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NORMAL SCHOOLS:

THEIR RELATIONS TO PRIMARY AND HIGHER INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING, AND TO THE PROGRESS OF SOCIETY.

BY WILLIAM F. PHELPS,

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Education, viewed in its most comprehensive sense, may be defined to be both a science and an art.

As a science, it investigates the laws which regulate the harmonious development of the physical, intellectual, and moral powers of the human being.

As an art, it applies those laws to the cultivation, and, as far as possible, to the perfection of man's three-fold nature.

Regarded in this imposing aspect, there is not an organ of the body, a faculty of the mind, nor an affection or passion of the soul, which its forces should not aim to reach, cultivate, strengthen, or subdue.

Between education and learning, between an educated man and a learned man, there is a marked distinction. While profound attainments in positive knowledge are by no means to be underrated or undervalued, neither are they to be substituted for that thorough discipline, that careful training of all the powers and faculties which alone can give sound minds in vigorous healthy bodies—which makes one know, feel, and practice his duties and obligations to himself, to his family, to his neighbor, to humanity, and to the beneficent Author of his being.

A merely learned man is one who has made profound attainments in knowledge, regardless of the ability requisite to make those attainments available for the elevation and improvement of his fellow creatures, and for the advancement of human society. He may be apt to acquire, but incompetent to impart, to disseminate, to use, to apply. An intellectual giant, he may be a moral dwarf, a social nonentity, a physical imbecile; a human encyclopedia, his stores of knowledge may be and often are, locked up within the narrow precincts of his own individuality.

An educated man, on the other hand, is he who superadds to his
knowledge the skill, the disposition, and the ability to use it for the promotion of the great objects of human existence—for the moral, intellectual, social and material progress of humanity. He is a man of action as well as of acquisition. He is not only an intelligent, but a useful man; a healthy, vigorous man; an honest man, “the noblest work of God.” He measures his actual attainments in knowledge and virtue, in a great degree, by their availability and his opportunity for bringing himself and his brethren into harmony with those immutable laws by which the Creator upholds and governs every domain of his universe.

The most perfect type of human wisdom and of human power would therefore undoubtedly be what may be denominated an educated scholar; or, if you please, an educated learned man. Such a man contains within himself not only a vast reservoir of power, but he is at the same time, so to speak, the engine through which that power is applied, and the engineer to control its movements and guide them to the production of noble and beneficent results.

But there is another fundamental truth too often disregarded, which in this connection may not be altogether out of place. The Creator, in his infinite wisdom, while bestowing upon his creatures the same general characteristics of mind and soul, while giving to all the same order of faculties, has yet impressed upon each, to a certain extent, a peculiar and special individuality. Mankind may thus be said to be an embodiment of unity in diversity. While all have powers to be developed and cultivated, while all have responsibilities to meet and duties to perform, yet it is not to be supposed that all are to be fused in the same crucible, or run through the same stereotyped mould. As each has, to a limited extent, a peculiar organization, so has each a correspondent special adaptation; and this adaptation is to be sought out, preserved, improved, and, as far as possible, perfected, to the end that each individual may be prepared to act well his part in the grand drama of human life.

Now, the question is, what kind of men does society, does our country, does the world most need? This is the great question of the age; and upon its proper solution depend not only the welfare and progress of society, but its very existence also.

Since human society is made up of rational beings, if it has wants, those wants must have their origin in the necessities of the individuals that compose it. But the necessities of individuals may all be summed up in the means that are required for the proper development and expansion of their manifold and undying faculties. The more perfect and the more widely diffused these means, therefore, the
more perfect the society and the less its wants. It hence follows that the great, unceasing, relentless want of society is, that of cultivated, refined, and in the fullest sense of the term, educated men; not the learned few, but the educated many. This want properly met, subordinate ones will gradually disappear; and the innumerable forms of vice and crime, of injustice and wrong, with their endless train of nameless woes, will be supplanted by the benignant reign of virtue and intelligence, and the consequent blessings of individual and social order and happiness.

