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THE IMAGINATION IN TEACHING

An Address by Rev. Mr. Farquharson At the Teachers' Institute.

IMAGINATION DEFINED.

To some of you it may seem as if imagination, moving in a sphere which is to some extent ideal, should occupy a secondary place in the work of education. Like Herbert Spencer, you might give the position of eminence to scientific fact and relegate all that has to do with the imagination to the playground as "amusement for the leisure hour." My purpose today is to show you that the imagination, which is all important for the poet and the novelist, is also the prime qualification for the teacher. So far from being an addenda, desirable it may be but dispensable, I wish to show you that every step of real growth from the cradle to the grave is made through the exercise of this all-important faculty. To get a clear hold of what I mean, we shall look for a moment at the human mind in its process of acquiring knowledge.

Starting at the very beginning, you will see set down as the elementary material what are called sensations, simple bare feelings of color, hardness or such like. Now you must keep in mind that though these are always talked of as if they were the stuff out of which all thought is built, they are something you never actually grasped and something you never will grasp. Like the atomic quantities in chemistry they are impalpable to human sense. We shall for our present purpose then disregard these and come to what we shall call perception. I see a book or any other object, this is a percept. I learn any fact or truth from whatever source and we shall call it for our present purpose a percept. Now I can not only perceive but I can recall my perceptions; i. e. I can remember. To some of you it may seem that your main business as teachers will be the cultivating of these two powers—perception and memory. So far as this is from being the case that these two faculties merely give the crude stuff on which the teacher is to work. Even were these powers trained to the full and no mental activity awakened besides, all the accumulation would no more make an education than the piles of stone and brick that lie on the street would be a house. The general on the battlefield might have book knowledge in plenty, might perceive the situation and remember all the experiences of the past, and yet if he had not some ability to adapt himself to the circumstances, with all his knowledge he would be but a mere child as an officer. The teacher that is full of theories, but resourceless, will face a task that will be hopeless. Now this power that constructs and compares is what we call imagination. Dr. Bain says, "it rises above perception and memory in being a constructive faculty," and Sir W. Hamilton defines it as "the representative process, plus the process to which I would give the name of the comparative." You will see then that every stage of mental progress depends on the exercise of the imagination. The little child sees a dog pass—a vivid impression is made on the mind which it distinguishes from and compares with other perceptions it has had. It sees the dog again, and memory brings back the former impression and the imagination comparing the two identifies them. It hears the sound dog, and now with a great effort of its little mind it constructs in one whole these impressions made, one through the eye and the other through the ear, and advances to the important discovery expressed in the statement "this is a dog." What power gave this knowledge? Perception could not do it, for it deals with each particular presentation, one through the eye the other through the ear. Memory could not do it, for it is only perception revived. The power that knit all in one whole and gave the first step in mental growth was none other than imagination. At every step of mental growth the scope of this power keeps widening. In the nursery there is the building of blocks—the attempt to work out certain designs with the materials at hand. The playing horse or the imitation of the acts of those about them are all exercises by which the imagination is strengthened.

IMAGINATION AND CRAMMING.

At this stage they enter the school and the process of education without break should advance in the same line. As through the imagination the child has already learned to identify certain things with certain sounds, so now the constructive work goes on identifying these same objects and sounds with certain letter combinations. So step by step as education advances the constructive work grows in complexity, building not merely with things and sounds and words but with the full range of human speech as the expression of every variety of human thought and sentiment, but no matter how complex the material, education goes as fast, and no faster than the mind by its own effort builds the material provided, into the structure of its own thought. To crowd materials faster than they can be assimilated or "to cram" is to kill the imagination and stifle all intellectual activity. Sometimes this cramming shows its evil results in an utter loathing of all study, just as the person who has once been surfeited hates the approach of the food that caused the pain; sometimes its evil fruits are seen in a death none less certain though slower in its steps. The pupil takes to gulping—seeks knowledge on every side—till it may be he grows to be a walking encyclopaedia. But the more his mind is

with facts the less he is able to use them. You see an ever growing appetite for something to know, and are even lessening power of individuality, till the man is crowded out with the accumulations of his own industry. Opinions he can quote by the score but conviction and reason of his own growth less and less till you see some such men, with their splendid equipment of knowledge, utterly helpless in any practical situation. Do you ask why? The cramming has strangled his imagination and killed the man. Is it any wonder if some of the boys called dunces because they could not be "crammed" are mercifully preserved for the world's good through what was called their stupidity? I shall quote you a few lines from Browning's "A Death in the Desert."

"For I say this is death and the sole death
"When a man's loss comes to him from his gain.
"Darkness from light, from knowledge ignorance
"And lack of love from love made manifest.
"A lamp's death when replete with oil it chokes,
"A stomach's when surcharged with food it starves."

