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THE CURSE OF EDUCATION

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The Curse of Education

BY
HAROLD E. GORST

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PREFATORY NOTE

In calling this little book 'The Curse of Education,' I trust that I shall not be misunderstood to disparage culture. The term 'education' is used, for want of a better word, to express the conventional mode of teaching and bringing up children, and of educating youth in this and other civilized countries. It is with education systems, with the universal method of cramming the mind with facts, and particularly with the manufacture of uniformity and mediocrity by subjecting every individual to a common process, regardless of his natural bent, that I have chiefly to find fault. At a moment when the country is agitated with questions of educational reform, I thought it might be useful to draw attention to what I believe to be a fact, namely, that the foundations of all existing education systems are absolutely[Pg vi] false in principle; and that teaching itself, as opposed to natural development and self-culture, is the greatest obstacle to human progress that social evolution has ever had to encounter.

HAROLD

E.

GORST.

LONDON,
April, 1901.

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{1}

THE CURSE OF EDUCATION

CHAPTER I

FLOURISHING MEDIOCRITY

Humanity is rapidly becoming less the outcome of a natural process of development, and more and more the product of an organized educational plan. The average educated man possesses no real individuality. He is simply a manufactured article bearing the stamp of the maker.

Year by year this fact is becoming more emphasized. During the past century almost every civilized country applied itself feverishly to the invention of a national plan of education, with the result that the majority of mankind are compelled to swallow a uniform prescription of knowledge made up for them by the State. Now there is a great outcry that England is being left behind in this educational race. Other nations have got more exact systems. Where the British child is only stuffed with six pounds of facts, the German and French schools contrive to cram seven pounds into their pupils. Consequently, Germany and France are getting ahead of us, and unless we wish to be beaten in the international race,{2} it is asserted that we must bring our own educational system up to the Continental standard.

Before going more deeply into this vital question, it is just as well to consider what these education systems have really done for mankind. There is a proverb, as excellent as it is ancient, which says that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. No doubt learned theoretical treatises upon the scope and aim of educational methods are capital things in their way, but they tell us nothing of the effects of this systematic teaching and cramming upon the world at large. If we wish to ascertain them, we must turn to life itself, and judge by results.

To begin with, the dearth of great men is so remarkable that it scarcely needs comment. People are constantly expressing the fear that the age of intellectual giants has passed away altogether. This is particularly obvious in political life. Since the days of Gladstone and Disraeli, Parliamentary debate has sunk to the most hopeless level of mediocrity. The traditions of men such as Pitt, Fox, Palmerston, Peel, and others, sound at the present day almost like ancient mythology. Yet the supposed benefits of education are not only now free to all, but have been compulsorily conferred upon most nations. Nevertheless, even Prussian pedagogues have never succeeded in producing another Bismarck; and France has ground away at her educational mill for generations with the result that the supply of Napoleons has distinctly diminished.

Look at the methods by which our public service is recruited.{3}

Who are the men to whom the administration of all important departments of Government is entrusted, and how are they selected?

They are simply individuals who have succeeded in obtaining most marks in public competitive examinations—that is to say, men whose brains have been more effectually stuffed with facts and mechanical knowledge than were the brains of their unsuccessful competitors.

There is no question, when a candidate presents himself for a post in the Diplomatic Service or in one of the Government offices, whether he possesses tact, or administrative ability, or knowledge of the world. All that is demanded of him is that his mind should be crammed with so many pounds avoirdupois of Latin, Greek, mathematics, history, geography, etc., acquired in such a way that he will forget, within a couple of years, every fact that has been pestled into him. For every vacancy in the various departments of the Administration there are dozens, or even scores, of applicants; and the candidate selected for the post is the one whose mind has been most successfully subjected to this process of over-cramming, and consequently most effectually ruined for all the practical purposes of life.

Now, to whatever cause it may be ascribed, there can be no doubt that the general level throughout the various branches of the public service is one of mediocrity. We are not surrounded, faithful and devoted as our public servants are universally admitted to be, by administrative geniuses. Facts point altogether the other way. Great national catastrophes, like the blunders and miscalculations that have characterized the conduct of the war in South Africa, have always resulted in making the most uncomfortable revelations concerning the inefficiency of more than one important department of Government.

The War Office has long since become a public scandal, and if the truth were known about the inner domesticity of more than one great Administrative office, the susceptibilities of the nation would be still further shocked and outraged. Fortunately, however—or it may be unfortunately—Government linen is usually washed at home; and it is only in times of great emergency that the truth leaks out, to the general consternation.

When this does happen there is a great outcry about the inefficiency of this or that branch of the public service. The Government in power wait to see if the agitation dies a natural death; and if it is successfully kept up, a sort of pretence at reform takes place. There is a re-shuffle. Fresh names are given to old abuses; incompetent officials exchange posts; and a new building is erected at the public expense. Then all goes on as heretofore.

Nobody seems to think of making an inquiry into the constitution of the public service itself. But until this is done no real reform of any permanent value can possibly be effected. It is not the nomenclature of appointments, the subdivision of departmental work, and such matters of detail, that stand in need of the reformer. The titles and duties

of the several officials are of secondary importance. It is not in them that the evils of bad administration are to be located.

The fault lies with the officials themselves, who are the victims of the stupid system which has placed them in the position they occupy. The education they have received has, in the first case, unfitted them for the performance of any but mechanical and routine work; and the strain of a competitive examination, involving the most unintellectual and brain-paralyzing process of cram, has probably destroyed the faculty of initiative, which should be, but is not, a distinguishing characteristic of the administrative official.

Herein lies the secret of all opposition to progress. It is the permanent official who needs reforming. He is the embodiment of routine and conservatism, because he is the embodiment of mediocrity. Progress means ideas, and mediocrity does not deal in them. It has been furnished, instead, by a systematic course of instruction, with a sufficient equipment of the ideas of other people to last its lifetime. Whilst we fill our public service with specially prepared mediocrity, the administrative departments will remain reactionary. And as long as education is synonymous with cramming on an organized plan, it will continue to produce mediocrity.

The army affords at the present moment an admirable object-lesson in this connection. The results of cramming young men as a preparation for a profession which demands, more than any other, individual initiative and independence, have become painfully apparent upon the field of battle. One of our foremost generals has come home from the campaign declaring the necessity of both officers and men being trained to think and act for themselves. That is one, perhaps the chief, of the great lessons which this war has taught us. But here, again, no useful reform can be achieved by alterations in the drill-book, through lectures by experienced generals, or by the issue of army orders. It is our entire system of education which is again at fault.

Boys are stuffed with facts before they go to Sandhurst, and when they get there they are crammed in special subjects. The whole object of the process is to enable candidates to pass examinations, and not to produce good officers. The effect here is the same as elsewhere. A quantity of useless and some useful knowledge is drilled into the pupil in such a manner that the mind retains nothing that has been put into it. And, to make matters worse, all this is done at the expense of retarding the proper development of faculties which would be of incalculable value to the soldier.

Most of the blunders of the war are, in fact, attributable to want of common sense, and common sense consists in the capacity of an individual to think for himself and to exercise his judgment. Educational methods which, in the majority of cases, appear to destroy this faculty altogether are clearly pernicious. Common sense is the most valuable gift with which man can be endowed. It is the very essence of genius, for it

consists in the application of intelligence to every detail, and the highest order of intellect can accomplish no more than that. Yet it is the rarest of{7} all attributes, for the very reason that it is deliberately destroyed by conventional methods of bringing up children and instructing youth. Therefore, before we can hope to obtain a supply of self-reliant officers and men, we must see some radical change in the very principles upon which modern methods of education are founded.

Wherever we go we find this curse of mediocrity. In the professions, at the Bar, in the pulpit, amongst physicians, it is apparent everywhere. There are clever men, of course; but the very fact that their names spring at once prominently to mind is in itself a proof that ability is exceptional.

Some people, of course, accepting the world as they find it, may think it very unreasonable to expect able men to be plentiful in all walks of life. That is, to my mind, the chief pathos of the situation. It has come to be accepted that the world must be filled with a great majority of very commonplace people, even amongst the educated classes.

No doubt it is filled at the present moment with a very vast preponderance of conventional minds manufactured to meet the supposed requirements of our complicated civilization. But I deny that this need be the case. On the contrary, we are surrounded on all sides by ability, by great possibilities of individual development, even by genius.

And our education systems are busily engaged in the work of destroying this precious material, substituting facts for ideas, forcing the mind away from its natural bent, and manufacturing a machine instead of a man.{8}

CHAPTER II

SQUARE PEGS IN ROUND HOLES

Perhaps the worst evil from which the world suffers in an educational sense is the misplaced individual. Nothing is more tragic, and yet nothing is more common, than to see men occupying positions for which they are unfitted by nature and therefore by inclination; whilst it is obvious that, had the circumstances of their early training been different, they might have followed with success and pleasure a natural bent of mind tending in a wholly opposite direction.

This miscarriage of vocation is one of the greatest causes of individual misery in this world that exists; but its pernicious effects go far beyond mere personal unhappiness:

they exercise the most baneful influence upon society at large, upon the progress of nations, and upon the development of the human race. One of the advantages of the division of labour which is most emphasized by political economists is that it offers a fair field for personal adaptation. People select the particular employment for which they are most fitted, and in this way everybody in the community is engaged in doing the best and most useful work of which he is capable.{9}

It is a fine theory. Perhaps in olden times, before the introduction of education systems, it may have worked well in regard to most trades and industries. A man had then at least some opportunity of developing a natural bent. He was not taken by the State almost from infancy, crammed with useless knowledge, and totally unfitted for any employment within his reach. The object was not to educate him above his station and then make a clerk of him, or drive him into the lower branches of the Civil Service. A bright youth was apprenticed by his father to some trade for which he may have shown some predisposition.

Of course, mistakes were often made through the stupidity of parents or from some other cause. There are many such examples to be met with in the biographies of men who attained eminence in wholly different callings from those into which they were forced in their youth.

Sir William Herschel, who discovered Uranus, and who first conceived the generally-accepted theory as to the cause of sun-spots, was brought up by his father to be a musician. In spite of his predilection for astronomy, he continued to earn his bread by playing the oboe, until he was promoted from being a performer in the Pump Room at Bath to the position of Astronomer Royal.

Faraday was apprenticed by his father to a bookbinder, and he remained in this distasteful employment until he was twenty-two. It was quite by accident that somebody more intelligent than Michael Faraday's pastors and masters discovered that the youth had a great natural love of studying science,{10} and sent him to hear a course of lectures delivered by Sir Humphry Davy. This led happily to the young bookbinder making the acquaintance of the lecturer, and eventually obtaining a position as assistant in the Royal Institution.

Linnæus, the great naturalist, had a very narrow escape from missing his proper vocation. He was sent to a grammar-school, but exhibited no taste for books; therefore his father decided to apprentice him to a shoemaker. Fortunately, however, a discriminating physician had observed the boy's love of natural history, and took him into his own house to teach him botany and physiology.

Instances of the kind might be multiplied. Milton himself began life as a schoolmaster, and the father of Turner, one of the greatest landscape painters who ever lived, did his best to turn his brilliant son into a barber. The point, however, is obvious enough

without the need of further illustration. A few examples have been adduced of great geniuses who have contrived, by the accident of circumstances or through sheer force of character, to escape from an environment which was forced upon them against their natural inclination. But it is not everybody who is gifted with such commanding talent and so much obstinacy and perseverance as to be able to overcome the artificial obstacles placed in the way of his individual tendencies; and now we have, what happily did not exist in the day of Herschel, Faraday, Turner, Linnæus and others—a compulsory education system to strangle originality and natural development at the earliest possible stage.{11}

Most people would probably find it far easier to quote instances offhand of friends who had missed their proper vocation in life than of those who were placed exactly in the position best suited to their taste and capacity. The failures in life are so obviously in excess of those who may be said to have succeeded that specific illustrations of the fact are hardly necessary.

One has only to exert ordinary powers of observation to perceive that the world is not at all well ordered in this respect. It has already been pointed out that the public service and the professions are almost entirely filled with what must be called mediocrity; and one of the most potent causes of this unhappy state of affairs is the exquisite infallibility with which a blind system is constantly forcing square pegs into round holes.

Every profession and calling teems with examples. There are men, intended by nature to be artists and musicians, leading a wretched and unnatural existence in many a merchant's office because their best faculties were undeveloped during the early years of schooling. Mathematicians, philosophers, even poets, are tied to trade or to some equally unsuitable occupation. Scores of so-called literary men ought to be calculating percentages or selling dry goods; and no doubt there are shop-assistants and stock-jobbers who might, if led into the path of culture, have become creditable authors and journalists.

This is neither joke nor satire. It is sober earnest, as many observant readers will readily testify. The loss is not only to the individual, it is{12} to society at large, and to the whole world. No one will deny the fact; but to how many will it occur that such anomalies cannot be the outcome of natural development and progress, but that they must be directly or indirectly attributable to some artificial cause?

It is the great difficulty against which all human advancement has to contend, that people can rarely be brought to question principles which have become a part and parcel of their everyday existence. There are plenty of individuals who are ready to tinker with existing institutions, and who erroneously dignify that process by the name of reform. But nothing is more despairing than the effort to convince conventionally brought up

people that some cherished convention, with which the world has put up for an indefinite period, is founded upon fallacy, and ought to be cast out root and branch.

Even in the United States, where far greater efforts are made to encourage individuality in the schools and colleges than is the case with the countries of the Old World, people are not much better distributed amongst the various professions and occupations than they are here. I have made inquiries amongst Americans of wide experience and observation, and have learnt that nothing is more common in the States than to find individuals brought up to exercise functions for which they are wholly unfitted by natural capacity and inclination.

An instance was given me, by an American friend, of a boy who spent all his leisure in constructing clever little mechanical contrivances, in running^{13} miniature locomotives, and in setting up electric appliances of one kind and another. One day the youth's father came to him and said: 'I don't know what to make of B——. Could you find him a place in a wholesale merchant's office?' When it was pointed out to the parent that his son showed unmistakable mechanical genius, he obstinately insisted on getting the boy a situation for which he was quite unsuited, and which was highly distasteful to him.

I quote this instance to show that the parent is often as bad an educator as the school itself. In this case the school would have taken as little notice of the boy's natural bent as his father. It would, in all probability, never have discovered it at all. But it has become so much an accepted axiom that children are to be manufactured into anything that happens to suit the taste or convenience of their guardians, that it probably never occurred to the parent in question that he was committing a cruel and foolish act in forcing his son out of the path into which the boy's natural instinct was guiding him. The youth who might have pursued a happy and prosperous career as a mechanical engineer is now a disappointed man, struggling on, with little hope of success, in an occupation which does not interest him, and for which he does not possess the slightest adaptability.

Every nation is equally at fault in this respect. In Germany, for instance, the child is quite as much a pawn at the disposal of its parent and the school system as it is elsewhere. I spent a number of^{14} years in the country, and enjoyed an intimate acquaintance with many German families. Nothing has left upon my mind a deeper impression than the tragedy I witnessed of a boy being gradually and systematically weaned from the pursuit to which he was passionately devoted, and forced into a career utterly unsympathetic and distasteful to his peculiar temperament.

The boy was simply, from head to foot, a musician. He spent every moment he could steal from his school studies in playing through the difficult scores of Wagner's music dramas. His taste, his musical memory, the enormous natural ability which enabled him

to surmount all technical difficulties with ease, were apparent to everybody who knew him. Yet his parents determined from the first that he should study law, and enter the legal profession.

I have never seen anything more painful than the deliberate discouragement, during a period extending over several years, of the boy's natural bent, and the application of absolute compulsion to force him, against every natural instinct, to prepare himself for a profession repugnant to his inclinations, and for which he was not in the smallest degree adapted.

Out of this promising musical material the *Stadt Gymnasium* manufactured the usual piece of intellectual mediocrity. He was stuffed with the regulation measure of facts, scraped through the customary examination, and was despatched, much against his will, to the universities of Jena and Zürich. When I last saw him he was a plodding lawyer of the conventional type, doing his duties in a listless manner, {15} with very indifferent success, and quite broken down in spirit. The *Gymnasium*, the university, and the parental obstinacy had done their work very effectually. They had succeeded in reducing him to the level of a machine, and in all probability Germany lost an excellent musician who might have given pleasure to thousands of others, besides enjoying an honourable career of useful and congenial work.

We have seen that between the stupidity of the parent and the inflexibility of the school system children have little chance of developing their natural propensities. The results surround us everywhere, and there is no getting away from them. All that the school professes to do is to stuff the pupil with a certain quantity of facts according to a fixed curriculum. It does not pretend to exercise any other function. There is no effort to differentiate between individuals, or to discover the natural bent of each particular child. Instruction consists in cramming and prescribing by a more or less pernicious method—according to the lights of the particular school authorities in some cases, and in others according to a hard and fast code enforced by the State—a certain quantity of facts into all pupils without distinction.

Parents, on the other hand, think they have fulfilled their duty simply by sending their children to school. The only thing considered necessary to equip a child for the battle of life is to get him an education, and nobody bothers his head about the principles or the effects of the process. The parent leaves everything to the school, regardless of the fact that schools do not pretend to concern themselves about the natural {16} tendencies of their pupils. He is satisfied if his son is receiving the same education as his neighbour's, and is quite contented to leave the question of his future career to be an after-consideration.

The result upon the world in general of this double neglect on the part of parents and school systems is disastrous in the extreme. In the first place, it makes the life of the

misplaced individual a burden to himself and to those by whom he is surrounded. Natural tendencies cannot be wholly suppressed, even by education systems; and the victim's existence is not rendered more bearable by the reflection that, but for circumstances which he is rarely able to analyze, he might have succeeded in some other and more agreeable occupation had he only received the necessary encouragement in his youth.

Secondly, there is the fact that the progress of civilization is enormously retarded by its being rarely in the hands of the most fit. The most fit are not, and cannot be, produced under prevailing conditions. The whole machinery of education is directed towards the production of a dead level of mediocrity. In many cases—such as, for example, in Prussia—this is done by design, and not by accident. Instruction is imparted in such a manner that no regard is paid to individual propensities. All are subjected, more or less, to the same process. They are fitted for nothing in particular, and no trouble is taken to ascertain the direction in which an individual mind should be developed. The consequence is that, from one end of the civilized world to the other, resounds the cry, 'What shall we do with our boys?'{17}

And, lastly, it scarcely requires pointing out that the enormous sums of money spent by Governments, by municipalities, and by private persons upon education, in order to produce this lamentable state of affairs, is so much waste and extravagance. Not only does it bring in no practical return, but it works out in a precisely opposite direction. Schools and colleges that only serve to produce anomalous and unnatural social conditions, that stifle genius and talent, and that cause widespread misery among the unsuitably educated, must be reckoned as a national loss.

People deplore the heavy sums spent on armaments and on the maintenance of enormous fleets and armies; but it may be doubted if this expenditure is as costly in the end as that which goes to support a systematic manufacture of the unfit, and to assist in the distribution of individuals to stations in the social scheme for which they are wholly unsuited.{18}

CHAPTER III

THE DESTRUCTION OF GENIUS

Most people labour under the delusion that genius only makes its appearance twice or thrice during a generation. It is certainly the fact that a Napoleon, a Shakespeare, or a Beethoven, is only born once in a century; and colossal intellects such as these are

rightly regarded as unnatural phenomena. But genius of a less high order is far more common than is generally supposed. People are simply blind to it. Although it surrounds them on all sides, they fail to recognise it. And nearly everybody is busily engaged in helping to destroy it, with a perversity that is as unconscious as it is criminal.