"So shall licentiousness and black resolve
   Be rooted out, and virtuous habits take
   Their place; and genuine piety descend,
   Like an inheritance, from age to age"

It is evident, that for the rearing of such individuals, and for the production of such results as these, it is idle to rely upon divided, and one-sided, and partial efforts. As the greatest want of human society is man himself,—man, "broad-shouldered, symmetrical, swift" man, purified, ennobled, exalted,—man, trained, individualized, educated,—so it is equally clear that the means for the accomplishment of this end must be commensurate with the lengths, breadths, depths and urgency of the want which is to be supplied. Such a work needs, nay, must have, to succeed, the unflagging interest, the untiring zeal, the undivided influence, the cordial sympathy, the earnest cooperation of every citizen, irrespective of party, sect, or creed. In the solution of this complicated problem, the family, the school in all its gradations and ramifications, the parent, the teacher in all his varied relations, the patriot, the philanthropist, the christian, each and all have solemn duties to perform in virtue of a common existence, common interests, and a common destiny.

The development of the mind, body, and all the parts of human life, must, to be real, from the nature of the case, be progressive, and slow. Beginning with the first dawn of being, the work must advance by toilsome, gradual steps, through the successive periods of infancy, childhood and youth, up to the maturity and vigor of symmetrical manhood. So far as Nature is left to carry on the processes of tuition, she faithfully observes her own well defined and benignant laws. It is only man in his blindness and ignorance that errs, and mars the exquisite handiwork committed to his charge. The great problem then, in the education of the present day, is to observe, to learn and to apply those wholesome lessons which nature is ever ready to impart for our guidance and direction, in the work before us.
The first lessons of infancy and early childhood are taught in the school of home with its clustering affections, its deep-toned sympathies, and its winning smiles. It is here that the foundations of the future character are begun. It is here that for good or evil the young mind receives its first impressions. Are these foundations laid in intelligence and grounded in love? Are these early impressions all faithful transcripts from pure and pious hearts? If so, there is more than a presumption, there is almost a certainty, that the race thus commenced will be one of virtuous youth, of honorable, useful manhood, and of tranquil old age. If otherwise, there is more than a prophecy of a weary, wasted life, and an ignoble end.

From the home circle, passing to the pupilage of the primary school, the child is subjected to the more direct appliances of the educational process. It is here, and at this tender age, that the potent influence of the professional teacher is first brought to bear upon his impresible nature. If perchance, the home training has been, and still is, wise and judicious, the task of the teacher becomes comparatively easy and his burden light; for he has but to cooperate with the parent in the continuation of a work already begun. But if, as in a majority of cases, the education of the fireside has been a work of perversion and misdirection, if only a superficial foundation has been laid, if habits of disobedience and disorder prevail, if there be an absence of parental sympathy, cooperation and support, his position becomes one of almost overwhelming anxiety and insurmountable difficulty. It is at this stage, and surrounded by these common—alas! too common—circumstances, that he is called upon to exercise all the skill and all those high attributes which his nature can command, for the promotion of the work committed to his charge.

Even under the most favorable conditions, the merely intellectual training of the young is a task of exceeding complexity. To comprehend the capacities, the peculiarities, the attainments, the wants of individual minds; to bring them under a proper classification; so to adjust the processes of tuition as to arouse their latent energies into vigorous action; to awaken a desire for advancement in the paths of knowledge; to stimulate each and all to manly exertion and a heroic self-reliance, is an undertaking of no ordinary magnitude. But when, superadded to this, the teacher is called upon to guide the development of those still higher attributes of our nature, to impress upon the young those lessons of morality and Christian virtue, those duties which they owe to themselves, to their fellow creatures, and to their Creator; when he passes a step further and assumes to train his charge to the practice of these duties, he undertakes a work which, in
magnitude and importance, is commensurate with the imperishable nature and the priceless worth of the material upon which his forces are expended.

It is thus that we are to look to the joint partnership of the family and the primary school for the origin and early development of that perfect stature of manhood which the world so much needs, and which will surely yet rise up to adorn, to dignify, and to bless a coming age. It is to these, and especially to the latter, that we are to look for those peculiarly complicated and philosophical formative processes that alone can bring order out of chaos, give to the youthful mind its shape and direction, inspire it with an undying love of truth, impart to it those habits of patient application and of methodical procedure so essential to conduct it to definite and useful results, and implant the desire and prepare the way for that more enlarged culture which successive schools of superior grade may be so well adapted to secure.

