

"PHYSIOLOGICAL BASIS OF MENTAL CULTURE."

In the advancing knowledge of physiology, it has been discovered that the mental culture should be based upon the brain—that education should be pursued in harmony with the laws of life and health, and that, where these are violated, the advantages of the former afford poor compensation. Formerly no attention, or scarcely any, was paid by school boards and teachers, in the matter of education, to the condition of the body or the development of the brain, and even at the present day very little is paid them, compared with what should be given to those great physical laws which underlie all mental culture. The lives of a multitude of children and youth are sacrificed every year in this Commonwealth by violating the laws of physiology and hygiene, through mistaken or wrong methods of mental training; besides, the constitution and health of a multitude of others are thus impaired or broken down for life. Nowhere else in society is a radical reform needed more than in our educational systems. Inasmuch as the laws of the body lie at the foundation of all proper culture, they should receive the first consideration. But, in educating the boy or girl, from the age of five to fifteen, how little attention is given to the growth and physical changes which necessarily occur at this most important period of life! The age of the child should be considered; the place of schooling, the hours of confinement and recreation, the number and kinds of studies, together with the modes of teaching, should all harmonize with physical laws—especially those of the brain.

The system or mode of treating, in education, all children as though their organizations were precisely alike, is based upon a false and unnatural theory. Great injury, in a variety of ways, results from this wrong treatment; in fact, injuries are thus inflicted upon the sensitive organizations and susceptible minds of young children, from which they never recover. That many of our most independent and clear headed educators themselves express so much dissatisfaction with the working and results of our schools, affords evidence that something is wrong in the present system. As we contemplate the great improvements made in education for the last thirty or forty years, and are surprised that educators were content to tolerate the state of things then existing, so will the next generation, when still greater and more radical changes shall have been introduced, look back with astonishment at this generation, and wonder that it was so well satisfied with its own methods: * * * The mind is treated as a kind of general receptacle into which knowledge almost indiscriminately must be poured, yes, forced, without making that knowledge one's own, or creating that self-reliance which is indispensable to its proper use. In this way the brain does not work so naturally or healthily as it ought, and a vast amount of time, labor, and expense, is wasted—nay, worse than wasted. From this forced and unnatural process there often results, not only a want of harmony and complete development of all parts of the brain, but an excessive development of the nervous temperament, and not unfrequently an irritability and morbidness which are hard to bear and difficult to overcome. And not unfrequently it ends in a permanent disease of the brain, or confinement in a lunatic asylum.

When we take a careful survey of the various discussions and diverse theories on the subject, considered metaphysically, and then compare them with the great improvements and discoveries in the physical science for the last fifty years bearing upon the same subject, the change or progress looks mainly in one direction, viz., that all true mental science must ultimately be based upon physiology. Here is a great work to be performed, and when accomplished it will constitute one of the greatest, most valuable, and most important achievements, that was ever wrought in the history of science. A vast amount of positive knowledge has already been accumulated on this subject, by various writers, but a great work, by way of analysis, observation, and induction, and of further discoveries as to the functions of the brain, remains to be completed. This work must be performed, in a great measure, by persons profoundly versed in the physical sciences; and no small proportion of it must come from the observations, labors, and contributions, of medical men.—*Popular Science Monthly*

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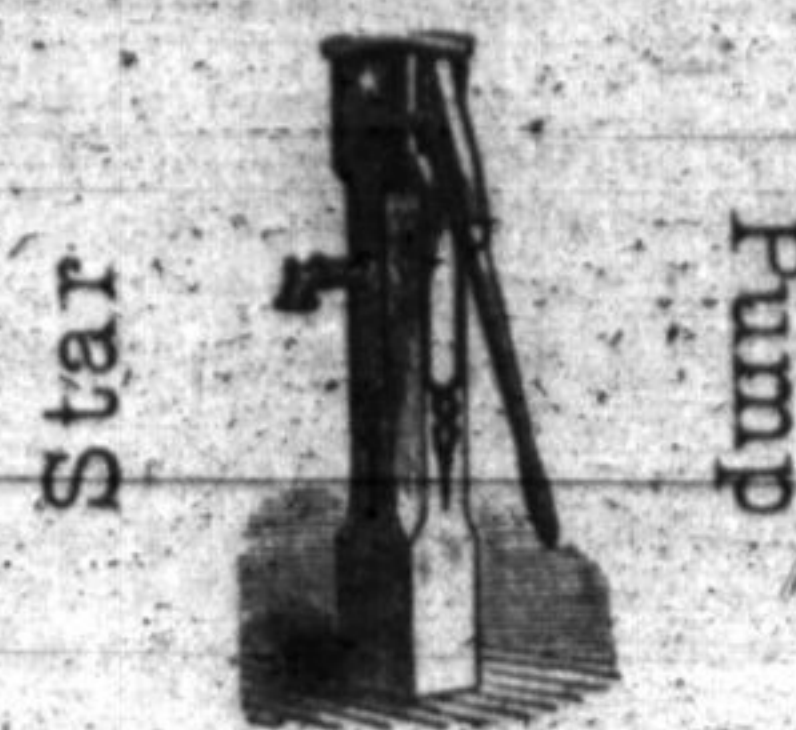
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