculiar endowment in every direction of the intellectual, moral, and perceptive faculties, differences of endowment, which create a greater disparity of intellect between different individuals of our species, than between some of them and the lower animals. On persons, who would deny this difference, all argument would be lost. Such would have educated Euler, La Place, and Newton to have been philologists, and Milton to have written on mechanics and farriery.

Education form all men alike! And what would be the fruit of admitting this doctrine? The construction of a bed of Procrustes, which would eke out the short, and lop off the tall. All mind, by

this guillotining process, set up in defiance of the laws of nature, would soon be extinct. It would still be required, that wood should be hewn, water drawn, cattle slaughtered, and boots blacked. Would we love to see Archimedes and Solon, Milton and Byron, Massillon and Bossuet, Newton and Davy, Euler and Bowditch perform these functions for us? Aye more, would these men have been good subjects in those callings? The men who actually perform these offices, in the sight of God and good men, may be acting their part as well as the others would have done, if in their place. Interchanging with them, they would, probably, have been out of their element. But it is objected, 'this doctrine is aristocratic.' Not so. If among these men there be cases of high and extraordinary endowment, as there are still greater chances, (there should be,) than among the rich and distinguished, they will feel a self-educating call to their vocation; and let all accessible means of education be furnished them. No! Let us shift the charge on the other horn of the dilemma. That education should be able to form all men alike is the glorious doctrine for an aristocrat. If education furnish all the intellect, and all the morality of our nature, as every one knows that education is a cash article, and that they who can afford their children most leisure and money, can, in the common acceptance of the term, educate them most, it would follow, that the children of the free schools could have but poor morals and scanty intellect; mechanics and farmers not more than ten per cent of the attainable, while the children of some of our merchants would obtain a million dollars' worth of knowledge and morality. Is it so! Are the children of the rich, who are taught from their cradles, and who are encumbered by masters and instruction, and whose incessant leisure calls them neither to toil nor to spin, either more intellectual or moral than the children born in the middle walks of life? The Eternal has promulgated no such conditions in favor of aristocracy. He who has seen fit to form gems in the ocean, and flowers in the desert, scatters beauty and worth and talent as often in cottages as palaces. They who feel that they are the Napoleons, and wear the long sword of destiny, will hold forth the banner that will gather others under their ascendant, be they born and educated where or how they may, on the same principle that causes the bees as soon as they see their queen to recognise her. The rich and great furnish incitements enough to envy, without putting forth the claims in question. There is no aristocratic leaning in the distributions of Providence.

What then does constitute the difference of character? Three elements—temperament, endowment, and education, or the modification of circumstances. These naturally act and react; and the result is so combined, that in the formation of character in the progress of life, with the little observation that has been hitherto

bestowed upon the subject, the contribution of each element to the total compound cannot be settled. Education creates nothing. It only operates upon the material which the Creator has furnished; and as this is infinitely various in kind and degree, so will be the character modified, and superinduced upon it by education. That education only modifies and develops endowment, without creating it, is indicated by the common sense of mankind in the very import of the term itself. *Educo is to lead from—to lead out—to develop.*

Educate and modify the original endowment as much as you will, you can never eradicate the influence of the original intellectual *stamina*. The choleric will always have to exercise a more painful watch over their temper than the naturally mild. You may improve a weak memory; but the same training will improve a strong one in a greater ratio. Almost every individual of the species possesses, in a greater or less degree, something of the original endowments that enter into the composition of the human intellect. Hence a person may have mathematical endowment enough to be trained to perform the common operations of arithmetic, who could never be educated to become a distinguished mathematician. A person may have poetry enough in his composition by great labor to make poor verses, who could never be formed to become that kind of poet, who, *nascitur non fit*, is born, and cannot be made such; and so of all the other endowments. Providence calls for a certain number of lights, legislators, poets, intellectually great men, and sends them forth qualified to be educated for their high functions. If the means are not supplied to their hands, from an internal impulse they will educate themselves. Instruction may form those to whom nature has denied these high endowments to be useful and respectable men. But they can never be trained to fill the places of the former.

Education can do much. It can strengthen weak endowments by exercising them, in the same way as the bodily muscles are enlarged and strengthened by gymnastics. It can do much by repressing excess, and bringing up deficiency. It can operate powerfully in the best of all its directions, to produce an equable and balanced character. But take care, that, instead of operating with the indications of nature, you do not exert your efforts perniciously against them. It is, we repeat, of the utmost importance, that this most precious of instruments should not be misapplied, or its efficiency miscalculated.