And so the tragedy of life is run out till the sad end faces us—
"The lamp o'erflows with oil, the stomach flags
"Loaded with nurture, and the man's soul dies."

IMAGINATION AND HISTORY.

But to come to the teaching of the subjects that are set down in the school curriculum. When I was in the profession nearly a quarter of a century ago I often heard it said that history was the worst taught subject in the school. One teacher in a neighboring section had the pupils memorize Collier word for word and thought he was teaching history. Another had a list of leading events that were memorized with the dates attached in much the same way as you might name and number the bricks in the wall, and she called that history, and pupils hated it and asked the natural question, what is the use of history? I cannot enter into details but how can one teach history unless he can throw himself into the motives that moved the different actors and feel the aspirations for life and liberty in all the struggles of the past. But to have that you must have an imagination well trained in all that makes for progress in human life. And yet so many teachers say they have no time for this and persist in meeting the children's cry for bread with the bare bones of the lifeless skeleton.

IMAGINATION AND MATHEMATICS.

Mathematics especially is a subject that cannot be grasped without imagination. Take the simple problem of constructing on a given straight line an equilateral triangle. Without imagination you might make sundry attempts and might construct something approaching to the requirement but it is only a haphazard process. Now the man with imagination trained sees that any two of the sides will be radii of a circle drawn with centre at the angle where they meet at the distance of the given straight line. In imagination he sees the circles drawn and the points of section joined and already the work is done. Deductions are set down for the very purpose of drawing out the imagination of the student, and yet I am told that some do no deductions and fancy that because they can repeat some propositions as set down in the book they are mathematicians!

IMAGINATION AND MORALS.

It may seem to you, before you reflect on it, that in the matter of right and wrong we have a sphere where, at least, there can be no play of imagination. You tell me right is right and wrong is wrong absolutely and invariably. Now I grant that the principles of morals are absolute, as absolute as those of mathematics, but that does not lessen the need for imagination to grasp these principles. Our dealings with our fellow men are all determined by our power of putting ourselves in the other's place and thus understanding the other's feelings. I do not need to tell a body of teachers how hard the task is of thus leading one to see the rights of others and his duties to them. Every day will supply you with examples. Do you ask how this difficult lesson is to be learned I would say through the imagination. Your power of acting kindly towards others will be in proportion to your power of imagining yourself in the other's place. To this faculty the Golden Rule makes appeal when it lays down the law, "All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you do ye also unto them." Nay, the teaching of Jesus makes a claim on the imagination still higher when He presents Himself as the model for our action in the law, "A new commandment I give unto you that ye love one another as I have loved you." The problem thus suggested of "What would Jesus do?" has been the subject of deepest interest, and to this very hour some of the most popular books published are those that attempt a solution in terms of modern life. Now the work of the teacher in training in morals is not merely to help to awaken the imagination to see the right but also to help each to stand in a right attitude to that right. I shall not enter into a discussion of the wide subject of the means of enforcing discipline. I shall presume that nothing has yet come together to supersede the old prescription—"A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass and a rod for the fool's back"—but I would say that little success will be attained if all pupils are summarily put into the latter class and treated accordingly. The task for the teacher is to awaken the pupil to see the right and to make him willing to do it. The power of all powers which you are to wield for that end is the power of the imagination. Let me refer you to two classical examples. "One is the lesson Nathan gave to David to

lead him to genuine penitence. It would have been easy to come with a broad denunciation, telling him in thunder tones his iniquity, but that would never have moved his heart. You all remember the delicate way in which the prophet awakens his conscience through the imagination in the parable of the "Ewe Lamb" till David's anger was kindled against the man that did such a thing. This done, the task of applying it is easy for the application enters by the door the imagination has opened and carries the irremediable conviction "Thou art the Man." The other example is the way Jesus took to teach the lawyer "who is my neighbor." You all remember how the imagination presented the man robbed and wounded on the way to Jericho, Priest and Levite passed him by, till the Samaritan came along, bound up his wounds and took him to an inn and took care of him, and now the question comes "which of these three thinkest thou was neighbor to him that fell among the thieves," and even the hard heart of the Pharisee is constrained to confess, "He that showed mercy on him," and the answer comes "Go and do thou likewise." That lesson is a living lesson to-day. Stir the imagination and you give a lesson that will grow in power with the years and be handed down to mould the hearts of unborn generations.

IMAGINATION AND ITS EDUCATION.