Those who have had the opportunity of observing the mental development of an intelligent child that has not been subjected to the ordinary processes of teaching, must have been struck with the originality of its mind. If children are left to themselves, they will breed ideas at an astonishing rate. Give an imaginative child of five or six some simple object, such as a button or a piece of tape, and it will weave round it a web of romance that would put many a poet or author to shame.

Naturally brought up children will chatter fascinating{19} nonsense to the very notes that float in a sunbeam; they will spin an Odyssey out of the most trivial incident that has chanced to impress them. Every commonplace object will be invested by them with mysterious and fantastic attributes. When left to observe facts for themselves, they will develop powers of reasoning and logic which no amount of cramming and caning would ever succeed in driving into them.

There are probably few parents who have not been startled, at some period or another, by hearing from the lips of a child an original reflection that exhibited an unexpected degree of mental development. Did it ever occur to them that some intellectual process must have been going on in the child's mind to produce such powers of observation or thought? There is a fallacious notion, founded upon pure want of observation, that human beings are unable to form ideas or to think for themselves until they have been put through an elaborate course of mental gymnastics. A great deal of the process misnamed education is directed towards this end, with the result that in nine cases out of ten the brain is simply paralyzed and rendered incapable of performing its proper functions.

The fact is, that people, whether young or old, cannot be forced to think. It is a habit that must come of its own accord, and that can only be stimulated by the most delicately-applied influences. Observant and reflective parents, who have not chosen to leave the entire development and upbringing of their children in the hands of nurses,{20} will have noticed that there is a natural tendency on the part of a child, if not interfered with, to think and to expand its faculty of imagination. This tendency is not shared to an equal extent by all children; there are, of course, dissimilarities caused by varying degrees of intelligence. But it is there, in however rudimentary and undeveloped a stage; and the more backward it appears to be, the more care should be taken not to destroy it or to check its natural growth.

Now, the whole machinery of education is brought to bear, from the moment the child is of an age to receive any instruction, to strangle the development of the thinking and

imaginative faculties. That process will be described presently. What I wish to point out first is that, long before the school or the governess commences this operation, the parents of the child, or those to whom they have delegated the duty of taking charge of it during the tenderest and most momentous years of its existence, are generally engaged in doing everything they can to bring about the same pernicious result.

Of course the evil is committed in sheer ignorance. But it has been bred for so many generations that individual judgment and common sense must every day be becoming more rare. Therefore the evil spreads, and people blame the introduction of railways and other mechanical improvements for the diminishing supply of artistic and creative genius, whilst they are in reality themselves busily employed in stifling its development.

There are two ways in which this unhappy result{21} is brought about. In the first place, there is the invariable custom of giving young children toys which, far from stimulating the imagination, only serve to impress upon their minds the commonplace facts of everyday life. It is really, only in a different form, a part of the process by which, later on, the education system drives out ideas and crams in facts.

To take a concrete instance, a doll is the plaything usually given to little girls. At first sight nothing can appear more charming or instructive than the gift to a little girl, who will one day be a wife and a mother, of the miniature representation of a baby. There will be a bath provided, in which she may learn to wash it. Everything will be complete—soap, sponge, loofah, puff-box, and powder. The present will be accompanied by a *layette*, so that the child may learn to dress her infant and to change its clothes. Hair-brushes will teach her to keep the doll's hair neat; and probably a dozen other toilet requisites, of which the masculine mind has no notion or is expected to affect ignorance, will be found ready at hand to inculcate the lesson of nursery routine.

In this ingenious way the materialistic side of life is deliberately forced upon the attention of the child. Everything is providently supplied that would be calculated to occupy her attention with commonplace facts instead of with fancies. The child is not encouraged to make a living creature of this inanimate dummy, to tell it stories, or to exercise her imagination in some other way. She is provided with a round of prosaic and extremely material duties, and her mind is carefully kept within these bounds by{22} details of soap and feeding-bottles, which do not offer scope for any flight of imagination.

It would be far better to place a bundle of rags in the arms of a little girl, and to tell her to imagine it to be a baby. She would, if left to herself, with no other resource than her own invention, soon learn to exercise her dormant powers of imagination and originality.

With the same lack of forethought boys are surrounded from earliest infancy with objects designed to keep their minds within the narrow limits of fact. Their playthings

are ships, fire-engines, miniature railways, water-pumps, and such-like. The imagination is allowed as little play as possible. Interest is carefully concentrated upon the mechanical details of spars, sails, rigging, watertight compartments, wheels, rods, cranks, levers, and the thousand-and-one items which go to make up a mechanical contrivance. Great care is taken in constructing toy models to reproduce at least the chief points of the original, in order to give them a supposititious educational value. The parents then fondly imagine that, in stocking the nursery with these abominations, they are largely assisting in the development of the boy's mind.

To people who do not understand children it is difficult to convey any adequate idea of the fatal result produced upon the dawning intellect by this introduction of materialism into the nursery. The imaginative will at once say that the contention is too far fetched. Certainly the pernicious effects of such toys as have been described are not easily discernible; therein lies the insidiousness of this retarding{23} process. But to those who have watched, as I have done, the natural development of an intelligent child's powers of reflection and imagination—unchecked by dolls or toy locomotives—there will be neither absurdity nor exaggeration in what I have written.

Toys in themselves are harmless and unobjectionable things, though every observant person who has had much to do with young children will readily concede how superfluous they are as a means of amusement. The average child will treasure up a button or a shell long after it has destroyed, or maybe forgotten the existence of, the most elaborate and expensive toy. That is a commonplace of the nursery. But it does not seem to convey either meaning or moral to the majority of parents.

The second way in which the thinking and imaginative faculties are impeded in their development is by the discouragement of, or by the injudicious answers given to, the questions asked by children. At a certain age the latter become inquisitive about everything in the universe. They ply their elders with perpetual questioning; and it must be acknowledged that many of their interrogations are highly inconvenient and unanswerable.

It is very difficult for the average person to reply offhand to elementary questions such as, Why does the sun shine? What makes the wind blow? How does a seed grow into a tree? and so forth. Few people have the patience to answer the numerous inquiries of an intelligent child; and sooner than expose their ignorance, parents will generally quench{24} this thirst for knowledge at the outset by a flat prohibition. The selfish desire for peace prompts them to refuse the solicited information altogether, or, worse still, to return answers calculated to kill imaginative ideas or to impress the child's mind with a bare and prosaic materialism.

They do not stop to think of the immense harm that may be done to the child by throwing cold water upon its first attempts at research. Children, it must be remembered, do not

possess the perseverance and determination which often come to the rescue of original genius at a later period. However active their minds may be, they are also timid, and shrink back quickly under the influence of unsympathetic treatment.

The fact should be patent to everybody that children strive constantly to use the brains with which Nature has endowed them. Being naturally imaginative and original, these faculties only need ordinary encouragement to develop and flourish. Yet the entire method of bringing up children, from the cradle to the school bench, is directed towards stifling all originality and substituting for it a stock of commonplace ideas and conventional knowledge.

The process is begun at home. It takes its root in conventionality, the curse of all individuality and progress. Parents, brought up to be the slaves of custom, carry on the imbecile traditions that have been handed down to them from former generations, without stopping to consider whether they are rational or foolish. It is good enough for the majority of people that the imbecile things they do were done by their forefathers before them; and no tradition is more rigidly followed than that which prescribes the manner of bringing up children.

It would have been thought that those who had themselves suffered from the effects of bad methods would be careful not to repeat the mistakes with their own children. But that is the worst aspect of the evil. Its chief operation consists in hedging round the intelligence with conventionalities to such an extent as to exclude vigorous and independent thought. The most intelligent people often find the utmost difficulty in attempting to shake off the prejudices inculcated during the early years of life.

Many, before accomplishing this end, have had to pass through a long period of suffering and adversity. But the average mind is generally a hopeless case. There must be strong inward impulses, or the necessary measure of initiative and courage will not be forthcoming. Everybody who chooses to think for himself knows that it is an operation which does not usually entail pleasant consequences.

So much for the part played by the parent. The school system stands on a different plane altogether, and must be considered by itself. For parents there is, as has been pointed out, a certain amount of excuse. For the school system there is none.{26}

CHAPTER IV

HUMAN FACTORIES

Distinction must be made, of course, in discussing the effects of teaching methods upon children, between the various kinds of schools, and between public instruction and private tuition. It would not be fair to lump them all together, for the evils they produce are by no means distributed by them in equal proportion. One must differentiate. Fundamentally, all education is proceeding on a false principle. In this respect it is necessary to blame education systems, institutions, school teachers, tutors, governesses, and parents alike; for all are engaged in keeping up an educational delusion that is working great harm to the world in general.

But when we come to consider the amount of evil produced by each of these factors, it will be seen at once that there is a good deal to choose between them. The private tutor, under present methods of teaching, is in a far better position to encourage the individual development of a child than is the schoolmaster who has the care of a class. Children can contend, to a certain extent, against the tyranny of the tutor; they can force their own wishes upon his attention should they possess the necessary strength^{27} of character. But the strongest must succumb to the school system. Here there is no latitude to particular pupils, no concession made to idiosyncrasies of mind or character. The system must not be relaxed, and in consequence everybody has to be subjected to precisely the same course of study.

Children begin to receive instruction at a very early age. The usual plan is to take a child the moment it is able to string enough words together to form ideas, and to subject it to a methodical process of teaching. The custom of beginning what is called a child's education at a tender age is verified by the fact that the State now compels, or rather pretends to compel, parents to send their children to school at the age of five, whilst large numbers of the children of the poor are voluntarily sent to school at three years of age, or even younger. It will be observed, therefore, that the State, as far as the masses of the people are concerned, takes the child in hand at the most impressionable period of its existence.

The instruction of infants is not a very difficult task, if all that is aimed at is to teach them certain elementary subjects. At five years of age children will generally learn with avidity. Their minds are just sufficiently formed to be receptive, and as all knowledge is a blank to them they are ready to learn anything, within the limits of their comprehension, that the teacher may choose to put before them. This would place upon the latter a very heavy responsibility if the matter were left entirely to his discretion. But this is by no means the case; the course of instruction is fixed beforehand by the school^{28} managers. It may differ slightly in schools of varying types; but in the main it is identical in all the essentials.

To what extent this variation may occur is, however, entirely beside the point. What should be noted in this connection is that each school, and for the matter of that every private teacher, has a fixed plan of instruction which is more or less rigidly enforced.

In the case of the school, as has already been stated, no attention whatever is paid to individual requirements. All are subjected to exactly the same process, for better or for worse. The child, therefore, as soon as it begins to attend school is compelled to learn certain things.

The stock subjects are reading, writing, and arithmetic. They are necessary accomplishments in all stations of life, and education without them would be practically impossible. I do not disparage them in the least. But there is a good deal to be said about the method of teaching them, and the grave error of making them the principal objective of elementary teaching.

In this connection it is both interesting and instructive to note a significant alteration in the Day School Code issued by the Board of Education. Until quite recently reading, writing, and arithmetic were classed under the Code as 'obligatory subjects' in infant schools. Article 15 of the Code now reads: 'The course of instruction in infant schools and classes should, as a rule, include—Suitable instruction, writing, and numbers,' etc. Compare this with the same passage contained in former Codes. {29} 'The subjects of instruction,' it runs, 'for which grants may be made are the following: (a) OBLIGATORY SUBJECTS—Reading, writing, arithmetic; hereinafter called "the elementary subjects,"' etc.

This amendment is a recognition of the fact that nothing can be more detrimental to education than hard-and-fast rules. It is a protest against the general assumption that the curricula of schools must be of a more or less uniform pattern, and puts an end to the absurdity of the central authority prescribing subjects to be taught in all elementary schools, regardless of varying circumstances or the possibility of improved methods of teaching.

Formerly the pernicious custom existed of examining the pupils, at the annual visit of the inspector, in stereotyped subjects. Matthew Arnold, reporting to the Education Department in 1867, observed: 'The mode of teaching in the primary schools has certainly fallen off in intelligence, spirit, and inventiveness during the four or five years which have elapsed since my last report. It could not well be otherwise. In a country where everyone is prone to rely too much on mechanical processes, and too little on intelligence, a change in the Education Department's regulations, which, by making two-thirds of the Government grant depend upon a mechanical examination, inevitably gives a mechanical turn to the school teaching, a mechanical turn to the inspection, is, and must be, trying to the intellectual life of the school. In the inspection the mechanical examination of individual scholars in reading a short passage, writing a short passage, and working two or three sums, cannot but {30} take the lion's share of room and importance, inasmuch as two-thirds of the Government grant depend upon it.... In the game of mechanical contrivances the teachers will in the end beat us; and as it is now found possible, by ingenious preparation, to get children through the Revised Code

examination in reading, writing, and ciphering without their really knowing how to read, write, and cipher, so it will with practice no doubt be found possible to get the three-fourths of the one-fifth of the children over six through the examination in grammar, geography, and history without their really knowing any one of these three matters.'

Throughout the whole of his career as an inspector of elementary schools Arnold had to reiterate this complaint again and again. He saw the incentive to cramming provided by the mode of distributing the grants, and he perceived the uselessness of the type of instruction engendered by it.

To-day all this has been changed. There is no such thing now as a compulsory annual examination in the three elementary subjects. It has been finally abolished by the central authority. The duty of the inspectors is no longer to examine the children, but to investigate the methods of teaching, the qualifications of the teachers, and so forth. They are, it is true, empowered to examine children when they think it advisable to do so; but they are directed to use this power sparingly, and in exceptional cases.

The Department at Whitehall does not, unfortunately, exist for the purpose of abolishing education{31} systems. It has been called into existence for the sole purpose of distributing grants of public money in aid of elementary education and for the support of training-colleges for teachers. The exercise of this function has necessitated the framing of a code of regulations to be observed by schools wishing to qualify themselves for the grant. This code is revised each year, and has undergone some remarkable changes of late. There is a distinct tendency to make it as elastic as possible, with the obvious aim of encouraging variety in the schools and in the methods of teaching.

For an example of this tendency one need only compare the present conditions attaching to the payment of the principal grant to infant schools with those that were in force a few years ago. The higher grant was formerly given if the scholars were taught under a certificated teacher, or under a teacher not less than eighteen years of age, approved by the inspector, and in a room properly constructed and furnished for the instruction of infants. There was also a proviso that the infants should be taught 'suitably to their age.' The new code contains the following regulation:

'A principal grant of 17s. or 16s. is made to infant schools and classes. The Board shall decide which, if either, of these grants shall be paid after considering the report and recommendation of the inspector upon each of the following four points: (a) The suitability of the instruction to the circumstances of the children and the neighbourhood; (b) the thoroughness and intelligence with which the instruction{32} is given; (c) the sufficiency and suitability of the staff; (d) the discipline and organization.'

Working in this spirit, the Board of Education is able to mitigate some of the evils of a State system. But it cannot attack them at the roots without initiating a complete revolution. Out and out reforms of this kind are only politically practicable when they are demanded by the irresistible voice of a strong public opinion. The public are misled as to the true issues by the intrigues of political parties. The conflict is narrowed down by party politicians, who have particular interests to serve, to a mere squabble about school boards, voluntary schools, local authorities, and religious instruction.

The consequence is that these side issues have come to be regarded as the great education question of the day. It is not easy to stir up any deep feeling about the comparative merits of the two classes of elementary schools. Most people do not care a jot whether their children go to one or the other. It is not the masses who agitate about denominational or secular teaching, but those limited classes who have some direct interest in matters affecting religion.

But who would not cast aside their lethargy, if they were made to understand that the question to be decided is not whether this or that type of school should be supported, but whether the present system of education should be entirely discarded in favour of an altogether new plan? that behind all these petty controversies lie great issues, affecting the fundamental principles of education, which must be pushed to the front unless the degeneration of the race—an inevitable result of the present educational method—is to be continued indefinitely?

Let people consider for a moment what is effected by the present system. The child, as we have seen, is taken by the State at an early age and subjected, for the most part, to a careful drilling in the three elementary subjects. There is no harm in knowing how to read and write; it is a very necessary accomplishment. A little arithmetic is also indispensable to the fulfilment of many of the commonest duties of everyday life. But, apart from the iniquity of cramming or forcing the brain in a particular direction, it must be recollected that by imposing certain subjects upon the undeveloped mind of a child, others are necessarily excluded. The process therefore, when rigidly carried out, has very serious and far-reaching effects. It prevents the development of the mind in any direction but that which is being enforced.

The harm done to the individual child by this means is incalculable. On the very threshold of the development of its faculties according to natural instincts this development is violently arrested by an artificial operation. Nor does the evil end here. This interference with Nature is carried on throughout the whole school career of the child, and the tradition flourishes in a modified form in the colleges and universities. It is, in fact, the vital principle of modern education.

These schools in which the children of the people are taught are nothing more than factories for turning out a uniformly-patterned article. They do not succeed in their

object of conferring what is called an education upon their pupils, but they contrive to drive out all original ideas without implanting any useful knowledge in their place. The general result of this wholesale manufacture of dummies will be dealt with directly. The intention here is merely to point out that the practical working of the machinery of State education is to check the natural development of the mind, and to unfit those whom it has victimized, not only for one, but for all occupations that demand manual dexterity or practical intelligence.{35}

CHAPTER V

THE GREATEST MISERY OF THE GREATEST NUMBER

It is now time to consider the effect of this system of compulsory education upon the masses of the people. In the first two chapters an attempt was made to sketch some of the anomalies brought about by the educational methods of our public schools and universities, and by the pernicious system of public competitive examinations. We will now turn our attention exclusively to the masses, and endeavour to see what national instruction does for them.

The common people labour under the delusion that children who have passed the standards of an elementary school are educated. They have been fitted, according to the popular belief, for a superior station in life. The first ambition of parents is, therefore, for their child to obtain a post suitable to its supposed scholarship.

Of course, the truth is, as we all know, that the product of the public elementary school is utterly useless, and generally wanting in intelligence. But these facts are only discovered by the victims themselves after years of bitter experience. Totally unfitted for any station in life, many of them leave{36} school full of self-confidence in the belief that their superior education will secure them a good opening. Despising all manual labour, they seek situations as clerks, shop-assistants, and such-like. The result is, of course, an over-supply of candidates for employment of this kind. In consequence, the girls have to fall back upon domestic service; while the boys swell the ranks of unskilled labourers and unemployed loafers, or, worse still, betake themselves to a life of dishonesty.

Nowhere are the evil effects of this education system more strikingly illustrated than in the country districts. The children of agricultural labourers and small farmers are given instruction which will be of no earthly use to them in the occupation for which they are naturally fitted. Instead of being prepared for country pursuits, they are given an inferior

type of all-round education which is equally useless everywhere. When they leave school they can read, write, add, subtract, divide, and multiply—after a fashion; they can mispronounce a few French words, without being able to construct a single grammatical sentence or understand a syllable that is said to them; they know enough shorthand to write down simple words at one half the speed of ordinary handwriting; and they have acquired by rote a few dry facts from history and geography, all of which will be totally obliterated from their memories within a space of twelve months.

