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EDUCATION IN RELATION TO MENTAL DISEASES.*

The system of education so much in vogue within the last few years, particularly in private schools, has unquestionably a tendency to impair the integrity of the nervous system and thus predispose to various diseases of that system, and to mental disorders. The effort to make a child study half-a-dozen books, on different subjects, and the continued strain thus induced, not only during school hours, but at their own homes, to enable them to keep up with the work required of them, and the consequent almost entire neglect of regular healthful exercise, seems to have been the rule.

Teachers do not seem to have considered that the brain and nervous system of a growing child need to be as carefully nurtured as a delicate plant, and they have been in the habit of giving them an amount of work to do which would well have sufficed to tax the strength of an adult. Let any one examine the number of books which any boy or girl may carry home from school, and often that is only part of what they are required to study, and look into these books, and mark the length of the lessons given by the majority of teachers, and then consider whether the mental and physical labor required to overtake and understand all this, is not more than should be expected of any growing child under sixteen.

*An extract from an address on Mental Diseases read by John Curwen, M. D., Superintendent of the Pennsylvania State Hospital for the Insane, at Harrisburg, before the Medical Society of Pennsylvania, June 10, 1875, and published in The Penn's School Journal by resolution of the Society.—Ed.

There is the same unerring rule for all, school authorities not seeming to be aware that there are diversities of gifts, as well as different powers of endurance; that what is easy and pleasant to one may be hard and repulsive to another, with the same anxious desire in both to learn; that while one may readily grasp a mathematical problem and have delight in its solution, another, from a peculiar bent of mind, may be able only to reach that solution after the most tiresome and patient toil.

It is freely admitted that there are certain general principles which all must learn and understand, but the point now insisted on is, not that these should not be learned, but that the method adopted to enable them to learn is liable to the serious objection that it makes no allowance for peculiarities of mental constitution, but insists that a certain amount of work must be done, whether or not the child really and properly understands what is studied; ignoring the true principle of all education, which consists in the regular and healthful drawing out of the different mental powers, and a proper, cautious and intelligent direction of them.

It is quality, and not quantity, which is really needed, but the system has been to reverse this and go over a large extent of surface in the most superficial manner. The greatest amount of injury will most probably be done to those who are active and ambitious and inclined to precocity, for they will be induced to make the greatest show of progress and learning, and will overtax themselves in
the effort, urged on by inconsiderate teachers and friends, who too often mistake the commencement of diseased action for great talents and ability.

Add to this, also, the close, confined, overheated air of the great majority of school rooms, causing the children to breathe a vitiated atmosphere, which dulls their faculties and too often poisons their blood, and the additional confinement in an uncomfortable position for so many hours, with very slight intervals of relaxation, and it must be obvious that here is a cause which will seriously interfere with the healthy growth of the physical system, and result in consequent injury to the mental powers.

Then, again, the present systems of education, as a rule, are directed to the training of only one set of powers—the intellectual—leaving the moral entirely out of consideration, and thus producing an improperly regulated or unevenly balanced mind.

It may be urged that the training of the moral powers is a work to be done at home, and, while that is true to some extent, it is equally just to say that what is commenced at home should be carried on through the whole daily life of the individual, for very often the youth will be for a longer period under the care of the teacher than with the parent, and it cannot be denied that the most successful mode of eradicating evil, or preventing its growth, is the inculcation of the higher principles of truth and morality, and careful instruction in these principles when once implanted.
BROOKS vs. BOOKS.

UNDER the expressive heading of "Brooks vs. Books," the Philadelphia Times thus facetiously discourses of the release from toil vacation brings to the hard-worked teachers of our schools, and the rich health-giving pleasures it scatters so lavishly among our school-boys and school-girls:

The summer school recess has come. School houses are closed. The doors are locked; the windows fastened; the yards guarded against intrusion from curious and mischievous urchins. Silence reigns supreme where but a few days ago the voices of boys and girls were heard in earnest recitation or animated declamation. Teachers have laid aside their governing austerity and controlling mein, and are preparing to visit old familiar scenes, hallowed by memories of a sweet and tender character, and even janitors dream of delights unconnected with the unlocking of doors, the creaking of hinges, the arranging of desks, and scores of other duties associated with their every-day lives. With the pupils it is brooks against books, fields, trees and flowers against studies in hot, stifling rooms, and walks upon pavements as unpoetical as a ledger crammed with unfruitful bills. For months boys and girls have dreamed of the recess and all its pleasures. And now that dream is a reality. In hundreds of houses books have been hidden in closets and out-of-the-way places. When next used they will be sprinkled with dust, as Father Time mottles the locks of men to notify them of his flight. Instead of study and books girls are selecting and trimming sundowns and gypsies, looping up dresses and buying baskets in which to gather wild flowers from the hill-sides and valleys, or carry luscious cherries or appetizing berries to the cottage which is to be their summer home for a brief but happy period. Boys have dismissed, for a time at least, from their thoughts and memories rules of grammar, problems in arithmetic and visions of scholastic ambition, and think only of where they shall go and how they shall spend the summer vacation. Sailor hats have replaced those of more formal shape and style, and guns, fishing rods and lines, base balls and bats, kites and a score of other articles of enjoyment are being gathered preparatory to the school-boy's exodus into the land which fancy has peopled with untold delights, and the streams of which run with milk and honey.