If this great work be not done by these agencies, then it will not be done at all, and we may as well abandon the experiment of a comprehensive system of universal education. It is in vain that we endeavor to make up in the high school and the college for the radical deficiencies of the common school. As well may we attempt to purify the fountain by cleansing the stream that flows from it. The functions of the primary school are preeminently formative and fundamental; and beyond this work it can not, with either propriety or safety, be allowed to go. To depart from it is unmitigated failure and irreparable injury. The task which in the economy of nature is assigned to it, is all that the most assiduous care, the most ample means, and the most untiring devotion will enable it, under the most favorable circumstances, to fulfill. Its work well done, that of its legitimate successors will, with comparative ease, be accomplished.

Beyond the primary schools, in a complete system of education adapted alike to the wants of our varied natures and to the necessities of human society, there must lie on the one hand, properly organized and conducted, the grammar school, the high school, and the college, or their equivalents; and on the other, the "Real" and the Polytechnic Schools, little known in our own country, but destined in the future to take their appropriate places in the great scheme of public instruction.

These two distinct classes of institutions are undoubtedly the types of two distinct forms of education, each complete in itself, and each adapted, under suitable organization and management, to meet two distinct classes of wants in the economy of society. These wants
may be denominated the Philological, or those which pertain to language in its relations to thought, including grammar, rhetoric, criticism, the interpretation of authors, history and antiquities; and the "real," or those which relate to objects or things, and their relations to each other and to man himself. These classifications seem to be entirely natural, and to some extent, the result of that special organization and adaptation, before alluded to as existing in individuals of the human species. The institutions of the first class named, following out to their legitimate specialties, give rise to Schools of Law, Divinity, &c.; while those of the second, lead to Schools of Medicine, Natural History, Mining, Engineering, Agriculture, and others of like character.

Of these two forms of education, the first, for obvious reasons, is the most ancient and the most prevalent. But with the rapid development of modern science and its application to the manifold purposes of life, it can not be doubted that the "real" will assume that position in the regards of mankind to which its transcendent importance entitles it. And not alone on account of the merely utilitarian tendencies of science is it destined to be more generally cultivated through the instrumentality of schools, but preeminently, because it unfolds to man the creature an unfailling source of happiness and felicity in the contemplation of the works of the Creator; enabling him, through a mastery of the laws of the material universe, better to comprehend the great plan of God in creation, and leading him to adore and praise that All-wise and Eternal Being who hath thus indeed manifested himself "Philologically" and "Really," in the two-fold sense of his word and his works.

If the foregoing brief summary has been made intelligible, it will readily be understood that from the primary school as a foundation, other institutions must successively arise adapted to carry on to completion the work already begun. They should flow from it as naturally as the stream flows from its source, widening and deepening with each influx of its tributaries as it moves majestically onward to the sea. When we understand and appreciate, as we ought, the object which these successive institutions are designed to answer, we shall give to them such an organization as will fit them for the progressive development of the complex forces of our three-fold nature. They will thus become but logical parts of one consistent harmonious whole, each adapted to its special functions, each laboring for and aspiring to the same desirable and comprehensive end.

From this commanding stand-point, having in full view the nature of the work which the education of the present day proposes, as well as the entire system of means by which this work is intended to be
accomplished, it is an easy task to trace the relation of normal schools to the great scheme of public education, and to the welfare and progress of that society whose most urgent necessity is that of earnest, enterprising, active, working, intelligent, moral, religious men, devoted to the great interests of their species and to the fulfillment of those high destinies which man is placed here to work out.

It will be easily seen that they aim to strike a powerful and effective blow at evils at once radical and deep, that they seek to remove difficulties and impediments at once serious and overwhelming, which beset man at the very outset of his disciplinary and preparatory career. Descending to those deep well-springs of individual and social life, welfare, progress, and happiness—the primary schools—they labor to purify, elevate, and improve. Recognizing the simple truth that "it is the master that makes the school," they take the teacher by the hand, unfold to his view the fearful and wonderful structure of this complex physical being, teach him to look upon the mysterious spirit that animates it, to understand, as far as possible its nature and capacities, to observe its manifestations, to master its laws, to investigate the methods by which its subtle forces are to be drawn out, train him to their application, and send him forth over the lengths and breadths of the land to wake up the latent energies of its embryo citizens, to infuse into the home circle a higher appreciation of parental duty and obligation, and to animate the public heart with a livelier interest in that great work which should ever be its chief concern.