Shorthand is not a very promising preparation for the plough; and French and mathematics are equally valueless accomplishments for the carting of manure.{37} Dairymaids need neither history nor geography; they can even do without grammar. Consequently these unhappy school-children have been rendered useless for all the practical purposes of the life they ought to lead. The result is inevitable. There is a constant, never-ceasing exodus from the country into the towns. The rural school victims are incited to look for employment in an altogether different sphere from that for which nature originally intended them.

Philosophers and politicians crack their heads over this mysterious problem of town immigration; but it is really a very simple affair. We are pretending to educate the rural population by conferring upon them the blessings of French and shorthand. The natural consequence of our excellent foresight in spreading this type of culture throughout the land is that there is a scarcely remarkable dearth of rural labour. Farm hands are not quite as plentiful as they used to be, and there is some difficulty in getting damsels to churn butter. But, on the other hand, we are driving this mob of cultured yokels into the towns to crowd out local labour, to starve, and to fill the gaols and workhouses.

London has at the present moment mainly to thank this process of 'education' for the overcrowding problem which is becoming every day more dangerous and pressing. It is useless to talk of pulling down slums and building up model blocks, or of inventing fresh means of communication to convey artisans to suburban dwellings, whilst the real cause of the evil is left untouched. Young men and women will continue to pour in from the country districts as{38} long as a smattering of geography and arithmetic flatters them into the delusion that they are educated, and that knowledge of the useless kind that has been drummed into them is the high-road to fortune.

It is, however, of little use to urge overcrowding as a ground for reforming educational methods. Few people are stirred by what to them is a purely abstract question. They see nothing to indicate its existence, and they know nothing of its evils. They seldom walk down the dreary avenues of bricks and mortar which contain the houses of the working classes; and if they do, they scarcely realize the fact that inside the humble, dingy little dwellings whole families are crowded into single rooms, share each other's beds, and are even thankful to find sleeping accommodation upon the floor.

But everybody appreciates and understands the servant question. That touches the comfort of the individual too nearly to be ignored. The rapid extinction of good servants, the insolence and inefficiency of the average domestic—these are facts of everyday life that will come home to the suffering upper and middle classes. It is not because they are educated that domestic servants have deteriorated, however, but on account of the profound state of ignorance in which their elementary schooling has left them, leading them to the misapprehension that, from the standpoint of culture, they are as good as anybody and certainly above their menial position.

Servants have as little need of French verbs and hieroglyphics as the ploughboy or the dairymaid. There are many useful things that might be learnt{39} by a person who wished to be trained for domestic service; but it is rare enough to find a cook that, amongst other items of a liberal education, has been given cooking lessons. In this respect education is like food: what is one man's meat is another man's poison. We do not wish to teach book-keeping to a washerwoman, or fancy ironing to a private secretary. Then, why stuff artisans, domestic servants, and farm labourers with common denominators and the rules of syntax? It may be highly satisfactory to schoolteachers to succeed in making their class read aloud passages from Shakespeare and Milton without dropping more than fifty per cent. of the aspirates, or mispronouncing more than half a dozen multi-syllabic words. But, unfortunately, there is no demand for parlourmaids who can quote 'Hamlet' amid the intervals of waiting at table, or for page-boys capable of spouting 'Paradise Lost' for the intellectual improvement of the servants' hall.

Perhaps these instances show as well as anything the grotesque absurdity of collecting a number of children together, and attempting to teach them things that they are not fitted to do, whilst no effort is made to cultivate in each individual the faculties that are really capable of development. It is not in the least surprising that occupations involving manual labour are for the most part filled with dissatisfied and incompetent grumblers, who have been obligingly provided by a State system of education.

But if any further illustration be needed of the superficiality and harmfulness of the education forced upon the masses, we have it glaringly enough in the{40} cheap literature of to-day. This stupendous mass of bosh could not have been produced unless there were a demand for it. Some people are never tired of abusing the millionaires who have made their fortunes by providing the illiterate nonsense that forms the intellectual food of the vast majority of the public. It is wholly unjustifiable and illogical to blame them. They are not founders of new schools of thought in the field of literature; they are men of business, and do not pretend to be anything worse. As such, it is their vocation to find out what the public want, and to supply it to them. They have no interest in making the million take their literature after it has been passed through a mincer. They chop up news and hash grammar at half price because the patrons of cheap papers and periodicals like their literature served up in that fashion.

It is not the millionaire trader who is to blame for this state of affairs—he merely profits by its existence. The real culprit is the education system, which is the universal provider of the peculiar type of culture that interests itself in the number of beef sandwiches that would be required to encircle the earth, or the rate at which the population of the world would have to increase within a given time to enable its inhabitants, by mounting upon each other's heads, to reach the moon.

The enormous demand for this class of literature is the most pregnant evidence of the miserable effects of misapplied education and defective instruction that could well be brought forward. But it is by no means confined to the uncultured masses who have{41} been driven through the standards of an elementary school. Thousands who have been put through the paces of what is called 'higher education' may be seen in railway-carriages, at health resorts, or in the public libraries, deeply immersed in cheap-jack reading-matter that no self-respecting person of moderate intelligence would care even to be capable of specifying.

This painful sight, which cannot have escaped the notice of the least observant, must surely lead the reflective man or woman to doubt the value of educational methods that have led to no better result. It is monstrous to think of years spent in grinding out syntax rules, mathematics, Latin, French, geography, science, history, composition, and a dozen other branches of knowledge, in order to develop a taste for sensational rags, middle-class magazines, and inferior fiction.

If the process were coupled with no worse consequences than this, nobody of the least pretension to culture would wish to see it continued another day. But we have seen that the mischief goes far beyond mere superficiality and bad taste. It carries its pernicious influence into every social problem by which modern statesmen are perplexed and harassed. From the housing question to the dearth of servants we feel its baneful effects. And as if it were not enough to have unfitted the masses of the people for the occupations best suited to the great bulk of them, to have instilled into the minds of working-men's children, by means of illiterate Shakespeare recitations and burlesque efforts to{42} grasp geography, a contempt for the skilled labour of the artisan—this education process has brought about a general deterioration in the manners of the lower classes that has long been a subject of general complaint.

Nobody wishes to see the common people in a constant attitude of servility towards the classes above them. To thinking people nothing is more painful than to observe such signs of a want of proper self-respect and independence on the part of freeborn men and women of whatever standing in the social scale. But it is a significant fact that educating the masses, in the sense in which that term seems to be generally employed, has had the effect of eradicating from them all respect for education. The educated man of real attainments is not looked up to in the smallest degree by the average individual of the lower orders. It would be useless to quote, in support of a statement made in the

presence of unexceptional members of the working classes, the opinion of any recognised authority. For the matter of that, there are many persons of a higher rank who are supposed to have enjoyed the benefits of a more liberal type of education than that afforded by the elementary school, who are equally unimpressed by the value of expert knowledge.

Whether it is that State-educated youths think that their accomplishments have made them the equals of everybody else, or whether the inanity of the system to which they have been subjected has given them a contempt for learning, it would be difficult to determine. Probably both misconceptions are evenly distributed{43} amongst the victims of the process. But the fact that this should be the case at all speaks eloquently for the crass ignorance which results from the confounding, on the part of so-called educationists, of mere fact-cramming and subject-compulsion with the proper development of the human faculties.{44}

CHAPTER VI

THE OUTPUT OF PRIGS

Having considered the evils produced by sham education, such as is compulsorily given to the masses of the people, we can proceed to examine into the average results effected by more genuine and efficient systems of cramming and instruction. It is not in the least degree necessary, for this purpose, to go into minute comparisons of the various types of secondary schools and colleges that have been established in this country. In the actual method of teaching there is little to choose between them. All have practically a common aim, namely, the preparation of boys and young men for examinations.

Of course, all boys who go to school are not destined for professions that necessitate the passing of an examination, competitive or otherwise. But that does not disturb the school authorities a jot, or involve the slightest relaxation of the school system. The boys are crammed just the same. Whoever wishes to pass through the mill must go in like a pig at one end and come out as a sausage at the other. There is no middle course except the private tutor; and he, owing to the defects of his own early training{45} and to the terrific Conservatism peculiar to his profession, probably knows no better process than the familiar routine of cram and idea-suppression.

The whole of school life is a scramble for marks. The school managers and masters are interested in getting the boys stuffed with facts, dates, figures, and inflections, because the prestige of the school—and consequently its commercial success—is mainly

dependent upon the creditable placing of pupils in public examinations. Therefore the boys are encouraged, or rather compelled, to occupy themselves with what will best conduce to secure this object, regardless of their own wishes or obvious inclinations.

A boy might enter a grammar-school, or one of the great public schools, teeming to his finger-tips with an inborn thirst for scientific knowledge; he might spend all his spare moments making crude experiments with an air-pump, or gazing at planets through a cheap astronomical telescope; he might fail dismally to grasp the rudiments of the Latin grammar, and be incapable of conjugating an irregular verb; but his nose would be kept down to the grindstone of the school curriculum all the same, and not the smallest attention paid to his obvious bent of mind.

He had been placed there, the authorities would say, to receive a general education, and a general education he should have. If during the process all the scientific enthusiasm is ground out of him, that is not the business of the schoolmaster. The boy, for the ordinary purposes of instruction, is an empty bottle into which a certain prescription is to be poured. The prescription has been made up{46} beforehand, and cannot be altered. The school undertakes to administer a draught, but it refuses to bother about diagnosing each case. There is only one method of treatment, and every patient who enters the establishment has to be submitted to it.

There have been, of course, enlightened pedagogues. The names of Arnold and Thring will always stand out prominently in the history of English school life, and it will be a bad day indeed for the youth in our public schools when their traditional influence shall have been entirely obliterated. They grafted upon the established methods of teaching a liberal and broad-minded effort to bring out what was best in each pupil by other influences. 'It is no wisdom,' Dr. Arnold declared, 'to make boys prodigies of information; but it is our wisdom and our duty to cultivate their faculties each in its season, first the memory and imagination, and then the judgment; to furnish them with the means, and to excite the desire of improving themselves, and to wait with confidence God's blessing on the result.'

Edward Thring wrote the following remarks in his diary:

'Education is not bookworm work, but the giving the subtle power of observation, the faculty of seeing, the eye and mind to catch hidden truths and new creative genius. If the cursed rule-mongering and technical terms could be banished to limbo, something might be done. Three parts of teaching and learning in England is the hiding common sense and disguising ignorance under phrases.'

No stranger anomaly can be conceived than that{47} presented by the constant effort of these two eminent headmasters to undo the evils of a universal system of education. It is not often that people strive to set their house in order after this fashion, and all honour is due to them for the courageous endeavour. The mistake they made was in tinkering

with a system inherently bad and useless, instead of taking the bold step of abolishing it altogether and beginning afresh on new and sound principles.

The energies of schoolmasters of the type of Thring and Arnold are, in fact, concentrated mainly upon a constant struggle to prevent the ordinary process of school instruction from producing prigs. Stupid boys are generally rendered more stupid by teaching, for reasons that will be analyzed later on. But boys whose brains are amenable to academic training are liable, unless the environment of the school is peculiarly unfavourable to the development of the species, to become priggish.

It is the purely academic training that produces the prig. Football, cricket, and other athletic sports are not favourable to his growth; and he receives equally little encouragement from his companions. The important point about him is that he is not a natural product at all, but the outcome of an artificial drilling of the mind. In a word, he is the embodiment of the education system, uncorrected by fortuitous influences and conditions. Everybody knows that gracefulness is not acquired by means of stilted lessons in deportment, but that it consists of natural muscular movement untrammelled by self-consciousness or artifice. The same law of nature applies to{48} the working of the brain. Stuffing a boy's head with so much knowledge is not developing his mind, and the result must necessarily be as artificial as the process. The mind becomes incapable of thinking individually and naturally; it becomes pedantic and circumscribed, powerless to give simple expression to simple thoughts; and the prig is made.

It requires a great deal of kicking and hustling on the part of the victim's schoolfellows to arrest this process, and the cure is generally only effected outwardly. Priggishness cannot be eradicated from the system in a moment, even by the most heroic measures. Its excision involves a slow mental process, the converse of that which served to call it into existence. The prig has to divest himself of the false mental outlook imposed upon him by his education, and to begin all over again. It is a hard lesson which can only be learnt in the school of life, generally after humiliating experience and bitter suffering. Many never succeed in learning it. There must be some material to work upon, and probably their individuality, weak at the commencement and therefore doubly in need of tender treatment and fostering care, has been hopelessly crushed out of existence by the conventional training of school and university.

Under present conditions prigs can and do grow up everywhere. In some educational institutions—notably in great public schools like Eton and Harrow—they are more discouraged than in others; but the cramming system has reached such proportions that all schools and colleges are affected in a greater or{49} less degree. They infect our public life, as we have seen; largely recruit our public service; and are in evidence in the pulpit, at the schoolmaster's desk, on public platforms, in the lecture-room of the university, and wherever the services of educated men are employed.

The ideals of men like Arnold and Thring cannot be carried out as long as the examination system puts a premium upon cramming. 'I call that the best theme,' said Dr. Arnold, alluding to original composition, 'which shows that the boy has read and thought for himself; that the next best, which shows that he has read several books, and digested what he has read; and that the worst, which shows that he has followed but one book, and followed that without reflection.'

There is no time nowadays for a boy to read and think for himself. Besides the examinations inside his own school for which he has to be prepared, there are scholarships, university examinations, competitive examinations for the civil service, and a host of other possibilities of the kind, all of which necessitate the acquisition of an enormous number of useless facts in every branch of learning.

Too much attention is concentrated on the admirable physical product of the athletic side of our public school and university life. This advantage of the English system of education has been dwelt upon to such an extent, that people are apt to overlook the fact that, side by side with these fine specimens of healthy and for the most part unintellectual manhood, we are manufacturing a purely academic article{50} of the least inspired and most retrogressive description.

If somebody, wishing to make you acquainted with a friend, says to you: 'I want you to meet So-and-so; he was at Eton and Trinity Hall, and came out tenth in the mathematical tripos,' you know exactly the kind of man to whom you are going to be introduced. He will have a very proper contempt for made-up ties, and will refuse to fasten the bottom button of his waistcoat. You know beforehand the precise point of view that he will take upon every conceivable topic, and the channels in which his conversation is certain to flow.

His entire mental horizon will be bounded by academic conventionalities in such a cast-iron fashion that it would, you are well aware, waste your time to attempt to extend its boundaries by the fraction of an inch. If you say anything yourself out of the beaten track, you know that you will be looked down upon as a fool or a faddist. The Eton stamp will be upon his dress and manners; the Cambridge brand seared into every crevice of his mind. There will be an individuality about him, but it will be an individuality shared in common with hundreds of young men of the same educational antecedents.

That is the fault of the system. It takes away, or fails to evoke, the distinguishing traits of each individual, and substitutes a kind of manufactured personality according to the particular institution, or type of institution, in which the educational metamorphosis has taken place. 'A mob of boys,' said the man who raised Uppingham from complete{51} obscurity to the front rank of public schools, 'cannot be educated.' It is, nevertheless, the process that is going on all over the civilized world. Reform does not

lie alone in making instruction itself more effective. As long as the principle is retained of forcing certain facts and certain subjects into the mind of every boy, the country will continue to breed conventionality, to produce a uniform type of useless mediocrity, and to make prigs.

This is, unfortunately, exactly what the average educationist aims at. There is no disguise about the belief that conventional ideas, and the manufacture of what is called average ability, are the sheet-anchor of the State. And this type of fossilized Conservatism seems to grow in proportion to the number of schools and colleges in the country.

Lower-middle-class young men, of no intellectual predisposition at all, are being turned out on all sides crammed with the narrowest type of educational tradition. Prigs are produced wholesale; the worst and most odious branch of the family being the semi-illiterate prig—the man who gets drummed out of decent regimental messes, the man who wants to go on the stage and declaim Shakespeare through his nose, the man who vulgarizes the public service by dropping his h's in the great Government departments, and others too numerous to be specified.

Everything is vulgar that pretends to be what it is not. Priggishness is an artificial mental condition that is far more common than people generally suspect. We are most of us prigs, if we only knew it. The man who is unable to get rid of conventions and to think for himself is a prig. England is peopled with them. We meet them at every turn; we see them driving the country to the dogs by sheer inability to grasp its needs;—and we send our sons to the schools and universities to be manufactured after the same pattern.

CHAPTER VII

BOY DEGENERATION

If some boys thrive, according to ordinary school standards, on the cramming system, what becomes of those to whose nature the process is entirely antagonistic?

The question is best answered by a glance at the schools themselves. Take one of the great public schools, and it will be found that much the same conditions are prevalent in every class or form. There is a small percentage of boys at the top of each class who are considered the most intelligent, and by whom most of the questions asked by the master are answered. The remaining majority are divided into two sections, one of

which consists of what are termed boys of average ability, whilst the other contains the lazy element, the refractory boys, and the dullards.

In the last chapter we chiefly discussed those individuals who may be taken as representing the average of the best results achieved by higher schools and universities. These form, however, only a fraction of the scholars who pass through such institutions. It still remains for us to discover the rôle which is played by the other four-fifths in school-life.^{54} According to scholastic methods of classification, the bulk of this residue are boys of medium intelligence who plod on without specially distinguishing themselves, and contrive, by dint of industry and application, to blunder through the ordinary course of study without coming to grief.

It would be difficult to conjure up a more melancholy picture than that presented by these plodders, whose work is rendered trebly hard by being performed against the grain. They suffer more under the system than the dull, the lazy, and the fractious, who escape its worst evils, either because some active power of resistance comes to their rescue, or because the mind itself is so formed as to be incapable of receiving instruction imparted on the cramming principle.

But the average mediocrity amongst schoolboys are often inferior in ability both to those who rank above and below them in school attainment. They neither profit by the teaching process, nor do they possess those qualities that would enable them to resist its consequences. Thus they fall between two stools, being carried out of their natural sphere, and at the same time failing to attain such a measure of artificial success as would afford them compensation for the injury.

Success in life is not an easy thing to generalize about. It is, however, important to note as far as possible the results brought about by school education. The boy who is trained to pass examinations has a respectable chance of getting into some branch of the public service; and, as we have seen, it is from^{55} amongst his ranks that the permanent officials of the various departments of Government are recruited. A great number of those who distinguish themselves academically also pass into the teaching profession; though a considerable percentage of graduates, for reasons that will be discussed in due course, drift into the ranks of the unemployed.

The average schoolboy, who does his work mechanically and without enthusiasm, probably furnishes the greatest number of examples of the misplaced individual. His application to his studies is not natural; it is enforced by what is called school discipline. That is to say, the authorities devise every conceivable form of punishment to make a constant grind at obligatory subjects less disagreeable than the consequences of idleness. These are the simple arts by means of which unwilling boys are driven, like cattle, along the highway of what is termed, by an inaccurate application of the English language, knowledge.