Will the summer vacation bring all the pleasures anticipated by boys and girls just let loose from school? In most cases yes, for youth is the season of hope, and hope paints the future in bright colors. There are no sad memories to dash in great masses of darkness, or wring the life-blood from the heart in a winter of vain tears. When the school children leave the city they will shake off the dust of daily labor and study from their feet, and become a part of the free, jocund nature by which they are surrounded. They will rise with the matin song of the robin, the thrush or the lark, not to study with weary brains, but to ramble upon the dewy grass, row upon the streams, or indulge in scores of amusements in the cool air, perfumed with wild roses or the aroma of the mountain pine. On all sides will be heard the sweet, low laugh of girls, the manly, careless voice of boys. Songs will be sung, and each scene made more entrancing by the presence of happy, enfranchised youth who are determined to drain the goblet of nature to the last drop.

These are some of the delights of summer vacation. They can be enjoyed only in the season of youth, and therefore let youth be crowned with all the joys of an innocent character that can be crowded into that portion of life's pilgrimage. Let books supersede books for a season, and children play instead of work. They will come back in the fall better able in all respects to commence study and profit by tuition. There will be bronzed cheeks and tanned hands and freckled necks; but there will be bright eyes and sturdy frames and active brains and rigid nerves to meet the duties of the school-room and to overcome all obstacles that may arise in the path of pupils.

Then welcome the coming, speed the parting guest, and let King Books abdicate for a period in favor of King Brooks. The rippling old fellow will have a merry set of subjects.

POLITE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

THE following remarks, on the propriety of giving more attention to training the children in our public schools to be more refined in their manners, are taken from an editorial in Appleton's Journal. We do not think that the roughness, the "insolence," of which the writer of the article complains, exists, except in special cases, to the extent described; but that amendment in this direction is loudly called for we have not the slightest doubt. We know many parents, favorable to public
schools and disliking to withhold their patronage from them, who yet send their children to private schools rather than have them adopt the rude ways and catch the rough expressions that too often characterize the children of our public schools, especially the large public schools of our cities and towns. And, for ourselves, we would prefer less of knowledge, if that must be, and more of good manners—prefer that teachers should occupy less time in giving instruction in arithmetic and grammar and devote more to training children to be civil and polite. The Journal’s article is therefore timely, and will be read with profit.

We all of us brag a great deal about our public schools, although we take occasion not unfrequently to criticise them freely in this or that particular. There is one defect in the system, however, that we believe has not been pointed out. This is the manners of the pupils. Those who have occasion to see much of the boys and girls turned out of the public schools are a little startled at the free-and-easy manner they possess, at the remarkable self-possession and self-assertion they exhibit, at the supreme confidence in themselves and supreme disregard for their elders which they manifest at every turn. It cannot be assumed that discipline is not maintained in our public schools; when one visits these institutions he discovers no lack in this particular; yet let him encounter the pupils anywhere in public, and he finds that in a majority of instances their manners are wholly bad. They seem to respect neither places nor persons. They are insolent in bearing and insolent in language when they have an opportunity; they swagger as they please; they would wear their hats before the king if there were such a personage in the country; they whistle and sing in every presence; they loudly assert, by their manner, that they consider respect for their elders an unmanly weakness; they wholly lack that fine and admirable spirit of subordination that in well-trained youth is so excellent a preparation for the time when they may for themselves exercise authority. All these evidences of bad breeding are really very surprising as well as vexatious. We wonder, how it is that, in institutions where a certain discipline is well maintained, so much ill-breeding should be exhibited by their graduates. The young people—but we are thinking more particularly of boys, so let us confine our observations to the masculine sex—the boys that graduate in our public schools are some of them well-mannered youths, but this is because their home-training has been good; and there are others, gathered from the streets, who have gained something in decorum by their school experience; but, as a whole, the influence of the schools upon manners is very slight indeed. As we have said, this is very puzzling, and can only be accounted for by the fact, that while a necessary order and discipline is maintained in the class-rooms, there is no instruction in the principles of politeness, no distinct ethical training, no enforcement of a code of conduct. This is unfortunate. It might be well to consider whether it would not be an advantage to the pupils, and to the public generally, if the ladies at these establishments should be sent forth with a little less grammar and arithme-

STATE UNIFORMITY OF TEXT-BOOKS.