Hence it is that normal schools, by the direct and powerful influence which they must inevitably exert upon the principal sources of public intelligence, virtue, and happiness, will serve to invigorate and intensify the entire social organization. If conducted in accordance with their true intent and spirit, if conducted as they may and should be, they will do more in the course of years for primary education, for the education of the fireside and the common school, and hence for the real welfare of society, than all other agencies combined. For who does not know that the moral and intellectual renovation of entire neighborhoods is often effected by the almost silent, yet potent influence of a good school and a faithful, intelligent, skillful and conscientious teacher of youth? The heart of the true parent is said to be bound up in his child; and if the teacher can mould that child—like clay in the hands of the potter—to his will, by what a natural and easy transition may he not work upon the parent too? leading him to a knowledge and practice of the duties which he owes to those who are dear to him as the "apple of his eye," and to his brethren of a common heritage.
But normal schools, by virtue of their diffusion of the great principles of education, and the improved and philosophical methods of training based thereon, by the desire and ability for further advancement which they impart through their pupils to the young, by the habits of manly self-reliance which they instill, and by the almost incredible abridgment of labor and of time which they secure, are destined to play an important part in that modification and regeneration of all those institutions growing out of the primary schools, which are certain gradually to take place. These institutions will be forced to reorganize on a more comprehensive and philosophical basis. They will be obliged more fully to recognize the great truth, that the office of the school, of whatever grade, is not, and can not be, to make profound scholars, but rather to train the powers of the student; to arm him with the means and methods, by the proper and diligent use of which he may himself become learned, wise, and good; to teach him the uses of knowledge; to qualify him for its judicious application; to impress upon him the dignity and duty of labor; and thus to qualify him for whatever position on the busy stage of life a beneficent God may assign him.

We need not mistake the signs of the times; we need not close our eyes and ears to the teachings of experience. What has been done, and is doing on another theatre, can be done and will be done in our own land. While this grand idea of education has attained on a less congenial soil a degree of development hitherto unequaled and unknown, how can we doubt that, fostered by the genius of a people and a government, whose hopes and whose safety are based upon its legitimate results, it is destined here, to its noblest, fullest, most unlimited expansion. In those countries where education is the most complete and the most universal, normal schools are the most numerous and the most nearly perfect; and they have been the all-powerful agency, by means of which, this completeness and universality have been reached. They have accomplished this work by regenerating and vivifying the primary schools, impelling them to lay a broad and deep foundation, as well as creating an unconquerable desire in the youthful mind for higher attainments, by a rigorous mastery of elementary principles, and a judicious application of the same at every stage of its progress. Discarding the dogmatic modes of teaching which compel the pupil to take on trust the unqualified dicta of the master, and which are alike destructive of intellectual freedom and rational progress, they aim to develop and to disseminate those means and methods of tuition which result from an intelligent perception and application of those laws which God has imposed upon the human faculties.
And while laboring for the improvement of the intellectual, they strive also to draw out the moral powers and to inculcate those kindly, courteous, and fraternal sentiments which should regulate the intercourse of mankind in the routine of social life. Passing even further still, they have been made the instruments for infusing into the entire texture of the teacher's life, enabling him thus to inculcate it in turn upon the hearts of the future citizens, a spirit of contentment with whatever lot in the order of Providence may be assigned him, and a faithful discharge of the duties, however humble, which that lot imposes.

If we do not under our own genial skies mould them to the accomplishment of all, and more than all, of the high purposes which have been indicated, it will not be because of their exotic origin, or of their inherent incompatibility with our peculiar needs, or of their lack of a direct and powerful relation to our most vital interests, either as individuals or as a people, but rather because of our blind ignorance of their true nature, distinctive objects, and priceless value, or to a perverse determination to close our eyes to the light alike of immutable truth and of enlightened experience.

He who in this country sits down deliberately to calculate the cost of its teachers, at the same time puts a price upon the privileges and the blessings which under the benignant sway of its government, he is permitted to enjoy. And on the other hand he who would even approximate to the value of our true, intelligent, and faithful teachers must, as a preliminary step, absolutely determine the value of these same privileges and blessings. And again, he who feels that under the operation of this principle of self-government, he has a superabundance of the good gifts which it imparts, will find that the most philosophical mode of removing these incumbrances is to offer a premium for incompetent and inefficient schoolmasters, and send them abroad to stultify and pervert the juvenile mind of the community.