Anybody who has been coerced, and *pænaed*, and flogged through the curriculum of a public school will acknowledge that the performance is not an exhilarating one for the victim. It is preposterous to dignify this nigger-driving by the term 'education.' One might as well talk of the Chinese eagerly embracing Christianity, when, as a matter of fact, the missionaries have been forced upon them, like their foreign trade, at the point of the bayonet.

The wonder is that anybody survives the process and retains his sanity. That many nervous temperaments and highly-gifted minds do not survive it is a point of so much importance that it will be dealt with{56} later on in a separate chapter. What needs emphasizing here is that to make boys do certain things under compulsion is not developing their faculties, but is absolutely preventing their development; and secondly, that this infamous but universal proceeding is responsible for a positive degeneration amongst those whom it is supposed to educate and improve.

Dr. Arnold held that a low standard of schoolboy morality was inevitable. 'With regard to reforms at Rugby,' he wrote to a friend, 'give me credit, I must beg of you, for a most sincere desire to make it a place of Christian education. At the same time, my object will be, if possible, to form Christian men, for Christian boys I can scarcely hope to make; I mean that, from the natural imperfect state of boyhood, they are not susceptible of Christian principles in their full development upon their practice, and I suspect that a low standard of morals in many respects must be tolerated amongst them, as it was on a larger scale in what I consider the boyhood of the human race.'

In a letter to another friend he spoke still more strongly on the subject. 'Since I began this letter,' he wrote, 'I have had some of the troubles of school-keeping; and one of those specimens of the evil of boy nature which makes me always unwilling to undergo the responsibility of advising any man to send his son to a public school. There has been a system of persecution carried on by the bad against the good, and then, when complaint was made to me, there came fresh persecution on that very account, and divers instances of boys joining in it out of pure{57} cowardice, both physical and moral, when, if left to themselves, they would rather have shunned it. And the exceedingly small number of boys who can be relied on for active and steady good on these occasions, and the way in which the decent and respectable of ordinary life (Carlyle's "Shams") are sure on these occasions to swim with the stream and take part with the evil, makes me strongly feel exemplified what the Scriptures say about the strait gate and the wide one—a view of human nature which, when looking on human life in its full dress of decencies and civilizations, we are apt, I imagine, to find it hard to realize. But here, in the nakedness of boy nature, one is quite able to understand how there could not be found so many as even ten righteous in a whole city.'

This sweeping statement has been quoted because it comes with double force from an undisputed authority such as the late Dr. Arnold. Everybody who has had experience of

school-life knows that the average boy spends a great deal of his time in cheating the masters, lying to the authorities, and playing every sort and kind of mischievous or disreputable prank that comes into his head. But it is better to have this fact testified to by a man who has been in a position to observe large numbers of boys over a very extended period. The accusation of exaggeration or hasty generalization cannot then be well sustained.

Where, however, I venture to differ with Dr. Arnold is in the assumption that this low standard of morality must be ascribed to boy nature alone. Undoubtedly{58} this is the case in part. But there is a far more potent cause than natural instinct. It is to be found in the system of education which not only fails to develop and encourage the boy's individual tastes or faculties, but actually forces upon him occupations that are, for the most part, absolutely foreign to his nature. This is the real key to the vagaries of boyhood, and without such an explanation one must hold, with the great headmaster of Rugby, that boy nature is inherently bad.

Boys, like other rational beings, must have their interests and amusements. If the legitimate and normal ones are prohibited, solace will be sought in those which are illegitimate and abnormal. By failing to encourage the faculties that nature intended a particular boy to develop, a vacuum is created. This vacuum must be filled up, and it is no earthly use trying to fill it up, against the grain, with mathematical problems or the irregular inflections of Latin verbs. The average boy is as little capable of taking an absorbing interest in these exhilarating features of the school curriculum as would be the average Hottentot.

Every healthy boy stores up energy. It should be the first object of the schoolmaster—if such a being ought to have any existence at all—to see that this energy is not allowed to waste. Natural forces of this kind do not, it must be recollected, evaporate. There they are, and the laws of nature have decreed that they shall be constantly expended and renewed. If this or that boy's store of energy is not turned into one channel, it will expend itself through another.{59} If the schoolmaster were to take the trouble to find out the particular bent of a pupil, and were then to proceed to foster and educate it, all the energy of the boy would be used in this useful and congenial work. But this can never be the case until the present methods of instruction have been revolutionized.

The discipline upon which schools pride themselves so much is an altogether false and pernicious discipline. The only liberty which is vouchsafed to schoolboys is outside of their work. No doubt it is an excellent thing that boys should be free to choose the manner in which they make use of their leisure hours. There would be a great uproar amongst parents if their sons were forbidden to join in the games they wished to play, and compelled to play those for which they had no taste. It would be considered monstrous to remove a boy who was a capital bowler from the cricket-field, and make him go in for fives or racquets; or, to use an Eton illustration, to take a 'wet bob' who

was a promising oarsman and might row in the school eight at Henley, and turn him into the playing-fields to become an inferior 'dry bob.'

But the same arguments that apply to physical discipline apply also to mental discipline. In the class-room there is practically no latitude given to the boy at all. In many schools, it is true, there is the choice of a classical or a modern side; but the choice is the parents', not the boy's. The latter is always treated, in reference to his school-work, as a machine. There is simply the offer of a classical strait-waistcoat or a modern strait-waistcoat; and the{60} boy is put into one or the other according to the fancy of a third person.

Strait-waistcoats have long been discarded in lunatic asylums. It has been discovered by medical experts that anything like coercion is the worst possible treatment for the brain. Whilst our lunatics, however, are treated in this humane and rational spirit, the educational expert is busily occupied in destroying the delicate fabric of the schoolboy brain by the very methods that have been discontinued in the case of madmen.

The school curriculum, or any other arbitrary course of study, is a mental strait-waistcoat. It has a more immoral and degenerating effect upon the mind because it is applied directly. If physical restraint acts perniciously upon the reasoning powers, a far greater degree of harm must be caused by direct mental restraint. Yet nobody, from Arnold and Thring down to the professional crammer of to-day, seems to have grasped this simple fact.

Schoolmasters are like mothers. They imagine that because a boy happens to have survived their system of teaching the latter must necessarily be the one perfect method—just as the fond mother, whose infant has been enabled by means of a phenomenal digestion to outlive a particular food, believes that it is the only food upon which babies can possibly be brought up.

When we come to survey impartially the effects of this system of education upon boys in general, it must surely be brought home to us that something is radically wrong somewhere. If a few manage to{61} survive the treatment and remain the ten righteous individuals, what is to be said of the degeneration of the majority? It is surely absurd, with the anomalies and defects of the whole method of educating youth staring one in the face, to ascribe it to mere boy nature.

The truth is that in boyhood the natural tendencies incline to push their way boisterously to the front. They are constantly trying to find an egress. But the parent and the pedagogue, in their blindness, can only see in this law of nature a wicked and perverse propensity that must be restrained at all hazards by a speedy application of the educational strait-waistcoat.{62}

CHAPTER VIII

THE STRUGGLE OF THE EDUCATED

So far we have chiefly discussed the effect produced upon the individual by a compulsory course of study. It has been seen that he suffers in a number of ways, through being subjected, from his earliest childhood, to a more or less inflexible method of training. All of these, however, have been directly attributable to his education. We may now consider, before pursuing the subject any further, certain disabilities that may be traced to the same cause, but which are brought about indirectly.

It is bad enough, as most of us will have perceived, to compel a boy to learn certain things whether they are congenial to him or not. But it is preposterous that the same stock of knowledge should be forced upon all alike. This is, however, exactly what is being done in every educational establishment throughout the Empire, with the most disastrous consequences to the victims of the system.

Let us turn once more to the map of life for an illustration.

The average educated man begins to learn his alphabet at the age of four or five. During the following years he receives the necessary grounding^{63} to prepare him for the lower forms of a public school. At eleven, or thereabouts, he commences his school career. Throughout the whole of this period he is put through a course of study identical in every respect with that pursued by his schoolfellows. Every boy in the school is crammed with the same facts, and in the same way. The sixth-form boy is exactly like the rest of his class, exactly like the sixth-form boy of ten years ago, and probably exactly like the sixth-form boy of ten years hence. Not only does he possess precisely the same knowledge as his companions, hold the same opinions, and enjoy the same mental horizon, but he has acquired uniform tastes and habits. In other words, the school has stamped upon him a common individuality shared by all its pupils.

After he has left school the same process is carried on at the university. Here he is crammed again with the same facts, the same rules, and the same ideas, borrowed from the same people, that are being dinned into scores of other young men who are working for their degree. Having gone conscientiously through this routine, he takes his degree with the rest.

This aim being accomplished, his educational career is over. He has graduated; that is to say, he has obtained a certificate to the effect that he has acquired a certain regulation stock of knowledge.

What happens next?

The unhappy graduate suddenly makes the discovery that his university qualification is not the ready passport to employment that he had fondly {64} imagined it to be. Unless he has a reasonable chance of a curacy and chooses to enter the Church, or can scrape together a few pupils to coach, or has the means to go on reading for the Bar or cramming for the public examinations, his prospects of immediate starvation are excessively favourable.

It was remarked some years ago by a writer who had spent a great deal of time in investigating life at common lodging-houses in the poorer districts of the Metropolis, that a startling number of university men seemed to drift into them. Yet these are the men who are supposed to have qualified themselves most highly for the holding of good positions. In some way, therefore, it is clear that this academic training has disadvantages which serve to handicap its victims severely in practical life. It cannot be mere accident that those who, according to all educational tradition, are classed as the most fit for responsible employment necessitating good mental ability, actually labour under obvious disabilities in this connection.

Nobody can urge that there is not enough work of a nature demanding high attainments to go round. Literature itself offers an enormous field for the exhibition of special talent; and there are many other walks in life where mental superiority is sadly needed, and which should therefore provide ample work and remuneration for those who show capability and resource. But in spite of all these openings some of our scholars are driven to eke out a miserable pauper's existence in the common lodging-house, or even in extreme cases to solicit parish relief. {65}

The explanation of this strange anomaly lies simply in the fact that the educational mill not only manufactures dummies, but makes them all exactly alike. In the higher types of schools and colleges there is generally a choice of three patterns—the classical dummy, the modern language dummy, and the scientific dummy. But each pattern is very like the other, for all the practical purposes of this life; that is to say, they are all equally useless and equally unfitted for the task of moving forward with the times.

The result of fitting out everybody with a common stock of knowledge is to institute a disastrous form of intellectual competition. Thousands of young men are being equipped annually by our schools and universities for the performance of precisely the same functions. Intelligence brought wholesale to the market in this stereotyped form is in much the same unhappy condition as unskilled labour. There is a supply far in excess of the demand, and consequently employment cannot be found for all.

Perhaps the profession of literature and journalism affords the aptest illustration of the utter folly and uselessness of producing these machine-made scholars, all filled chock-full with the same ideas, facts, figures, and dates. Here, as in reality everywhere else, there is need of originality, intellectual independence, insight, judgment, and

imagination. Journalism wants ideas; facts are amply provided by the news agency and the reporter. The gates of literature are opened wide for striking and vigorous thought, trenchant criticism, and imaginative flights of fancy. {66}

What has the average academically-trained man to offer? He has an assortment of second-hand ideas borrowed from Plato and Socrates, from Ovid and Virgil and Horace; he can echo Voltaire, Goethe, Kant, Shakespeare, Dante; he can dish up Aristotle, Pythagoras, Bacon, Galileo, Newton, Lavoisier, Davy, Faraday and Darwin. He can borrow illustrations from classical mythology; he knows the Dynasties of ancient Egypt; and he is able to furnish, without reference to history, the exact date upon which King John signed Magna Charta, and the precise number of battles fought in the Wars of the Roses.

Such are the literary accomplishments of numberless university graduates, and it is small wonder that they often lead to the workhouse. The demand for the dressed-up ideas of the poets, philosophers, and scientists of a former generation is not great. Those who like their literature at second hand prefer snippets from the Newgate Calendar to the wise saws of Bacon; and they would rather have their blood stirred by quotations from 'The Charge of the Light Brigade,' or 'Pay, pay, pay,' than read a paraphrase of the combined wisdom of all the philosophers of the nineteenth century.

The same argument holds good in relation to other professions and occupations. The university graduate has no practical accomplishments. He may be an ornamental, but he is certainly not *ipso facto* a useful, member of society. The only thing for which he is pre-eminently fitted is to assist others, by means of extension lectures and cramming, to be his companions in misfortune. But this can hardly {67} be designated a beneficial sphere of activity, and he is handicapped in all he undertakes by the fact that thousands of others possess the same educational equipment as himself.

Why should every educated man be like the other? There is absolutely no reason for it. The similarity is purely artificial. Nature never intended all men to be cast in the same mould, and it is only the perversity of man himself that has brought the human race down to such a level. The stupidity of giving every scholar the same mental outfit is so self-evident as scarcely to need further comment. Even following the modern plan of stuffing minds instead of developing them, one would have thought that common sense would dictate the necessity of manufacturing as much variety as possible.

The whole trend of evolution is to differentiate; and if natural laws were not completely disregarded by education systems, the absurdity of filling the world with two or three human species instead of a hundred thousand would never have been perpetrated. As long as this arbitrary interference with Nature is continued, educated men will not cease to be a drug in the market. Its immediate effect is not to endow the individual with special qualities, but to handicap him heavily for the real business of life.

Competition amongst the 'well-educated' is not the result of over-population or of a too liberal supply of competent men. It is caused by uniformity of attainment; and until this is generally realized, one of the most pressing social problems cannot hope to find a solution.{68}

CHAPTER IX

WOMAN'S EMPIRE OVER MAN

Men have always been reluctant to acknowledge the truth about woman's real position in the world. They keep up a beautiful kind of masculine myth about the mastery of the sterner sex and their mental superiority, and they talk of woman in a patronizing way as man's helpmate.

There is no doubt—it is a physiological fact—that man possesses more brain-power or capacity than woman. But woman has, on the other hand, an enormous advantage in the use to which she has put her mental machinery from time immemorial. The truth is that women think out things for themselves a great deal more than does the average man. As, however, they concentrate their attention for the most part on what are called the minor interests of life, whilst men are occupied with bigger and more important things, it has come to be accepted that the mind of woman is inferior to the mind of man.

In one sense this is true. Potentially, woman's mind has not the capacity of man's. One has only to look for female Shakespeares, Newtons, Bismarcks, Raphaels, and Beethovens, to verify the fact beyond dispute. But we are dealing here with existing{69} circumstances, not with potentialities. Therefore I have no hesitation in saying that, as a general rule, women use what brain power they have to much better advantage than men; which amounts to a confession that woman, apart from intellectual specialization, is, on the average, man's mental superior.

This is a sweeping statement to make, but it is made only in the interests of truth, and it admits of a great deal of plausible explanation.

Man's mental training, as has been fully pointed out, consists almost entirely in pouring facts into a vacuum created by the careful elimination of original thought. Until recently, women have not been subjected to this agreeable process. For a very long time they were not educated at all, and when governesses first came into fashion in better class families, the idea was rather to endow girls with a few graceful accomplishments than to cram them with dates and other kinds of mechanical knowledge.

This tradition is still kept up to a certain degree in the higher social circles; but there have also sprung up a large number of girls' colleges, in which all the bad points of masculine education are carefully copied. These colleges are frequented by girls of the upper and middle classes, chiefly the latter, and no doubt they are gradually working a revolution in feminine character. But heredity—especially when it is, within a generation or so, the heredity of long ages—is a very potent factor in the formation of both mind and body, and offers a steady resistance to innovation.{70} The full effects, therefore, of this educational revolution in respect to womankind are not yet apparent.

The net result of this is that the majority of women are still addicted to thought. Facts have not yet entirely taken the place of ideas in their minds, except in extreme cases which may be called exceptional, although it must be confessed that they are becoming every day less rare. They think, no doubt, for the most part about the commonplace incidents of their daily life, and possibly they are given too much to morbid introspection. But anything that serves to make a human being exercise the function for which his brain was originally intended should be regarded with thankfulness. It is a thousand times better for the development of the mind to speculate about the motives of acquaintances, or to philosophize on the shortcomings of the maid-of-all-work, than to babble off the dates of the Sovereigns from William the Conqueror, or to construe Horace's Odes without taking in a syllable of their sense.

Women have thus formed a habit of reflection about trifles, which the more gifted amongst them extend to weightier topics. And it is in this way that they are able to gain an ascendancy over man that is the more potent because it is unobtrusive. The average woman sees things the subtleties of which escape man altogether, and she perceives them because her mind has been trained, by natural development, to observation.

The average man, on the other hand, is the most unobservant creature under the sun. He rarely understands even what is going on under his nose.{71} It is all very well to say that his superior mind is wrapt up in percentages, or absorbed in grand schemes for the regeneration of mankind. The plain truth is that he does not possess the faculty of applying his intelligence to everything within his range of observation. Evolution intended him to possess it; but education systems, which harbour very little respect for the laws of Nature, have found ready means to curb the propensity or to destroy it altogether.

It is small matter for surprise, therefore, that woman should have succeeded in subjecting man to an empire as autocratic as it is, to all outward appearances, unsuspected. Some people maintain that this empire is gained solely by physical attraction; but this contention is disproved easily enough. All women do not possess the charm of beauty; yet there is scarcely a woman of any nationality, or belonging to any station in life, who does not exercise a more or less powerful influence over her menkind.

Husbands are guided by their wives, even in matters of business or affecting public interests, far more than they are generally ready to acknowledge. Staying at a seaside hotel some time ago, I made the acquaintance of a hard-headed Lancashire merchant who had amassed a comfortable independence. In an outburst of confidence he told me one day that he had never taken a single important step in the conduct of his business without consulting his wife, and he also acknowledged that he had never had to regret asking her advice.

The moral of this story is the more significant when it is recollected that in such a case the wife has^{72} not had the same opportunities as her husband of forming a correct judgment. The latter has the business details at his finger-ends; he is acquainted with the person or persons with whom the dealings are taking place; and he has his experience to fall back upon. But somehow or other the wife seems to grasp all the points, and to see more clearly into the motives of the person concerned. 'Why,' she will exclaim to her husband, 'can't you see that So-and-so is trying to bamboozle you?' And, the scales falling from the deluded husband's eyes, he suddenly makes the discovery that his wife thinks where his own powers of reflection are contented to remain dormant.

The fact is, that the habit of thinking cannot be acquired through exercise in mental gymnastics. Philosophers, mathematicians, and men of science are notoriously up in the clouds, and incapable often to a remarkable degree of managing the affairs of everyday life with common sense. Yet these are the individuals who have been subjected to the highest form of what is called mental training. If fact-cramming and mental gymnastics are the best developers of the human mind, these men ought to be perfect models of intelligence. But will any candid-minded person call it the highest form of intellectual development to have a clear conception of the precession of the equinoxes, or to manufacture metaphysical conundrums, whilst remaining utterly incapable of applying common sense to human affairs that demand at least an equal amount of attention?

It is clear that this type of mental training does^{73} not teach people to think at all, but has the contrary effect of restricting the intelligence to an altitude very far beyond the ordinary requirements of our social existence. Man may have a very broad horizon; but the broader it becomes, the further he seems to be transported from the capacity to exercise the normal functions of the brain. To designate this the proper development of the mind would be manifestly absurd; yet many people seem contented to regard it as such, and accept the anomaly without giving its obvious contradictoriness a second thought.