It would appear, then, if these views are correct, that the great object of enlightened education should be to study the intellectual endowments of the pupil, while yet in embryo, and before the development of education and circumstances; to ascertain, if it may be, in what direction his mind is endowed, what are his aptitudes,



and for what pursuits he is best fitted. We have studiously avoided any reference, for this purpose, to the cranium, as furnishing indications ; because, if the child have, for example, the strong external development of mathematics, poetry, or mechanics, the development will certainly make itself known to a competent observer by mental manifestations. The latter demonstration no one can mistake. The former remains, with most people, a matter of question. We, therefore, rely entirely upon the latter.

We have no manner of doubt, that every child is born with a peculiar aptitude to some one of the pursuits of life. Could this be discovered, and the child rightly trained, it would certainly attain eminence in that pursuit. Could the parent have mistaken the indications of young Mozart, who, when he listened to fine music, was observed to melt into tears, and who learned of himself to play the harpsichord at five years old ? Can there be any doubt about the aptitudes of a child, whose first manifestations of mind are in the construction of machinery, or in performing mental operations of arithmetic ? Was it difficult to discover the bent of the painter Opie, who, while yet a collier, sketched accurate figures with coal on the walls of the mine ? Does not every intelligent mother note these manifestations in her children ? Which then is the true system, to believe that all minds can be trained alike, or that it is right to consult these manifestations, conform to them, and educate the children in that direction ? Which is the wise and true way, to rear the child according to its genius and capabilities, or to govern education by such laws, as are imposed in some despotic countries, which compel the children, from generation to generation, to follow the pursuit of the parent ?

To bring these observations nearer home ; what a preposterous spectacle does not the aspect of society, as now constituted, exhibit ? True ; we see a few men at home, and consequently eminent in every walk. But how often is it otherwise ? Of the three professions, emphatically denominated the *learned*, what proportion of the members were determined to their calling by any decided predilection for it ? Consequently, how few of them attain eminence ? The general axioms, on which these important points are settled, are sufficiently ludicrous. A farmer has laid by sufficient means to send one son to college. Laziness is the most general badge to decimate the favorite for this honor ; or he is silent and dull, and this is called *taking to learning*. In the pursuits, how often do we see tailors in the blacksmith's shop, and the blacksmith sitting on the shop board, people, who should have turned the soil, procuring good sleep for their hearers in the pulpit, and excellent harangues in bar rooms and grocery shops, instead of the bench and the rostrum. Hitherto the momentous question of settling the choice of a pursuit or a profession has either been decided by mere

chance, or any elements, rather than aptitude and predilection. Of course the general arrangement of society shows little more than a game of cross purposes with nature.

If parents, guardians, and those who influence these choices, possessed a true and enlightened ambition, they would perceive, that by impelling their children, and those with whom they are charged in the direction of the learned professions, without first consulting, by a severe and impartial analysis, their fitness to succeed and shine in them, they are doing any thing for them, rather than advancing their true honor and interest. Cæsar preferred to be the first in a village, rather than the second at Rome. Though this may have been an overweening ambition, it indicated in the mind of one who was no humble judge of what the world calls glory, the impulse of a true aspiration. Who would not prefer that his son or ward should be a thriving and respectable farmer or mechanic, rather than one of the numerous subordinate supernumeraries who become either injurious, or starve in the learned professions ?

Education bestowed without discernment, and by a distribution predicated on the idea that God has no part in creating mind, may produce a seeming of knowledge—a flat and superficial equality. But profound and pre-eminent attainment never grew from any other source, and never will be produced from any other, than the concurrence of endowment and right discipline, nature and education. Neither are these endowments passive, as our antagonists suppose. So far as they are dependant upon organization, (and we know them in no other way,) they commence their activity with life. Circumstances react upon them. The organization, through which we are conscious of memory, volition, knowledge, can no more be said to be passive, than the lungs or the heart in physical life. All these physical and intellectual organs commence their action co-ordinate with our existence, and education is their aliment, as food is of the body.

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### WATER MUSIC.

From you blue waters pealing,  
 There came a sound at even;  
 And oh! it seemed, as it was stealing,  
 Almost too sweet for Heaven!  
 It was the hour of sunset, when  
 Our hearts and souls feel more;  
 And mine felt, as it listened then,  
 As ne'er it felt before.

And as on air it seemed to float,  
 By zephyrs borne along,  
 It sounded not like earthly note,  
 It was so sweet a song:  
 It seemed as if some angel had  
 From its high home been tossed,  
 And in those strains so soft, so sad,  
 Was mourning all it lost. A. W.