But if there be any who feel deeply sensible that an abnormal abridgment of their rights and privileges has already occurred; if there be any who have a remote suspicion that justice is a costly commodity, and difficult to secure, at any price, that virtue and truth are held at a ruinous rate of discount, that portentous signs of anarchy and disorder are distinctly visible, that pauperism, idiocy, insanity, vice, and crime, already stalk abroad over the land in frightful procession, that our houses of correction and our penitentiaries are unduly patronized, that the demons of corruption, avarice, and misrule, like so many vampires, are extracting the life blood of the body politic,—if any have come to a realizing sense of these startling facts, they are
in some measure prepared to appreciate the value and importance to
the republican commonwealth of a band of whole-souled, well-trained,
and devoted teachers of youth. If passing a step further, they are
penetrated by an intense desire to see these evils eradicated—not
covered—and if they in honesty and sincerity, seek for the most effect-
ive means for their removal, they have but to exercise that ordinary
common sense so highly commendable in every other pursuit, to per-
ceive, and to know, that these same humble teachers, imbued with the
humanitarian spirit, filled with a sense of the magnitude of their mis-
sion, specially drilled and prepared for their special work, and full of
energy and zeal for its accomplishment,—that these offer the surest,
the only practical mode for the solution of so great and so important
a problem.

The Prussians say that, “whatever you would have appear in the
life of a nation, you must put into its schools.” But they may with
equal truth, go still further, and affirm that whatever you would put
into its schools, you must put into its teachers, and whatever you would
put into its teachers, you must first put into its normal schools. No
combination of words could be made more forcibly to express the
direct and intimate relation of the normal school, not only to the peo-
ple, but to the government itself. In determining the future of these
institutions, therefore, their numbers, their influence, in moulding the
moral, intellectual, social, and political character of our people, we
may say with impressive distinctness, that we likewise determine the
future of our government, as founded upon the principle of popular
virtue and intelligence.

Wherefore, does it not become our government and every subject
of that government by every means in its and his power to multiply,
build up, and perfect that instrumentality by which more than by any
other, the blessings of liberty are to be preserved, perpetuated, and
increased, through all coming time?

In Europe, these institutions have been, according to our ideas, per-
torted to the strengthening, preservation, and perpetuation of arbitrary
power. But how much more may they become the means in the
hands of freemen for the propagation of the great doctrine of equal
rights, and of the inviolability of our immortal natures, as well as for
cementing those ties of unity and of brotherhood so conductive to the
welfare, progress and happiness of a free people.

The great length of this paper, will not permit a more extended
development of the train of thought here initiated, we will therefore
conclude it by the enunciation of a few concise, yet self-evident pro-
positions which must commend themselves to the assent and approba-
tion of every honest and intelligent mind.
1. A free government is, and ever must be based upon the fundamental idea of virtue and intelligence, universally diffused among the people.

2. This virtue and intelligence can be adequately secured only by means of the thorough mental and moral training afforded by a general system of effectively administered schools.

3. These schools depend for their value and efficiency upon a perpetual supply of well trained and properly qualified teachers.

4. All experience, no less than the dictates of common sense, has demonstrated that an adequate supply of competent teachers, fitted for the high duty of rearing a nation of intelligent freemen, can be secured only through the instrumentality of normal schools comprehending their great and distinctive mission, and organized and conducted with direct reference to the fulfillment of that mission.

5. Whence it follows that when these self-evident truths come to be fully understood and acknowledged, normal schools will become co-extensive with the wants of the people, and co-equal with the power, the dignity, and the importance of the government itself.

Wherefore let these impressive truths sink deep into the hearts of all who cherish the priceless blessings of good government and of social order. Let them be pondered by those upon whom is imposed the responsibility of conducting the normal "experiment," that it be so conducted as to vindicate that perfection of common sense upon which these institutions repose. Let them be weighed by the great mass of our "Popular Sovereigns," and by their servant, the government, whose first duty it is to foster, encourage, perpetuate and support. Let them not only sink deep into the heart, let them not only be pondered and weighed, but let them spring up and bring forth prolific fruits to the enduring welfare and glory of our country, and the happiness of our race.