Of course it is not argued that woman's mental training is, or has been, all that can be desired. It is, in her case, more the neglect to apply severe educational methods, than anything else, that has permitted the negative development of her thinking faculties; and this tends to demonstrate all the more conclusively that the real use of the brain is practically destroyed by conventional modes of instruction.

Women, left to their own devices for countless generations, have acquired a faculty that all the education systems in the world have failed to pound into the mind of man. It is their superiority in this respect that has given them far-reaching empire over the opposite sex. That this should be generally appreciated is of the utmost importance, because the modern metamorphosis of woman, if rightly understood, is the best conceivable object-lesson in the evils brought about by the educational methods of the present day. It is not that the academically-trained woman threatens to push man out of his place in the world, but that she is herself in danger of losing the {74} very weapon that has given her so large a share of power and influence.

A great deal of nonsense has been talked and written about the spectacled Girton girl competing with men in knowledge, at the expense of forfeiting their admiration and thereby losing her vantage-ground. Spectacles do not enter into the matter at all. As has already been pointed out, physical attraction has nothing, or very little, to do with feminine wire-pulling.

Women derive their real powers from a gift of trained observation, and from the subtlety conferred upon them by the capacity to apply their intelligence to the numerous small matters which go to make up the sum of human life. Their minds will no longer develop these powers when they are systematically subjected to a process of education which has invariably failed to evoke them in the opposite sex. And with the loss of them, woman is bound also to lose the empire which she has hitherto exercised over masculine nature.

From this point of view alone, the education of women on the modern system is much to be deplored. There is no doubt that women in general have always exercised their predominant influence for the good of mankind. Striking exceptions might easily be adduced from history; but, on the whole, it must be acknowledged that woman has seldom abused her power. Therefore, anything that is calculated to undermine or destroy this favourable influence on human affairs cannot be regarded as otherwise than pernicious.

The more the idea spreads that girls must be {75} given the same educational equipment as boys, the more rapid will be the degeneration of woman. It is a well-known fact in the medical profession that weakly boys are often unable to withstand the strain of school cramming; therefore girls, with their more delicate organization, will suffer proportionately in a greater degree. Physical training, of course, obviates a great deal of this evil. But the same thing is bound to happen in the case of girls as has already been experienced where boys are concerned; that is to say, the most promising intellects will be sacrificed, partly through the ambition of the school authorities, whose principal anxiety is to see their pupils distinguish themselves in examinations, and partly owing to the fact that exceptional ability so often implies a nervous temperament and delicate physique.

Women, it must be acknowledged, by no means use their faculties of thinking and observation to the best advantage. The conclusions at which they arrive are often far too definite, and have been formed in too great haste. So rapid is this operation of thought that it often becomes a mere intuition. Yet the remarkable accuracy of a woman's intuitions is evidence that there underlies them some intellectual process resting on a more solid basis than conjecture or guesswork.

It is the crude and untutored stage of development of the thinking faculty in woman that causes it to work intuitively, instead of by the slower and sounder processes of logic. To neglect a faculty is by no means synonymous with developing it. Hence woman's powers of thought and observation are embryonic rather than matured. The work they{76} perform is not a tithe of what would be accomplished by them under the auspices of judicious encouragement and skilled training. The faculty has neither been destroyed by over-cramming nor fostered by enlightened treatment. It has simply been allowed to lie more or less dormant, according to the natural environment of the individual.

If man, with his superior brain capacity, were encouraged to cultivate the habits of observation at present restricted to woman, and to apply his intelligence to everything, instead of to a few selected objects, the ratio of the world's progress would be enormously increased. Who first started the notion that man is being manufactured into a superior article, and that woman cannot do better than submit herself with all haste to the same process, I do not know. At any rate, it is a disastrous doctrine, and the sooner the fallacy of it is perceived the more chance there will be of saving future generations of women from the blunder that is handicapping the masculine sex at the present moment.

It would be a grand thing if educationists could be persuaded to open their eyes to the fact that women, having been providentially saved from school instruction for past generations, have been enabled to preserve mental faculties that no amount of cramming and corporal punishment has ever succeeded in awakening in man. They would then cease from their ignorant attempt to deprive woman of her intellectual gift, and possibly even do something towards securing man a little mental room for the installation of his own thinking faculty.{77}

CHAPTER X

YOUTH AND CRIME

We now come to the consideration of an aspect of the educational problem that involves questions of great difficulty and importance. The discussion has hitherto been limited to the lesser evils attributable to the forcing upon the masses of the people a useless and unsuitable kind of education. But there are far graver possibilities than the mere unfitting of large numbers of individuals for the occupations their natural propensities intended them to pursue.

People are, as has been pointed out, driven by the stupidity of the teaching system into all kinds of uncongenial employment. The suffering and waste caused by this constant production of the unfit are incalculable. It is scarcely to be wondered at that some persons have formed the ingenious theory that this world is hell itself, and that we are now actually undergoing our punishment in purgatory. Certainly there is some ground for the supposition in the fact that the lives of so many of us seem to have been ordered in direct opposition to our individual tastes and wishes.

This is bad enough. The question we have to face now is whether we have not to thank education{78} systems for something a great deal worse. Mere unhappiness is not necessarily soul-destroying. But there is only too good reason to suppose that the evil effects of the mock education provided by the State do not stop at making its victims unhappy, but even go so far as to plunge a certain proportion of them into actual crime.

At the outset it must be acknowledged that the allegation is very difficult to prove. No satisfactory evidence on the point is derivable from published statistics. It is quite possible to determine by means of the latter how many young persons between the ages of twelve and twenty-one have been convicted of indictable offences during the year. But everybody who is acquainted with criminology, or who is conversant with the compilation of statistical information, must be well aware of the futility of depending upon the apparently clear testimony of official figures.

It would be extremely useful to find out whether juvenile offenders have increased or decreased since the institution of compulsory education. Statistics relating to this subject are procurable, but it is impossible to place any reliance upon them.

In the first place, there is nothing to show the cause of any such increase or decrease in the offences committed by young persons. It may be due to a variety of circumstances, none of which can be accurately determined. For instance, it is a well-known fact that youthful offenders have of late years been treated by magistrates with ever-increasing leniency. Consequently, fewer convictions take place now, in regard to this class of offence, than was the{79} case some years ago. The number of the convictions is, therefore, no guide at all as to the increasing or diminishing proportion of youthful criminals.

Then there is the increased vigilance of the police, which leads to the more frequent detection of crime; whilst, as a set-off against this, there is the fact that education

teaches the criminal, by assisting him to the reading of police-court reports and sensational storyettes, to be more wary.

Besides these, there is the important consideration that by far the larger number of young persons guilty of offences of various kinds are not prosecuted at all. This is due to two causes: firstly, to the fact that in the majority of cases they are not found out; and secondly, that many people are reluctant to bring youthful offenders within the meshes of the criminal law, as a conviction, whether or not it be followed by punishment, generally spells ruin to the person who has been found guilty.

There may be, and there probably are, many other and even more substantial reasons for discrediting statistics that are commonplaces to experts in crime. But those that have been cited, and which are at once suggested by common sense, fully suffice to show the impossibility of arriving at satisfactory conclusions on the basis of statistical tables published by the authorities.

The Blue-book containing the latest judicial returns attempts to deal with this question of the increase or decrease of juvenile crime; figures being only available, however, from the year 1893. 'To answer this question,' it is stated, 'it is necessary to ascertain the proportion which youthful offenders bear to the total number of convicted persons. This is given in the following table, where it will be seen that the proportion of offenders under the age of twenty-one remains almost constant:

**'PROPORTION OF YOUTHFUL OFFENDERS CONVICTED OF INDICTABLE
OFFENCES TO TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONS CONVICTED.**

Age.	1893.	1894.	1895.	1896.	1897.	1898.
	Per cent.	Per cent.	Per cent.	Per cent.	Per cent.	Per cent.
Under 12	4.6	4.9	4.6	5.6	5.6	5.6
12 and under 16	15.0	15.2	13.4	14.5	14.0	14.5
16 and under 21	21.2	22.0	21.8	19.7	19.5	20.2
Total under 21	40.8	42.1	39.8	39.8	39.1	40.3

'The general result is that the number of youthful offenders has diminished with the general diminution of crime, but that they still bear almost the same ratio as before to the total of criminals.'

All this is, as has been pointed out, absolutely misleading. The number of persons convicted has nothing whatever to do with the increase or decrease of crime; and the proportion of youthful offenders to the total number of persons convicted is only calculated, in view of the great amount of clemency shown to young people both by magistrates and by the public, to give one a wholly false impression as to the prevalence of juvenile crime.

It would be easy to take the criminal statistics of foreign countries, and to prove from them that the education of the masses there has brought about an{81} overwhelming increase in the proportion of crimes and offences committed by young persons under the age of twenty-one.

In Germany, Austria, France, Russia, Italy, Holland, and the United States juvenile crime has, according to statistical information, largely increased during the last quarter of a century. But, without making an exhaustive inquiry into the alterations that may have taken place in the law, the relative activity of the police, and a dozen other contingencies, it would not be honest to attempt to draw definite conclusions from these figures.

One has, after all, in these matters to fall back upon logic and common sense. There is the solid fact that youthful criminals abound in spite of education systems, and although there is a considerable leakage in respect to school-attendance, it does not follow that juvenile offenders are drawn from this truant class to a disproportionate extent. It must be remembered, on the contrary, that a great amount of non-attendance at school is due to the employment of children—especially in rural districts, where the members of School Boards are often the very people who extract most profit from child labour.

A prison chaplain of great experience, the Rev. J. W. Horsley, wrote, in his interesting work on 'Prisons and Prisoners': 'While covetousness is a factor of crime, the tools education places in the hands make crimes of greed more possible, and possible at an earlier age than in past generations. This week I got the Church of England Waifs and Strays Society to take under its care a child of ten,{82} who had written, filled up, and cashed, a postal order that it might buy more lollipops. Increased knowledge, especially when not adequately accompanied by moral and religious education, will create new tastes, desires, and ambitions, that make for evil as well as for good. Let instruction abound, let education in its fullest sense more abound, but let us be aware of the increased power for evil as well as for good that they produce, and at any rate let us not imagine that education and crime cannot co-exist. Crime is varied, not abolished, not even most effectually decreased, by the sharpening of wits.'

Speaking of intemperance in relation to crime, he states that: 'Brain-workers provide the most hopeless cases of dipsomania. Increased brain-power—more brain-work; more brain-exhaustion—more nervous desire for a stimulant, more rapid succumbing to the alcoholic habit—these are the stages that can be noted everywhere among those who have had more "schooling" than their fathers. Australia consumes more alcohol per head than any nation. In Australia primary education is more universal than in England, and yet there criminals have increased out of all proportion to the population. Of much crime, of many forms of crime, it is irrefragably true that crime is condensed alcohol, and it is certainly not true that the absolutely or comparatively illiterate alone comprise those who swell these categories.'

I have taken pains to ascertain the opinions of several of the chaplains attached to the great convict prisons, and they are practically unanimous in condemning the present system of education.{83}

'It is liable,' writes one of these experienced clergymen, 'to foster conceit, discontent, a disinclination to submit to discipline and authority, and a dangerous phase of ambition, which are fruitful sources of that kind of crime which is in these days most prevalent.... This superficial education causes, I think, self-deceit as well as self-conceit, and makes young people imagine that because, in addition to what they have learnt, they can present a good outward appearance, they are qualified to fill any kind of appointment with success.

'I think, also,' he goes on to say, 'that it leads them in their desire to rise in the social scale to attempt by dishonest means to live at a higher rate than is justifiable, to gamble and speculate, in order to keep up a false position. I have come across those who have fallen where this has confessedly been the case, and who have lamented that such wrong ideas had been put into their heads. Young people now look upon many honourable and useful employments as beneath them, and there is a general rush for those which seem to offer a better social position.'

The conventional belief in the efficacy of cramming boys with moral platitudes and all kinds of commonplace facts and theoretical knowledge is so ingrained that there is a natural reluctance to ascribe any evil effects to the process of education. I am contented, however, to let the facts speak for themselves. It cannot well be disputed that unsuitable education, or sham education, or whatever one may like to call it, is the direct cause of widespread dissatisfaction amongst the very classes from which the{84} majority of criminals are recruited. Whilst vast numbers of people are constantly being unfitted for the commonest occupations of life, there must result an overcrowding of the callings which are considered suitable to the dignity of those who have eaten the unripe fruit of the elementary tree of knowledge.

It is self-evident that the unsuitably educated have much greater incentive to wrongdoing than the merely illiterate, and it is also a corroborative fact that by far the greater proportion of criminals have been taught at least to read and write. Given two boys, one of whom had acquired a smattering of facts at school and had learnt the Catechism very perfectly by rote, whilst the other had merely been encouraged to apply a little common sense to manual labour, who would have any hesitation in pointing out the former as the more likely to fall into evil ways?

Therein lies the supreme foolishness of modern methods of instruction. All the moral aphorisms in the world will not help a boy to be honest if he is at the same time unfitted for his station in life. People do not need moral instruction; they acquire all their morality in the school of life. It is impossible to teach boys and girls theoretically to be

virtuous. All that can be done is to turn them into first-class hypocrites, ready to quote texts and to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles, whilst they are busy breaking the Ten Commandments every day of the week.

A surprising amount of virtue would come into{85} the world of its own accord if a little more pains were taken to preserve for each individual the environment to which he is adapted by nature. This life has become such a mockery that people talk of heaven as a state in which every person will be free to do the things he likes best—as if that blissful condition were utterly unattainable here.

Whilst such anomalies exist as those which curse the existence of the majority upon this earth, criminals will continue to be produced. And if we concede that these anomalies are directly or indirectly brought about by false and irrational methods of educating the youth of the country, we must also allow that education helps to manufacture criminals and to encourage crime.{86}

CHAPTER XI

MENTAL BREAKDOWN

It was frankly stated in the last chapter that there is no concrete evidence of a reliable nature as to the immoral effects of our education system. The inquirer has to depend rather upon the logic of philosophical speculation than upon the testimony of our available statistics, common sense being generally a far more truthful witness than figures that can be manipulated to mean almost anything.

But when we come to inquire into the physical evils that are produced by cramming and injudiciously-applied instruction, it must be acknowledged that the evidence as to their existence rests upon a much more solid foundation. Clever brain specialists, who have made a lifelong study of mental diseases and the causes of mental breakdown, are in a position to state very definitely, from actual experience, whether or not the cramming system of modern education is productive of physical ill on a large scale.

We all of us know, probably, of some isolated instances here and there where the severe strain of cramming for a competitive examination has resulted in loss of health and physical breakdown. Some are even aware of cases in which the unhappy victim of{87} overwork has lost his reason altogether, and has been compelled to be placed under restraint. But it is only the physician who has made a special study of mental diseases that is in a position to form wide and accurate generalizations on the subject.

In approaching this question, therefore, I have realized the importance of obtaining the opinions of experts who are alone qualified to express a well-balanced judgment upon a matter demanding knowledge and opportunities of observation of a very special nature. Accordingly, I have consulted some of the greatest brain specialists in this country, and the brief remarks that I am enabled to make on the subject of educational cramming and mental breakdown are chiefly based upon the valuable hints for which I am indebted to them.

To take the case of healthy children first, it is satisfactory to learn upon high authority that they do not suffer much physical harm from the effects of overwork. What happens in their case is that the vigorous and healthy brain offers a sound resistance to the stuffing process, and speedily forgets what has been forced into it. From an educational point of view this is, of course, very disastrous; but as far as health considerations are concerned it affords a certain amount of consolation.

This is to say, one must bear in mind, that modern methods of education are only salutary as long as they fail altogether to affect the intelligence. The moment they prove themselves to be efficacious they become an immediate source of danger.

It follows from this fact that stupid children are{88} as well protected against the evil effects of the education system as the healthy children. In fact, to a large extent the stupid children are the healthy ones by reason of their stupidity. It is, however, a great mistake to suppose that a stupid child necessarily implies one that is in any sense deficient mentally. The dull schoolboy often proves in after life to be the brilliant man. All that his dulness need be taken to signify is that his mind is not receptive to the subjects which are being forced upon it. Linnæus was very stupid at Latin until an enlightened physician, who was aware of his passion for botanical study, suggested his reading Plinius; and although he may not have imbibed very accurate information about natural history from that philosopher, he succeeded in making immediate progress in the Latin language.

There should be, under a rational system of education, no such thing as a stupid child. What is, after all, stupidity or dulness in a schoolboy? It simply means that the boy's faculties are undeveloped, and that no amount of fact-cramming has succeeded in developing them. The whole mischief lies, of course, in the fact that the school is not trying to develop the boy's own faculties at all, but merely to force him to adapt himself to its own curriculum and conventionality.

The danger to the brain of the healthy or stupid child is not over-development but under-development. It is not they who suffer in the worst sense from the evil effects of over-education, but the gifted children, as they are called, or those whose quick, nervous{89} intellects are most susceptible to the process of receiving any kind of instruction.

It is the nervous boy or girl who generally makes the most promising pupil. A natural inclination to study leads children of this type to prefer the schoolroom to the playground. The boy who works hard to get to the top of his class, or to pass an examination, or to obtain a scholarship, is the one least given to games, and, in consequence, the weakest physically.

These are the very children whom the teacher is most tempted to encourage to do more work than is good for them. The process of their mental development is so rapid that it needs no stimulation from outside. But that is not, unfortunately, the concern of the school authorities. The anxiety to produce scholars who will distinguish themselves in public examinations, and thereby advertise the school, invariably leads the schoolmaster to cram and stuff the brains of the brightest and most forward boys.

There is special danger in over-working boys or girls of this type, because the brain is not strong enough to withstand the pressure. The result is never good, and in extreme cases it is as bad as it could possibly be. It follows, in fact, as a matter of course, that the finest and most sensitive intellects are the first to succumb to the pernicious effects of over-cramming the brain. There is a strain that can only be endured by second-rate minds, and it is not, therefore, the intellectually fittest who are encouraged to survive under the present system.

What has been stated above refers rather to the {90} higher class of schools and colleges, which prepare boys for examinations and academic distinctions of various kinds, than to the elementary schools to which the children of the poor are commandeered. In the latter establishments a special barbarity takes place which has been so widely discussed in Parliament and in the newspapers that I will do no more here than allude to it in passing.

I refer to the forcing of instruction upon under-fed school-children.

Apart from the gross inhumanity of the proceeding, there is the indisputable fact that the compulsory teaching of children whose bodies have not been properly nourished tends to weaken the intellect. If these children were subjected to a process of cramming such as is usual in the higher schools, their minds would undoubtedly break down altogether. As it is, the comparatively mild method of the elementary school does not effect anything worse in such cases than the prevention of the development of the mind, which is one degree better than complete breakdown or insanity.

'The School Board system of cramming with smatterings,' wrote one of the greatest mental specialists in the world in reply to my inquiries, 'instead of teaching their victims to think—even if only by teaching one subject well—is perhaps responsible for some positive mental breakdown; but probably the main harm of it is that it stifles and strangles proper mental development.' 'Undeveloped mentality,' he says in conclusion, 'is perhaps the principal fault of our educational system (so-called).'