THE DANGER WE ESCAPED.

The state of California is one in which the law requires text-books for all the schools to be selected by a commission, of which the Governor and State Superintendent of Public Instruction are members. This commission held a meeting for the purpose of attending to the duties of their appointment some time last spring. The session was a stormy one. Another even more stormy was subsequently held. The interests involved, or the agents who represented those interests, managed not only to create ill-feeling and division among the members of the commission, but to draw into the discussion the newspapers, the politicians, and even church organizations. The result was, the issue of injunctions by the courts restraining the action of the commission, to be followed by bitterly contested law-suits. These proceedings have estranged some of the leading educators of the state, have led to criminations and recriminations on the part of teachers and school officers, and have greatly weakened the whole system. Happily, Pennsylvania has thus far escaped the evils that everywhere and always grow out of an attempt to concentrate large textbook interests in the hands of a small, central commission. Had the bill which passed our Senate two years ago, and which met with so much favor on the part of some of our public men, become a law, Pennsylvania would have been the scene of a book battle, the fierceness of which would have greatly exceeded that which has just ended so disastrously for the schools of California.

That our readers may see that we do not exaggerate the bad effects which have grown out of the effort to enforce the law concerning text-book uniformity, we present below extracts from two of the most influential
papers of the state. It is proper to say, perhaps, that Mr. Bolander is the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and that Messrs. Allen and Crawford are members of the text-book commission. These gentlemen, as well as the agents referred to in the text, are quite as likely to have been in the right as in the wrong. The stories told of them may have been gotten up and circulated for a bad purpose. We do not quote the extracts for the purpose of increasing the censure which has been heaped upon the gentlemen named. There is another side which deals quite as severely with their opponents who advocate different series of books. We present them simply because they illustrate the degrading nature of the fight on the question of school books in a sister state, and the kind of charges and agencies used in obtaining a victory. May our state long be saved from occurrences equally disgraceful! Vigilant friends have protected us in the past; their constant watchfulness will be needed in the future. Let corruption once touch our school system, and the death of our political institutions would seem to be only a question of time.

Extract from the Placer Herald:

"Battle of the Books."—A terrible commotion has in the last week been created among the leading educators of the state, and especially the members of the State Board of Education, owing to certain evidence, which inadvertently comes to light, showing unevitable connection of certain members thereof with the school-book rings in the East. A letter, intended for Crawford, Superintendent of San Joaquin county, and a member of the State Board of Education, from an agent of the publishers of Monteith's geographies, was, through carelessness or lack of geographical knowledge, addressed, "Superintendent of Schools, San Jose." This letter was naturally taken out by Kennedy, of San Jose, who, on reading it, was utterly astonished to find his fellow-member of the State Board, Crawford, so frankly addressed on matters which rightly concern only the publishers of the above-named books or their confiding agents. The letter goes on to tell whom they (the publishers) have got, and whom they are likely to get—gives advice freely, and as freely asks it, and tells what to do in case of certain emergencies. Besides implicating Crawford, and telling where Professor Allen stands, this letter says something about Bolander being with them, which explains Mr. Bolander's action at the meeting of the board this week. Last January he voted to change Monteith's geographies for Cornell's, but now he is found opposing any change. Something has convinced him, we suppose, that Monteith's geographies are better books than he thought they were. The actions of the State Board of Education just now present rather a repulsive mess which it would be hard to clarify. At their meeting last Tuesday, with the exception of giving notice that they would vote to change the text-books on the 3d of December, 1875, their time was occupied in throwing hot shot at one another.

From the Los Angeles Herald as follows:

As anticipated in another article in to-day's paper, the meeting of the State Board of Education on the 1st instant was a sort of a cat-and-dog affair. The lie was bandied back and forth between members with all the vehemence and none of the easy grace which characterize a fish-woman's quarrel. The reader text-book question came up for discussion, and resolutions to throw out McGuffey's readers, the geographies, and other books now in use, as soon as the law permits, were passed, only Bolander and Crawford of San Joaquin voting No. When the board resolved itself into a committee to prepare the necessary notice of change, Mr. Bolander refused to act, and withdrew, giving as his reason for so doing that the resolutions were illegal. The action of the board is a step in the right direction, though it does not place Bancroft's readers in the schools; and if, as is probable, the Legislature abolishes the State Board, they will never get into the schools. The present board is a disgrace to the state. When our educational heads cannot come together without branding each other as liars and rascals, the School Department will be better off without them.