{91}

Another distinguished physician writes to me from a lunatic asylum:

'We have had a few cases who have broken down, the results of working for scholarships; also we have had one or two cases of ladies who have broken down working for higher examinations. Dr. ——— and myself both feel certain that there is a good deal to be said against the increased pressure put upon young adolescents at schools. From my own experience I know that boys who were considered especially clever, and were high up in forms in the public school I was at, have most of them now dropped back, and are very mediocre. On the other hand, many who matured slowly have continued to advance. This is only an observation, and has many exceptions; but it is an observation that, as time passes, is more fully confirmed.'

It is not necessary to add anything to these valuable expressions of opinion, proceeding from eminent men of wide experience, who are far more capable judges than the layman who has no scientific knowledge and a necessarily limited range of observation.

Facts speak very eloquently for themselves. If brain specialists are continually coming across cases of mental breakdown resulting from cramming or over-education, it is quite clear that a system which is productive of such evils must be altogether defective in principle and wanting in common sense.{92}

CHAPTER XII

EVIDENCE OF HISTORY

After an exhaustive inquiry into the multifarious evils which must be laid at the door of education, it is refreshing to turn to history for illustrious examples of men who not only did not owe their greatness to academic training, but who actually owed it to what would nowadays be designated a neglected education.

The chronicles of the past teem with instances of youths who have developed into brilliant men, in spite of the fact that they had either had no schooling at all, or had been considered the dunces of their class. It would, in fact, be far more difficult to supply illustrations of great men who have succeeded on account of their academic distinction, than to give examples of those who failed to distinguish themselves at school, but who nevertheless became famous afterwards as men of unusual talent.

When Napoleon Bonaparte, at the age of fifteen, left the military college of Brienne, where he had been a pupil for five years and a half, the inspector of military schools gave him the following certificate:

'M. de Buonaparte (Napoleon), born August 15, 1769; height 4 feet 10 inches 10 lines; is in the{93} fourth class; has a good constitution, excellent health, character obedient, upright, grateful, conduct very regular; has always been distinguished by his application to mathematics. He knows history and geography very passably. He is not well up in ornamental studies or in Latin, in which he is only in the fourth class. He will be an excellent sailor. He deserves to be passed on to the military school of Paris.'

This was an optimistic description of the youthful Napoleon's accomplishments, for he was, as a matter of fact, so backward in Latin that his removal to Paris was opposed by the sub-principal of the college. According to the testimony of his schoolfellow and biographer, M. de Bourrienne, he exhibited backwardness in every branch of education except mathematics, for which he showed a distinct natural bent.

The only professor at Brienne who took any notice of Napoleon was the mathematical master. The others thought him stupid because he had no taste for the study of languages, literature, and the various subjects that formed the curriculum of the establishment; and as there seemed no chance of his becoming a scholar, they took no interest in him.

'His superior intelligence was, however, sufficiently perceptible,' writes M. de Bourrienne, 'even through the reserve under which it was veiled. If the monks to whom the superintendence of the establishment was confided had understood the organization of his mind, if they had engaged more able mathematical professors, or if we had had any incitement to the study of chemistry, natural philosophy, astronomy,{94} etc., I am convinced that Bonaparte would have pursued these sciences with all the genius and spirit of investigation which he displayed in a career more brilliant, it is true, but less useful to mankind. Unfortunately, the monks did not perceive this, and were too poor to pay for good masters.... The often-repeated assertion of Bonaparte having received a *careful education* at Brienne is therefore untrue.'

Napoleon's military bent showed itself whilst he was at the College of Brienne. Heavy snow fell during one winter, and prevented him from taking the solitary walks that were his chief recreation. He therefore fell back upon the expedient of getting his school companions to dig trenches and build snow fortifications. 'This being done,' he said, 'we may divide ourselves into sections, form a siege, and I will undertake to direct the attacks.' In this way he organized a sham war that was carried on with great success for a fortnight.

This brief sketch of Napoleon Bonaparte's schooldays has been given in order to show that the development of his genius owed nothing to academic training. Without being actually a dunce, he was backward in all the subjects except the one in which he took a vivid interest; and, doubtless, had he cared as little for mathematics as for Latin, he would have left Brienne with a reputation for profound stupidity.

The school career of his great opponent, Wellington, was even less distinguished. Tradition has handed down to posterity no further details regarding his Eton days beyond the record of a fight with Sydney Smith's elder brother 'Bobus.' Alluding to him as{95} a dull boy, Mr. Smiles states, in a footnote, in his book on 'Self-Help': 'A writer in the *Edinburgh Review* (July, 1859) observes that "the Duke's talents seem never to have developed themselves until some active and practical field for their display was placed immediately before him. He was long described by his Spartan mother, who thought him a dunce, as only 'food for powder.' He gained no sort of distinction, either at Eton or at the French Military College of Angiers." It is not improbable that a competitive examination, at this day, might have excluded him from the army.'

Lord Clive was a perfectly hopeless youth from the schoolmaster's point of view. He loathed work, and was always up to some prank or other. In the vain hope of inducing him to learn something, he was sent to four schools in succession; but, with a single exception, every master under whom he was placed declared him to be an incorrigible idler. The exception was Dr. Eaton of Lostock, who predicted a great career for Clive, provided an opportunity were afforded him for the exercise of his talents.

At Market Drayton he amused himself by organizing a band of idle scamps, who went about threatening to smash the windows of tradespeople unless they paid a fine of apples or pence; and on one occasion he alarmed the inhabitants of the town by climbing a church steeple and seating himself upon a stone spout near the top.

A man of the same stamp who received the scantiest education was George Washington. He is described as having been given a common-school{96} education, with a little mathematical training, but no instruction whatever in ancient or modern languages.

Christopher Columbus, another adventurous spirit, owed very little to his schooling. 'He soon evinced a strong passion for geographical knowledge,' writes Washington Irving in his interesting *Life of the explorer*, 'and an irresistible inclination for the sea.... His father, seeing the bent of his mind, endeavoured to give him an education suitable for maritime life. He sent him, therefore, to the university of Pavia, where he was instructed in geometry, geography, astronomy and navigation.... He remained but a short time at Pavia, barely sufficient to give him the rudiments of the necessary sciences; the thorough acquaintance with them which he displayed in after-life must have been the result of diligent self-schooling, and of casual hours of study amidst the cares and vicissitudes of a rugged and wandering life.'

No better instance of the advantage of natural development and self-culture could be afforded than by the career of Dr. Livingstone. Working in a cotton factory as a boy of ten, he studied scientific works and books of travel, besides the classics, not only at night, but during the hours of labour.

'Looking back now at that life of toil,' he wrote afterwards, 'I cannot but feel thankful that it formed such a material part of my early education; and, were it possible, I should like to begin life over again in the same lowly style, and to pass through the same hardy training.'

Dr. Adam Clarke, the celebrated divine, scholar, and philanthropist, was a regular dunce in his early youth. It was only with difficulty, and an undue proportion of whacking, that the elements of the alphabet were driven into his head by an impatient teacher—a mode of instruction that probably caused him to remark, in after life, that 'many children, not naturally dull, have become so under the influence of the schoolmaster.'

It is related of Dr. Clarke that when he reached the middle of 'As in præsentī,' in Lilly's Latin Grammar, he came to a dead stop and could get no further. His fellow-pupils, however, jeered him to such an extent that he determined to go on and conquer the difficulty. And this resolution seems to have helped him considerably, as, instead of the grammar being forced into him, he began to study and think for himself.

Nevertheless, he always found great difficulty in learning anything at school, but was passionately devoted to reading imaginative books and stories of adventure, such as 'Jack the Giant-killer,' 'Arabian Nights,' 'The Pilgrim's Progress,' 'Sir Francis Drake,' and a host of similar works. To these, in fact, and not to his painfully acquired school education, he was wont to attribute the formation of his literary taste.

Disraeli's education was by no means thorough. There is no record of his having distinguished himself academically in the slightest degree. It is related of him, on the contrary, that he was such a duffer at classics as to be incapable of grasping the rule that 'ut' should be followed by the subjunctive mood. The following account of Disraeli's schooldays, given by one of his school-fellows, is quoted by Sir William Fraser:

'I cannot say that Benjamin Disraeli at this period of his life exhibited any unusual zeal for classical studies; and I doubt whether his attainments in this direction, when he left the school for Mr. Cogan's at Walthamstow, reached higher than the usual grind in Livy and Cæsar. But I well remember that he was the compiler and editor of a school newspaper, which made its appearance on Saturdays, when the gingerbread-seller was also to be seen, and that the right of perusal was estimated at the cost of a sheet of gingerbread, the money value of which was in those days the third of a penny.'

Turning to literary men, we find an imposing array of dunces. I have not had time to examine into the school experiences of more than a limited number of great names. If the reader is anxious to pursue the investigation further, he will doubtless find that there is scarcely a famous man of letters who made his mark at school or university.

The first person to teach Oliver Goldsmith his letters was a woman, who afterwards became village schoolmistress, named Elizabeth Delap. She did not form a very flattering opinion of her young pupil. 'Never was so dull a boy,' she was wont to declare; 'he seemed impenetrably stupid.' From this kind but indiscriminating teacher Oliver gravitated to the village school, where he learnt nothing. Thence he was sent to Elphin; and of this period of his school life Dr. Streat says: 'He was considered by his contemporaries and school-fellows, with whom I have often conversed on the subject, as a stupid heavy blockhead, little better than a fool, whom every one made fun of.'

Goldsmith has himself, in his 'Inquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning,' recorded some very striking impressions as to the value of academic success. 'A lad whose passions are not strong enough in youth,' he writes, 'to mislead him from that path of science which his tutors, and not his inclination, have chalked out, by four or five years' perseverance, probably obtains every advantage and honour his college can bestow. I forget whether the simile has been used before, but I would compare the man whose youth has been thus passed in the tranquillity of dispassionate prudence to liquors that never ferment, and consequently continue always muddy. Passions may raise a commotion in the youthful breast, but they disturb only to refine it. However this be, mean talents are often rewarded in colleges with an easy subsistence.'

Another 'impenetrable dunce,' according to the opinion of his tutor, an eminent Dublin scholar, was Richard Sheridan. He was afterwards sent to Harrow, where he earned for himself a great reputation for idleness. Dr. Parr, one of the under-masters, wrote to Sheridan's biographer the following expression of opinion:

'There was little in his boyhood worth communication. He was inferior to many of his schoolfellows in the ordinary business of a school, and I do not remember any one instance in which he distinguished himself by Latin or English composition, in prose or verse.... He was at the uppermost part of the fifth form, but he never reached the sixth, and, if I mistake not, he had no opportunity of attending the most difficult and the most honourable of school business, when the Greek plays were taught—and it was the custom at Harrow to teach these at least every year. He went through his lessons in Horace and Virgil and Homer well enough for a time. But, in the absence of the upper master, Dr. Sumner, it once fell in my way to instruct the two upper forms, and upon calling up Dick Sheridan, I found him not only slovenly in construing, but unusually defective in his Greek grammar.... I ought to have told you that Richard, when a boy, was a great reader of English poetry; but his exercises afforded no proof of his proficiency.'

The latter statement speaks volumes for a method of teaching which failed to evoke, even in such a master of English literature as Sheridan eventually proved himself to be, a proper development of his greatest talent. No doubt the exercises in which so little proficiency was shown were compulsorily executed against the grain, being of such a

pedantic character that no sane schoolboy could possibly be found to evince the smallest interest in them.

Dean Swift and Sir Walter Scott were both dull boys. The former says of himself that he was 'stopped of his degree for dulness and insufficiency.' Scott, in his autobiographical sketch, does not make himself out to have been the dunce that he really{101} was supposed to be at school. If not bright at his lessons, however, he was certainly clever in other ways and capable of thinking for himself. An excellent illustration of this is contained in the story that though Scott, as a boy, used invariably to go to sleep in church in the course of the sermon, yet, when questioned about the latter afterwards, he was generally able to sketch out most of the points dwelt upon by the preacher—the explanation being, of course, that, given the text, he was able to follow the probable train of thought inspired by its wording. Summing up Scott's attainments, a biographer gives expression to the opinion that he was 'self-educated in every branch of knowledge he ever turned to account in the works of his genius.'

Neither Burns nor Carlyle was a scholar. The former received a grounding in grammar, reading, and writing. He acquired a little French, but learnt no Latin at all. Whatever he knew he owed to the fact that he exercised his own taste for knowledge by choosing his own books and devouring only what appealed to his mind. Carlyle, like many another famous man of letters, had little Latin and less Greek. 'In the classical field,' he wrote, 'I am truly as nothing.' For mathematics he showed a certain amount of inclination, but even in that field did not succeed in carrying off any prizes. His own opinion of a conventional education is very tersely rendered by his exclamation: 'Academia! High School instructors of youth! Oh, ye unspeakable!'

The poet Wordsworth was educated at the grammar school at Hawkshead. He always declared that the{102} great merit of the school was the liberty allowed to the scholars. No attempt was made to cram or to produce model pupils. Within limits they appear, in fact, to have been allowed to read precisely what they pleased. In this way Wordsworth received in every sense of the term a liberal education; and when he went to Cambridge, 'he enjoyed even more thoroughly than at Hawkshead whatever advantages might be derived from the neglect of his teachers.'

The poet had a great contempt for academical training, and refused to go through the usual Cambridge course. He finally graduated as B.A. without honours, afterwards recording his indifference to academic distinction in the well-known lines:

Of College labours, of the Lecturer's room, All studded round, as thick as chairs could stand,
With loyal students faithful to their books, Half-and-half idlers, hardy recusants,
And honest dunces—of important days, Examinations, when the man was weighed
As in a balance! Of excessive hopes, Tremblings withal and commendable

fears, Small jealousies, and triumphs good or bad—Let others that know more speak as they know. Such glory was but little sought by me, And little won.

More forcibly expressed was Rousseau's derision of ordinary educational methods. Writing in his 'Confessions' about the school days of his cousin and himself, he says: 'We were sent together to Bossey, to board with the Protestant minister Lambercier, in order to learn, together with Latin, all the sorry trash which is included under the name of education.... M. Lambercier was a very intelligent person who, without neglecting our education, never imposed excessive tasks upon us. The fact that, in spite of my dislike to restraint, I have never recalled my hours of study with any feeling of disgust, and also that, even if I did not learn much from him, I learnt without difficulty what I did learn, and never forgot it, is sufficient proof that his system of instruction was a good one.'

As far as the history of science is concerned, there is a long array of self-cultured men to whom most of the discoveries that have been made are due. In no other occupation is the faculty of thinking originally and independently more essential than in the pursuit of scientific knowledge, and it is significant that amongst famous scientists more instances are to be found of men who owe nothing to school instruction or academic training than in almost any other walk of life.

In this connection mention has already been made of the famous botanist Linnæus. The whole of his school life was one unrelenting protest against the usual educational methods of endeavouring to force the mind away from its natural bent. Linnæus detested metaphysics, Latin, Greek, and every subject except physics and mathematics, in which he usually outstripped his fellow-pupils. But his nose was kept to the grindstone until the authorities informed his father that he was not fit for a learned education, and recommended his being given some manual employment. Thus were twelve precious years of the life of one of the most gifted men of science, save for what he accomplished out of school hours, wasted to no purpose. It is not to be wondered at that he spoke of one of his masters as 'a passionate and morose man, better calculated for extinguishing a youth's talents than for improving them.'

One of the greatest anatomists that ever lived, John Hunter, who numbered Dr. Jenner amongst his pupils, was scarcely educated at all for the first twenty years of his life. Mr. Smiles states that 'it was with difficulty that he acquired the arts of reading and writing.' Originally a carpenter, he became assistant to his brother, who was established in London as a surgeon. He acquired all his knowledge of anatomy in the dissecting-room, and owed everything he had learnt to his own hard work and habit of thinking things out for himself.

'The brilliant Sir Humphry Davy,' says Mr. Smiles, 'was no cleverer than other boys. His teacher, Dr. Cardew, once said of him, "While he was with me I could not discern

the faculties by which he was so much distinguished." Indeed, Davy himself in after life considered it fortunate that he had been left to "enjoy so much idleness" at school.'

Newton was always at the bottom of his class, until he suddenly took it into his head to give a boy, whom he had already thrashed in another sense, an intellectual beating. 'It is very probable,' writes Sir David Brewster in his biography, 'that Newton's idleness arose from the occupation of his mind with subjects in which he felt a deeper interest.' Nobody could have penned a more incisive indictment against{105} the imbecility of an education system that forces all boys, irrespective of their wishes or talents, into a fixed groove. It was Newton who, in answer to an inquiry as to how the principle of gravity was discovered, replied: 'By always thinking of it.'

When Watt, as a boy, was engaged in investigating the condensation of steam, his aunt, who was sitting with him at the tea-table, exclaimed:

'James, I never saw such an idle boy! Take a book or employ yourself usefully. For the last half hour you have not spoken a word, but taken off the lid of that kettle and put it on again, holding now a cup and now a silver spoon over the steam, watching how it rises from the spout, and counting the drops of water.'

In this sympathetic way children are usually encouraged to think by their elders. Watt's faculties were developed entirely at home. He was sent to a public elementary school in Scotland; but, fortunately for science, he was so delicate that he was nearly always absent through indisposition. A visitor, who found the boy drawing lines and circles on the hearth with a piece of coloured chalk, once remonstrated with Mr. James Watt, senior, for allowing his son to waste his time at home. Watt had the good fortune, however, to possess an intelligent father, who encouraged the boy as far as it lay in his power.

Left to his own devices, Watt not only contrived to make himself the foremost engineer of his time, but he also developed his talents in many other directions. Sir Walter Scott says of him that 'his talents and fancy overflowed on every subject.' And M. Arago,{106} the French scientist, in his memoir of Watt, expresses the view that the latter, in spite of his excellent memory, 'might, nevertheless, not have peculiarly distinguished himself among the youthful prodigies of ordinary schools. He could never have learned his lessons like a parrot, for he experienced a necessity of carefully elaborating the intellectual elements presented to his attention, and Nature had peculiarly endowed him with the faculty of meditation.'

This is only a roundabout way of saying that the conventional process of cramming would have destroyed the fine intellectual faculties possessed by Watt. But if in his case, why not in that of another? That is the strange thing about the light shed upon educational problems by cases like that of Watt, Newton, and other men of commanding genius. People only perceive in it a half-truth. They think that it is only in these

exceptional instances that the mind is incapable of being developed by ordinary rough-and-ready methods.

Upon what grounds is such an absurd deduction founded? It is true that individuals differ widely as to the capabilities of their mental machinery; but it does not follow that the intellectual fibre of one person is more delicate than that of another.

The difference is not mental, but physical. It is because a boy is healthy, and not because his intellectual fibre is coarse, that he is better able to withstand the strain of an educational training than a weaker and more nervous boy.

Until the discovery is made that all minds are sensitive, when they have been actually reached,{107} people will go on ignorantly destroying the finer faculties under the impression that genius or talent is a very rare thing, and can always shift for itself.

Yet, as I have attempted to show, the evidence of history points conclusively to the fact that the contrary is the case.

Is it really supposed that the great names that have been handed down to posterity represent all the genius to which the world has given birth?

The idea is preposterous.

For every man of genius or talent who has been permitted to survive, education systems have killed a hundred.

If it had not been for Dr. Rothmann, there would probably have been no Linnæus to revolutionize the system of botanical classification. Had tyrannical parents and schoolmasters compelled Watt and Newton to give up mechanics and scientific study for a thorough cramming in Latin grammar and Greek roots, we might to-day be without a steam-engine or a theory of the law of gravitation. Even the genius of Napoleon and Wellington might easily have been crushed under the auspices of a modern competitive examination.

Would stupid Oliver Goldsmith have written his immortal 'Vicar of Wakefield' and 'She Stoops to Conquer,' or would idle Sheridan have penned the exquisite comedies that have not to this day been approached by any subsequent writer, if their idleness and stupidity had been submitted to the test of an enforced academic training for classical or mathematical honours?{108}

Surely the evidence of history points to only one conclusion—namely, that all the genius in the world cannot survive the hopeless imbecility of educational methods, except by successfully dodging them through stupidity and idleness, whilst the faculties develop themselves at stolen intervals.{109}

CHAPTER XIII

THE APOTHEOSIS OF CRAM

We have reached a point at which it is advisable to take a broad survey of the direction in which education systems are hurrying the world. Have these educational methods a definite objective, or is their sole purpose the production of scholars manufactured *en bloc*?

These are important questions that need careful answering. Upon the face of it, there is no doubt that in this country, at least, educational establishments have, up to the present, aimed only at turning out scholars of certain intellectual types. The result of this process has been shown in the preceding pages to be sufficiently disastrous in its effects upon its victims. There are, in fact, few social evils which cannot be traced, directly or indirectly, to its agency.

But as yet there has been no dominant motive-power, working invisibly towards a definite end, behind the educational machinery of the country.

A general feeling has been fomented of late, however, that all education, from the lowest step to the highest, ought to be co-ordinated and organized into a single piece of State-directed machinery. The danger of this can only be appreciated by an examination{110} of the effects already produced by such a system in other countries.

Germany offers in this connection the best possible example. The interference of the State in educational matters has there been brought to perfection. Absolute control is exercised by the Government in everything appertaining to the instruction of youth all over Germany. The Emperor has become so autocratic in the exercise of this control in the kingdom of Prussia, that he talks openly about manufacturing this or that kind of educational article exactly in the manner in which a manufacturer would discuss putting some commodity upon the market.

There is not the slightest attempt on the part of the Prussian Government to disguise the political uses to which their supreme authority in educational matters is put. One of the first acts of the Emperor William II., on succeeding to the throne, was to issue the most plain-spoken instructions to the Government of Prussia in reference to State interference with the schools for political purposes.

'For a long time,' it was declared in the royal decree,[\[A\]](#) 'I have been occupied with the thought how to make the school useful for the purpose of counteracting the spread of socialistic and communistic ideas.... The history of modern times down to the present

day must be introduced more than hitherto into the curriculum, and the pupils must^{111} be shown that the executive power of the State alone can protect for each individual his family, his freedom, and his rights.'

[\[A\]](#)For information on this and many other points connected with the subject of education in Prussia, I am indebted to Mr. Michael E. Sadler's special report to the Board of Education on 'Problems in Prussian Secondary Education for Boys.'

Later on follows the recommendation that, 'by striking references to actual facts, it should be made clear even to young people that a well-ordered constitution under secure monarchical rule is the indispensable condition for the protection and welfare of each individual, both as a citizen and as a worker; that, on the other hand, the doctrines of social democracy are, in point of fact, infeasible; and that, if they were put into practice, the liberty of each individual would be subjected to intolerable restraint, even within the very circle of the home. The ideas of the Socialists are sufficiently defined through their own writings for it to be possible to depict them in a way which will shock the feelings and the practical good-sense even of the young.'

The danger of this direct State control is obvious. It renders all liberty of thought absolutely impossible. Politics, religion, social views—all are systematically worked into the curriculum for the object of stifling independent ideas, criticisms, and whatever else may be of value to the interests of the community at large, although possibly highly inconvenient to the established order.

To cram the youth of the nation after this fashion with all the facts and fancies that may happen to suit the weaknesses of the national constitution, is exactly the way in which to bring about the decay of both Government and country. Merely from a political standpoint, therefore, nothing could be more^{112} disastrous to the State than to make use of its power of educational control in order to stifle opposition and independent criticism.

It is equally clear that, wherever the Government possesses this power, it will use it as far as is practicable for the purpose of self-preservation. Almost for a century the Prussian authorities have been getting the control of their national schools more and more into their own hands. They have now succeeded in bringing the application of the theory of State interference to the high-water mark of practicability. From the rudiments of the alphabet to the history of economics, everything in the Prussian curriculum may be suspected of serving some political purpose. The schoolboy is regarded by the authorities as a mere pawn, to be moved on the national board in strict accordance with the political necessities of the hour.

For some years past, the attention of Prussia and of the whole German Empire has been concentrated upon the commercial rivalry of the different nations of the world. The chief, if not the sole, educational aim has been to produce a percentage-calculating

machine on a wholesale plan, equipped with certain devices for the successful carrying on of trade. The German authorities became impregnated with the belief that commercial supremacy could best be attained by organizing the whole nation into a uniform body of workers trained to co-operation. Everything of late years has been subordinated to this design.

The commercial success of the scheme has been notorious. German manufacturers have been gaining{113} ground in all parts of the world. The consular reports at the Foreign Office are filled with pessimistic warnings about the decline of British trade at various points where it was once supreme, and with significant statistics that show the rapid advance of German commercial enterprise.

But it does not follow, because Germany seems to have shot ahead of us by leaps and bounds of late years, that she has adopted sound means to accomplish this end. On the contrary, if the expedients by which this commercial supremacy has been attained are an exaggeration of the worst evils of education systems, then Germany has started upon a downward path which must eventually lead her to the brink of ruin.

And this is precisely the case. Cramming has been brought throughout Germany to the level of a fine art. It is done, I must confess—for I was myself subjected to the process for some years—more completely and effectively than in this country. That is to say, the pupil is not crammed in such an idiotic fashion that he forgets all that has been stuffed into him immediately he has left school. The drilling, however wrong it may be in principle, is thorough enough, in all conscience. It may be, as it is elsewhere, the pestle and mortar system. But at least the pestle is applied consistently, and each ingredient is perfectly mixed before the next component is introduced.

If, therefore, the object of education be to produce an article of a certain type or consistency, then the Prussian school stands far in advance of our own{114} cramming institutions. It may well be taken in that case as a model for us to copy.

People should, however, ask themselves these questions: Is it international commercial rivalry that produces the necessity of a State system of education to equip the nation for the struggle? Or is it the State system of education, with its organized attempt to manufacture a race of traders, which has artificially created the state of commercial warfare into which we are rapidly drifting?

The answer seems to me to be plain enough.

The individuality of individuals is rapidly disappearing throughout that part of the world which has chosen to subject itself to uniform education systems. One Englishman is much like another, in the same way that Russians, or Germans, or Frenchmen resemble each other. In other words, the only individuality which education is leaving us is that

of nationality; and the reason of this is because the manners, the customs, and the school systems of various countries still differ to a certain extent.

Instead, therefore, of the individual competing against the individual, we are rapidly approaching the point where the whole strength and resources of each nation will be employed to co-operate against the rest of the world. And this is no mere natural outcome of evolution. Germany, with her extraordinary cuteness and foresight, invented the game for her own benefit a generation or two ago. She has spent the best part of half a century equipping herself, hand over fist, for this kind of commercial contest.{115}

But what is she sacrificing in order to obtain this triumph of the trader?

There cannot be a question that she is deliberately and systematically throwing away the most precious of all human possessions—the character of the individual. At the Berlin Conference on Secondary Education, held in 1890, Dr. Virchow observed: 'I regret that I cannot bear my testimony to our having made progress in forming the character of pupils in our schools. When I look back over the forty years during which I have been Professor and Examiner—a period during which I have been brought in contact not only with physicians and scientific investigators, but also with many other types of men—I cannot say that I have the impression that we have made material advances in training up men with strength of character. On the contrary, I fear that we are on a downward path. The number of "characters" becomes smaller. And this is connected with the shrinkage in private and individual work done during a lad's school life. For it is only by means of independent work that the pupil learns to hold his own against external difficulties, and to find in his own strength, in his own nature, in his own being, the means of resisting such difficulties and of prevailing over them.'

The inevitable result of this sacrifice of individuality must be the intellectual decay of the nation, or at least its degeneration into a state of hopeless mediocrity. Unless, therefore, Germany can persuade other countries to adopt similar tactics, and to meet her on the plane where she has already obtained{116} the start of a generation, she must come hopelessly to grief in the future.

Unfortunately, there seems every indication that the statesmen who lead rival nations are only too ready to follow Germany's blind lead. In this country it is only the blessed ignorance of the people which is holding back those who are anxious to commit the folly that has put pounds, shillings, and pence into German pockets, at the cost of taking originality and character out of German heads.

This educational suicide, it must also be remembered, can only be committed without serious social disturbance in a despotically-governed country like the German Empire. In England, with our system of party government, a complete measure of State control

in educational matters would create a political pandemonium that would be little short of appalling.

The party struggles of the future would, if this Prussian system were transplanted here, centre round educational control. The schools would no longer be regarded as establishments for the instruction of youth; they would be looked upon simply as the nursery of the future voter. A Conservative Government would cram everything into the curriculum calculated to stifle inconveniently progressive ideas, whilst a Radical Government would try to banish from the schools all established beliefs and conventions.

Between these opposing stools the manufactured scholar would fall lamentably to the ground. He would be neither fish, flesh, nor fowl. There would be a perpetual chopping and changing in the methods{117} of his education, from which he would not even derive the benefit, so gratefully acknowledged by Wordsworth, of being neglected by his teachers.

To talk of beating Germany at her own game is, therefore, the height of absurdity. Nothing could result from such an endeavour but ruin to the country. Under our party system it is obvious that it could not be done with the remotest chance of success. And even if it were possible to obtain steady uniform State interference, working always towards a specific end, German methods would only be adopted at the expense of increasing the pressure of cramming *en bloc*, and thereby multiplying the evils which have been but faintly depicted in the foregoing pages.{118}

CHAPTER XIV

THE GREAT FALLACY

That the world is badly ordered for humanity is a self-evident truth of which the observant scarcely need reminding. It is equally obvious, from the exquisite order and symmetry of animal and vegetable life, that Providence is not to blame for the colossal mess into which civilization has managed to lead the majority of mankind.

Man is himself responsible for the present state of human affairs; and although great things have been undeniably accomplished during the progress of the nations, the magnificent achievements of exceptional individuals pale beside the stupendous blundering of the many.

It must surely be clear to everybody that there has been some evil influence at work to arrest the fair promise and development of the human race. The splendid march of intellectual progress from the dark ages to the brilliant dawn of the nineteenth century, with its glittering array of master minds and its titanic roll of genius, has been suddenly brought to a dead halt. Here and there, during the past generation, great figures have struggled up on to the world's stage and grappled with the ebb-tide.{119} But the majestic stream of mediocrity has swept away their dykes, and obliterated their landmarks with its increasing volume.

The remarkable fact can hardly have escaped attention that the more humanity attempts to equip itself for the serious business of life, by forcing itself into an educational strait-waistcoat, the more rapid becomes the disappearance of character and genius, and even of ordinary talent. Everybody is getting ground down to a level. It is scarcely possible to point to a single civilized man and say: 'There is somebody in whom every faculty has been developed and natural talent perfected to its utmost capability.' The most that can be said of the individual is: 'There goes a Cambridge man or a grammar-school man, and when you have knocked all the nonsense out of him you'll find he's not a bad fellow at bottom.'

We are not what we have made ourselves, but what we have chosen to allow others to make us. Whatever may once have been the nursery of the human race, it is now to a great extent the school. Some part—it generally is the best part—of education takes place outside the class-room; but it must be remembered that the atmosphere of home is generally impregnated with the conventional traditions of the school and of the university.

The evil influence that is so obviously undermining social and national life must, therefore, first be sought in the principles upon which education systems have been founded.

Nothing is more astonishing than to reflect upon{120} the unintelligent grounds on which people base their adherence to the principles of modern education. They are unable, in the first place, to get over the fact that their forefathers were brought up in the same fashion before them. It is a sheer impossibility for most people to question anything that has been going on for any length of time unchecked.

The undisputed possession of a custom for so many years converts it into the legal property of the nation, whence it derives a sacred character, and nobody dreams of meddling with it. Any abuses it may bring in its train are then conveniently ascribed to the perversity of Providence. The cherished convention is never questioned. That is the remarkable thing about it. People can be brought to understand, by means of a flourish of dazzling prospectuses and newspaper advertisements, that a bicycle is an improvement on a bone-shaker, or that pneumatic tyres are more comfortable on rough

roads than iron-rimmed wheels. But that appears to be the set limit of their comprehension.

They are capable of being made to grasp, after nearly exhausting the resources of a wealthy syndicate, something that obviously affects their material comfort. But progress in ideas, or anything in the shape of moral revolution, has to undergo a thousand-fold more tortuous process before it can be made to filter through a convention. The academic product is, it must be remembered, a bundle of conventions. If the article has been properly manufactured, and bears the hall-mark of the maker and the stamp of the country of its origin, there is nothing else there{121} for the truth to filter into. It simply drops through and vapourizes without disturbing anything.

Conventionality is therefore an insuperable obstacle, as far as the majority of minds are concerned, to the discovery that the established principles of education are absolutely false. These principles will never be questioned. It is good enough for the average man that his fellow-creatures have been contented with them since time immemorial, and that they are diligently practised in the schools and colleges whose names have been household words for generations past.

Next to this antiquated conservatism of the least intelligent and most dispiriting type, comes the false shame that the majority of people exhibit when caught displaying ignorance of any of the facts which cramming systems have pronounced to be indispensable to a general education. Probably more real culture is nipped in the bud by the ridiculous assumption that everybody must be a walking encyclopædia, than by all the Philistine conventions and stupidities put together.

In the course of a recent conversation with an exceptionally brilliant woman of my acquaintance, it transpired that she believed Winchester and Cambridge to be in the same county. This lack of geographical knowledge did not appear, however, to have impaired her intellectual faculties. There are many persons who can accurately locate any town in England, and yet are vastly inferior in mental capacity to the lady who thought that Cambridge was in Hampshire.{122}

Why should an individual know more than it is useful and convenient for him to know? For the student of foreign politics it is essential to be aware of the geographical difference between Tokio and Peking; but of what earthly use would this knowledge be to a man who devoted the whole of his life to inquiring into the domestic routine of the extinct dodo, or to the improvement of agriculture by the application of scientific manures?

Life is short, and it is only possible within the limits of the brief span allotted to us upon earth to acquire a certain number of facts. It is monstrously absurd to sacrifice our best years in stuffing so many facts into the brain, in order to avoid being laughed at by a few thin-minded pedants as an ignoramus. Some consolation, at least, might surely be

derived from the reflection that many of the greatest geniuses whom the world has produced were profoundly ignorant as to ninety per cent. of the things which are considered to be indispensable knowledge at the present day.

Nobody can hope to read all the books that are popularly supposed to have been digested by the well-educated man. It would be impossible to get through a tithe of them. Yet how many people there are who will sooner tell a deliberate lie, than acknowledge having omitted to read some classic that happens to be mentioned in the course of conversation! And this is simply due to the infatuated belief that culture consists in stuffing one's self with the ideas of other people. A man whose brain was teeming with his own thoughts and creations, but who had neglected{123} to stock it with the hundred thousand conventional facts culled from the hundred best books selected for him by other people, would be looked upon as an uneducated boor by cultured pedants of the conventional type.

It will be seen, therefore, that this false shame, inspired by an unwholesome terror of public ridicule, plays a very important part in tying people to the apron-strings of education, and warping their judgment.

But there is also a third factor which must be taken seriously into account. This is the widespread credulousness not only as to the efficacy, but as to the indispensability, of the ordinary methods of instruction as mental training. People have actually come to believe that no one can think without being taught to do so by means of all kinds of mathematical and classical gymnastics.

Whence comes this monstrous notion I do not pretend to be capable of explaining—I merely note its universal existence. Probably no doctrine is more deeply ingrained in the mind of the average person. There does not seem to be any logic or sense in it; but somebody with a huge sense of humour must have once started the craze—much in the way that a practical joker will stare intently at nothing in a London street until he has collected a large and inquisitive crowd, and will then steal quietly away, leaving everybody looking vacuously at the same spot.

In the whole history of education there is no greater absurdity than the notion that a boy can be{124} taught to think by training his mind backwards and forwards in the conjugation of irregular verbs and the vagaries of Latin or Greek inflections. Exercises of this ingeniously ridiculous kind only serve to empty the brain of ideas, and to make room for the reception of facts crammed in on the wholesale system. It is an accepted fact, however, that the brain, in order to pursue its normal functions, must first be subjected to a course of training in abstract subjects as far removed as possible from all human interest; that common sense, in other words, is a product of Greek roots and algebraical formulæ—not of the natural application of the thinking faculties to the ordinary circumstances of everyday life.

The hopeless imbecility of this tenet of faith is only equalled by the depth to which it has taken root in the popular mind. The wonderful thing is that the total failure of the plan has not long ago convinced everybody of its uselessness. But that is at once the mischief and the charm of the convention: no amount of practical demonstration will prejudice anybody against it.

In this way the great fallacy of education has been allowed to grow up and to spread its false and obnoxious principles like a network over the whole civilized world. With all the baneful effects produced by these fallacious dogmas staring them in the face, people do not seem to have been capable of tumbling to the fact that the origin of the social evils which surround them lies in the very calf of gold that they and their forefathers have set up and worshipped.

Even the reformers of education appear to have^{125} deceived themselves. Many of them—Arnold and Thring conspicuous amongst their number—have tried to abolish this abuse or to remedy that defect; but not one has gone to the root of the evil, and has boldly stated that the whole system of education is based upon totally erroneous principles—designed, not to encourage progress and generate ideas, but to stifle development, and to place an insurmountable obstacle in the path of the evolution of humanity.

The world has acquiesced in the deceit, and so the great fallacy has grown up unchecked, and, like a rolling stone, gathered moss from generation to generation, until its hideous proportions seem to have embraced the universe, and to have shut out every particle of light from the vision of unhappy, convention-haunted mankind.^{126}

CHAPTER XV

REAL EDUCATION

There is no such thing in existence as a system of genuine education. A large number of institutions exist, as we have seen, for the purpose of manufacturing and cramming, after an approved plan, the youth of the upper and middle classes, and there is a well-organized system of sham education spread throughout the country under the title of 'public elementary schools.' That is the sum of modern educational effort.

The word 'education,' when used in the sense that is commonly applied to it, could not be satisfactorily and adequately defined in less than a post octavo pamphlet. It signifies an enormous number of things, from pot-hooks to trigonometry. It means history,

geography, physics, chemistry, natural history, mineralogy, Latin, Greek, French, arithmetic, algebra, Euclid, and goodness knows how many more things, jammed in at so much a pound. It means taking a child, shaking everything out of its head, and then stuffing every nook and corner with facts it will never be able to remember, and with dates for which it cannot have any use. It means risking the mental shipwreck of the clever child, and making{127} the stupid more dense. And it means popping the individual into a mould, and dishing him up as a dummy.

What it does not mean, is developing the faculties of each individual.

There is, in fact, a wide difference between what education is and what it should be. If every school and college throughout the country were closed to-morrow, it would probably effect some negative good within an appreciable measure of time, and it would certainly abolish much positive harm that is being unceasingly produced by the present methods of instruction. If no effort be made to develop the faculties of each individual, then it is better to leave them alone to develop on their own account. But nothing can be more pernicious than to take the youth of the nation wholesale, and to destroy most of the good that is latent in them, in order to manufacture them into something which Nature never intended them to be.

This is not education, but fabrication. It is destruction, not development. Real education would consist in assisting every individual to develop the faculties with which Nature had endowed him, and to train to their highest capacity any special talents that might reveal themselves during the process. Above all things, real education would encourage the utilization of the brain for purposes of thought and reflection, instead of trying to make it a warehouse for storing van-loads of useless knowledge.

It is absurd to assume that this simple educational aim is beyond the reach of humanity. That its{128} introduction into the practical affairs of life would cause a stupendous revolution cannot be denied. But it does not follow, on that account, that it should be conveniently consigned, like many another pressing reform, to the pigeon-hole of the impossible.

The main thing that is required to carry out the true principle of education is more individual common sense and less State interference. The mischievous enactment that children should commence any process of instruction at the tender age of five should be at once struck off the statute-book. No doubt something would have to be done to remove young children of the poorest class, in large towns at least, from the influence of sordid homes for a certain period of the day. It does not follow, however, that they should be subjected to the routine of an elementary school and crammed with superficial and unsuitable knowledge.

Children want room to think; their minds have to grow up as well as their bodies. Mental nourishment is quite as necessary as physical nourishment; but it is nonsensical to apply

them both in the same fashion. The mind has to be fed in a totally different manner to the body. The former is a delicate operation, that requires far more care and common sense than is necessary for the boiling of milk or the preparation of an infant food.

The child's mind is not a blank, upon which anything may be written at will; it is scored invisibly with heredity and individual tendencies. The function of the parent is to see that nothing is done to destroy this delicate fabric, and to watch carefully{129} for revelations of natural bent and character, in order to encourage and develop them.

Anything in the shape of actual teaching or instruction ought to be rigorously avoided. Facts should be regarded as poisons, to be used sparingly and with discrimination. Every time that a fact is imparted an idea is driven out. That should be carefully borne in mind. The operation of the simplest fact upon the intelligence is highly complex. It is not only a thing to imprint upon the memory, but it is also a means of diverting thought into the channels of the commonplace. Every fact closes up an avenue of the imagination.

To take an illustration, let us suppose someone to impart to a little child the information that it is a physiological impossibility for angels to have wings as well as arms. This prosaic piece of intelligence would, in one moment, annihilate most of the romance of childhood. It would be a blow from which the imagination might never recover. The child would, by a rapid process of thought, lose all faith in fairyland, and in the thousand and one fancies of the youthful brain that are the mainspring of the development of the imagination.

Why is it that ninety-nine persons out of a hundred lose this faculty in the earliest period of their childhood? It is simply because their bringing-up has consisted in a persistent inoculation with the material facts of life, and a correspondingly persistent elimination of all imaginative ideas. 'Don't let the children believe such rubbish!' is a constant ejaculation of the mechanical-minded person who{130} does not permit himself to suffer any illusions, and who has long since 'done with romance and all that kind of twaddle.'

At any cost the imagination of the child should be encouraged and developed. It is the richest vein in the whole mental machinery of man, the faculty within which genius most frequently lurks, and where it can be most easily and permanently destroyed. Grown-up people should remember that an indiscreet answer to a childish question, or a snub administered to an inquiring mind, is often sufficient to check thought. It should be mainly the care of the parent to encourage the imagination in young children, recollecting that up to a certain age its development depends upon all the absurdities and fantastic notions of childhood which the average adult is so fond of repressing.

By the exercise of prudence and some show of sympathy, it would then be possible to bring a child up to the age of seven or eight without damaging its mind or destroying

its faculties. From that point onwards the child's education ought to depend upon the individual himself. There should be no such thing as instruction, in the sense which implies the cramming of the brain with information, or such mental gymnastics as conjugating irregular verbs and hunting for the least common multiple.

The position of teacher and pupil would have to be practically reversed. The pupil would lead, and the teacher follow. In fact, the latter should become an adviser rather than instructor, the child selecting those studies, or those arts or crafts, which are to be made the principal objective of its education, whilst to the mentor would fall the rôle of encouraging and assisting the course of study or practice at a morally safe distance.

Boys and girls would then not learn, but investigate. The process of learning should be got rid of altogether, being a clumsy, dronish way of acquiring knowledge, and one that tends to keep the brain in a perpetual state of dependence.

Ignorance, one ought to remember, is a valuable incentive to investigation. Young people should be left as much as possible to find things out for themselves. Education should resemble a person groping forward in the dark; and only so much light ought to be let in upon the process as seems desirable in each individual case. In that way, at least, the pupil would learn to think for himself; and even if little more were accomplished than this, it would be of ten thousand times greater value to the individual, and to the community at large, than the acquisition of a large stock of facts at the price of losing all power of reflection and initiative.

Let me give an illustration of what I will call the opposing methods of education.

We will suppose, for the sake of argument, that the only available book for the instruction of a class of boys was that excellent but abstruse work known as 'Bradshaw's Railway Guide.' The modern schoolmaster would draw up an exhaustive and complicated scheme. So much time would be devoted to parsing every sentence through the book. The figures would be added up, and subtracted, and divided. He would concoct neat little mathematical problems: If the 11.40 express from Paddington travelled to Swindon at fifty miles an hour and broke down half-way, at what o'clock would the 12.15 parliamentary train overtake it? and so forth. But—most valuable exercise of all—long tables of trains would be learnt off by heart, with the names of stopping places and the prices of the first-class tickets.

A genuine educationist would set to work in a much simpler fashion. He would tell the boys to look out a good train from Birmingham to Newcastle. Each boy would be free to tackle the problem in his own fashion, and the task—if successfully accomplished—would do much towards developing the thinking faculties.

In any system of real education it would be impossible for the schoolmaster to dictate the subjects to which the pupil should give his attention, and it would be equally impossible for the parent to say 'I intend my son to enter such-and-such a profession.' Nobody can settle beforehand what talents the child is to develop. That is a private matter in which no third person has any right to interfere between the child itself and Nature.

Modern education consists entirely of interference. There is, in the first place, the interference of the parent, who insists upon an artistic boy becoming a banker, puts an incipient tradesman into the army, or tries to make a scholar out of a mechanic. Then there comes the interference of the schoolmaster, who has his favourite recipe of Latin verses, quadratic{133} equations, and what not, to stuff into every head he can get hold of for a few terms. Lastly appears the Government, which declares that nobody shall enter the army, or navy, or civil service, without devoting his best years to being crammed in such a scandalous fashion, that it is a toss-up whether he breaks down altogether under the ordeal, or simply forgets, a few months after the consummation of the process, all that has been pitchforked into his brain.

When a baby is brought into the world the parents spend the first year of its life in wondering and speculating about its future. Will it be a great author, or a Bishop, or a Lord Chancellor? If its mouth twitches when anyone slams a door, or it gurgles happily when a note is struck on the piano, they declare it has genius for music; and if it amuses itself later on by crude efforts to draw distorted figures with distorted faces and distorted arms and legs, they jump to the conclusion that they have produced an infant Correggio.

Why does all this anxiety about the child's individuality disappear the moment its intelligence begins to dawn? One must suppose, at any rate, that it does, because the parent immediately sets about getting all the originality knocked out of his offspring, and does not grudge the payment of heavy fees to secure this object.

The dreams about the Lord Chancellorship, or the gold medal at the musical academy, vanish as if by magic. There is no more talk about bishoprics or artistic fame. The parents settle down to the conventional task of having the child fitted for something{134} it has no desire to be; and the notion that the particular faculties they observed—or thought they observed—during its early infancy should or could be developed never appears to enter their heads for a moment.

Some children develop later than others; but with proper care and encouragement it would be possible not to lead, but to follow, each child to its own bent. The child must show the way—that is the essence of real education, and it involves a complete upheaval of the principles upon which systems of instruction are at present founded.

There is only one way in which people are now able to obtain a genuine education, and it goes by the name—applied with more or less contempt—of self-culture. The process

consists simply in the individual choosing his own subjects and studying them as best he can. No doubt the method could be immensely extended and improved, for the self-cultured man has no mentor to guide him when he is in perplexity, and would profit by experienced advice.

But even were this not the case, it would be far better to abolish schools and universities and to let everybody shift for himself, than to insist upon subjecting the youth of the nation to a system that ingeniously manufactures failures for every walk in life, and accomplishes practically nothing else.{135}

CHAPTER XVI

THE OPEN DOOR TO INTELLIGENCE

It has been the chief aim in these pages, not to elaborate a scheme of education on new principles, but to point out the utter folly of persisting with a system that has worked a vast amount of evil, and cannot be proved to have achieved any real good.

Our great men have not been the product of a school curriculum, or of an academic training. In no single instance, as far as can be ascertained, has nobility of character, or the possession of genius, or soundness of judgment, or even beauty of diction in literature, been attributable to the grind in grammatical rules, the fact-cramming, and the mental gymnastics which go to make up what is called 'a liberal education.'

In science, where the highest intellectual qualities are brought into play, most of the great discoverers have owed their entire scientific knowledge to self-taught methods of investigation. And it is the same thing in every field of research where the thinking faculties must reach the supreme limit of development—namely, that nothing is traceable to academic learning, and that everything is owing to the mental{136} initiative which is produced solely by self-inculcated habits of reflection.

To give education systems the credit, or even a share in the credit, of all the splendid achievements in politics, science, art, and literature is sheer intellectual laziness. It is the curse of the age that few people will trouble to question the existing order of things, and that nobody—except those who make the manufacture of opinions their profession—can be found to express an independent opinion on any subject under the sun.

That is one reason why newspapers exist in their present form. The leading article is primarily the invention of the stupid, conventional, well-educated man whose profound

knowledge of dates and irregular verbs has, unfortunately, had the effect of preventing him from forming his own judgment on public affairs. The Press, which must have been originally established, like the famous *Peking Gazette*, for the dissemination of news, has long ago discovered that people prefer to obtain their opinions ready-made.

The wise argument we hear being urged in a railway-carriage or at a dinner-table is merely an intellectual reach-me-down purchased at a book-stall for the modest price of one penny. If there were only one newspaper, and consequently only one leading article on a particular topic, political discussion would die a natural death.

The political opinion to which the majestic alderman or the classically-trained savant gives such profound utterance is the opinion, not of himself, but of some poor devil who knows nothing of the blessings{137} of a university education, but who writes in a garret, or in a dingy office off Fleet Street, to earn his bread and cheese.

Its value or political insight need not be disparaged on that account. I would trust it a thousand times rather than I would trust the opinion—if such a thing should have any existence—of the average educated man whose brains have been jellified at school or college. The point is not the value of the humble scribe's opinion, however, but the fact that a man, of what would be called inferior educational attainments, has to be engaged to do mental work that cannot be performed by the brains of people who have enjoyed all the advantages that a first-rate education is supposed to confer.

The vote of the working-man is scarcely more unintelligently applied at election times than the vote of the educated man. On the contrary, the former may be said to think independently, or at least to use an independent instinct, whilst the latter is contented to believe in the iniquity of one party or the virtue of another, according to the opinion of the man in the garret. The working man wants beer, and he knows it. The China question, the war in South Africa, the housing of the working classes, the great education controversy—everything is beer to him. It is the Government who cheapen beer, or who regulate the percentage of arsenic to be used in brewing, that command his support—not Ministers who promise to maintain British supremacy in the Far East, or who put forward an attractive programme of domestic legislation.{138}

The natural consequence of this wholesale production of dummy members of society is that the strings of government are really pulled by the intelligent few. Whatever the external constitution of Great Britain may be, the real power does not lie with Parliament or with the Executive, but is invariably wielded by one or more men of commanding ability.

Nominally, the administration is in the hands of the social aristocracy, that is to say, of a few peer families and their innumerable relations. Whichever of the two great parties in the State may happen to be in power, the Government is invariably exploited by

members of the peer class, who practically divide the spoils of office amongst themselves and their immediate entourage.

Although, however, the English nobility manage to usurp all the offices of State, and to secure all the plums for themselves, it is not they who really govern the country. No doubt the landed aristocracy are politically the most fit to govern. They have no commercial or industrial interests that may bring corrupt and undesirable influences into public life. But they are unfitted for the position they ought to occupy by a system of education that manufactures mediocrity, and stifles the very qualities of imaginativeness and initiative which are indispensable to sound statesmanship.

What is the inevitable result?

The self-made man, with all his splendid intellectual faculties developed, with his independence of judgment, and his acquired habit of thinking for himself instead of leaning on precedent and borrowed wisdom,{139} rides the dummy Government class with whip and spur. He lays on the lash here and digs in the rowels there, goading on his steed in any direction that chances to suit his purpose. He naturally places personal ambition in front of national expediency, because his political career is necessarily a constant fight against odds. Either he must rise superior to the peer combination, as Disraeli succeeded in doing after a struggle unparalleled in the annals of political history, or he will be crushed by it.

But the necessities of his position render the self-made man a particularly undesirable element in the administration of public affairs. During the course of his successful upward struggle he has, in nine cases out of ten, entangled himself in commercial or industrial interests from which it is difficult or impossible for him to dissociate himself. By this means, and through the necessarily adventurous character of his political career, he can scarcely avoid becoming, however undeserved the imputation may be, an object of suspicion. And when once distrust of this kind has been allowed to permeate through our public life, the degeneration of parliamentary government must follow.

Disraeli spent the greater part of his political life in manœuvring for the premiership. When his object had been successfully attained, all his great qualities were turned to the advantage of the State. But up to that point he was compelled, in order to survive in his colossal struggle against the aristocratic element in politics, to play for his own hand.{140}

That must always be the case with the self-made man. His first objective must be his own self-preservation, and if he wishes to gain power he is bound to exploit the political situation, regardless of the best interests of the country, because every man's hand is against him until the summit of his ambition has been reached.

Schools and colleges in which the mind is crammed instead of being developed cannot produce statesmen. They can manufacture in unlimited quantities the type of well-intentioned, honourable mediocrity with which our public service is stocked. But as long as this process is continued, the real power in the administration of the affairs of the Empire will remain virtually in the hands of a few able individuals of the wrong calibre. There will be a dummy Prime Minister, and a dummy Cabinet; but the wires will be worked by the self-made man who must place himself first and his country second, with consequences usually disastrous to the national welfare.

There is no intended disparagement of the self-made man. He is, and always has been, the best intellectual product of the age. The greatest statesmen, philosophers, scientists, writers, and other men of genius have been self-made or self-cultured. But it does not follow because great statesmen have been self-made men, that it is for the good of the country that its rulers should be drawn from that class. As has already been pointed out, the self-made man usually creates far more mischief in the course of his upward political struggle, than is compensated for afterwards when he has secured his position and can^{141} turn his talents to the account of his country, instead of for the purpose of securing his own personal advancement.

There is, it must be remembered, a national emergency for which we have to prepare. Our extended Imperial obligations, and the sharp commercial competition which has caused some of the great Powers to sacrifice individuality wholesale in order to mobilize an army of traders, make it imperative that measures should be taken to preserve the Anglo-Saxon race.

The thing to avoid at this moment is imitation of tactics that will send every nation adopting them backward in evolution. To secure a temporary commercial triumph at the enormous sacrifice of the natural development of the individual, would be a fatal and short-sighted policy that could only end in national ruin. We have not yet reached the worst depths of the education fallacy, but we are complacently drifting in that direction.

State interference in educational matters may be an excellent thing when the whole energies of the central authorities happen to be exerted in mitigation of the evils of the national system. But it must be borne in mind that political parties and the heads of departments are constantly changing in this country. The reformer of to-day may to-morrow be superseded by a retrogressive-minded mediocrity; and there would be no guarantee that the beneficial influence of the one would not be annihilated afterwards by the pernicious intermeddling of the other.

Instead of casting about for means of securing a^{142} State monopoly of the ruinous type of education supplied by our schools and colleges, it would be more conducive to

the salvation of the country if the whole energies of the nation were directed towards revolutionizing the system of instruction itself.

If schoolmasters can accomplish nothing better than the manufacture of set types of humanity, the progress of mankind would be promoted more rapidly without their assistance.

What is, after all, the main object of education?

It is to assist everybody to develop his faculties and talents, so that he may be fitted for the position in life which Nature intended him to occupy.

Nobody can assert for an instant that the conventional methods of instructing youth either achieve, or even appear to aim at achieving, this end. The school does not pretend to discover or to encourage individual talents. It offers to pound so much Latin grammar, mathematics, history, geography, etc., into each pupil, and to turn him out at the end of the process with exactly the same mental equipment as that acquired by the rest of his school-fellows.

The principal aim of this book has been to draw attention to the incongruities and evils brought about by this sham and worthless system of education. That the world contains many illustrious examples of culture and genius is no proof that the slightest benefit has been derived by anybody from parsing Ovid or cramming facts and dates. 'The best part of every man's education,' said Sir Walter Scott, 'is that which he gives to himself'; and it might be added, {143} with literal truth, that it is the only part which is of the slightest service in developing the mind with which he has been naturally endowed.

All that I have presumed to advocate is that the door should be left open to intelligence.

The education systems of the present day are particularly felicitous in keeping it firmly closed. It is only by dodging the schoolmaster and the coach that youthful talent stands a chance of being brought to maturity. The greatest achievements are not the work of senior wranglers and Balliol scholars: they have been accomplished by class-room dunces, like Clive and Wellington; by school idlers, such as Napoleon, Disraeli, Swift, and Newton; or by self-taught men like Stephenson, John Hunter, Livingstone, and Herschel.

It cannot be doubted that the institution of a rational method of developing the mind of the individual would sweep away all these anomalies. There are thousands of men in responsible positions who would willingly exchange their entire stock of classical or mathematical knowledge for a modicum of common sense and judgment. If everybody were encouraged to think for himself, the Empire would have no lack of good servants to carry on the traditions of the past; and the dummy unit of administration would give place to a self-reliant man, capable of moving with the times, and of serving the public interest according to its wants, instead of clinging merely to routine and precedent.

Nearly all the misery suffered by humanity has been produced by artificial means. Providence did{144} not intend this world to be a place of purgatory for the majority of mankind. We are what we have made ourselves, and not what evolution intended us to be. It is in our power to mitigate much of the evil we have ignorantly manufactured for our own discomfiture, if we only attack it at the roots. And the greatest curse humanity has laid upon itself is that arbitrary interference with the natural development of the mind which is misnamed 'education.'

THE END

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