After what I have said the question may be asked, What shall be done with a teacher who has no imagination? The late Dr. Blackie, of Edinburgh, in his inimitable way once said, "Any man seventeen years of age who has not read Shakespeare should be kicked into the Atlantic." I am sure you will all realize that however heroic the treatment it would do little to help the situation. I would rather to-day, feebly and imperfectly as it may be, do my best to show how that rare power is to be acquired. I shall not burden your memories with a very long list of directions, but if I must tabulate my prescription by firstly, secondly and thirdly I would say the first rule is "Exercise it," the second is "Exercise it" and the third is "Exercise it." You can get it in no other way. "You learn to play on the harp by playing on the harp," "you learn to build the house by building the house," and you can only learn to build the house made without hands by building it. Were I recommending books to read I would say read books that require you to exercise this faculty. Nothing is so deadening to the imagination as reading a kind of literature that needs no effort to grasp but which can be drunk in, in its tears and laughter just as you quaff your cup of tea or lazily bask in the sunshine. I remember seeing somewhere in Ruskin a statement which may startle the fair portion of my hearers. The statement is to the effect that the reason why women are so cruel is that they have less imagination than men. Well comparisons are odious and I shall not draw them in this case, but if you think women are angels listen on the next occasion when one, in good earnest, lets her tongue loose on another and you will see that even in her the tiger is not all dead. Well if there is anything in Ruskin's hint that woman is less highly gifted with imagination than men, it is largely due to their persistent reading of a class of literature that can be drunk in without any exercise of the imagination whatever. Learn to read, amongst novels, those that give an education in character, that force you to reflect, and that help you by reading to enjoy something better. Read and digest poetry and the best classical poetry, which cannot be read without every step of the way being paved by your own imagination. Know men, know thyself, know nature in all its principles—the space relations as seen in mathematics, the principles of life as seen in society and the struggle of the ages as recorded in history. More than all read it all with kindly eye. Nothing helps the imagination like love. Wordsworth says:—
"He who feels contempt
For any living thing, hath faculties
That he hath never used, and thought with him
Is in its infancy."
Above all if you would have imagination strong and pure it must spring from a manly noble life. These fruits of Paradise neither grow in the gin-palace nor in the ball-room. "A pure heart and a simple manly life alone can reveal to you all that which seer and poet saw."

IMAGINATION PERVERTED.

And now in the last place let me give you a word on the great danger facing us all of perverting instead of educating the imagination. When the sacred writer wished to present a picture of the sinfulness of the whole human race before the flood he uses the startling words "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," and when ever the imagination is perverted there is the brand of deepest degradation. The man or woman who feeds a diseased imagination is spreading the venour of the serpent. I realize to the full your earnest desire to fill the mind with things that are "lovely and of good report," and yet in your very anxiety to root out the ill there is danger lest you, all unwittingly, may be the occasion of suggesting thoughts that are not for health but for sickness. I shall indicate just two ways in which you are in danger of erring in this regard. You may, in the first place, through an affected modesty suggest visions which your very shyness confesses yourself behold. Were you driving along the road and all at once your horse sprang to the side, every eye would be turned to see what made

the pony shy. So every time you shy in dealing with something that has in it no cause for shame, every time you see in nature nakedness where no nakedness exists, you turn every prying eye to see what could have been in your mind that made you flinch. Why should there be the semblance of a blush at reading the lines:—
"And the cruel rocks they gored her side
"Like the horns of an angry bull."

Why should the meeting of the living bull, or calling him by his proper name, make you shrink, or for a moment seem as a revelation of nakedness? Why must people say limb instead of leg and so on? To the pure all things are pure, and no truth is more needful to be impressed than that nature, in all her parts and processes, is holy. Let this thought fill your minds and in the purity of your own hearts you will help others to be pure. Allow the thought to enter that all around there is nakedness and shame and your own shrinking will turn curious eyes to look and teach them to see the vision that made you shrink. The different ways in which nature may be viewed is well illustrated by two forms of an old fairy tale or more accurately of an old Saga. Let me say the tale is not a tale of a woman in the flesh but brings to us an old religious belief as to nature. Godiva, of whom I am to tell you, is none else than the Goddess of Nature. We shall first look at the tale as Tennyson gives it. Godiva in the poem was wife of Leofric King of the Mercians, who for love to the people of Coventry be sought her husband to relieve them of the tax that was oppressing them. He is the very picture of an unkempt boor—"His beard a foot in front of him, his hair a yard behind." The condition he exacts on which to relieve the tax is as follows:—
"Ride you naked through the town
"And I repeat it."
She gets his consent to do it and the heralds deal out the message that:—
"As they loved her well
"From then till noon no foot should pace the street,
"No eye look down, she passing; but that all
"Should keep within, doors shut and windows barred."

Thus the summons runs but as might be expected.
"One low churl compact of thankless earth,
"The fatal byword of all years to come,
"Boring a little auger hole in fear
"Peeped—but his eyes before they had their will
"Were shrouded into darkness in his head."
"And dropt before him. So the powers who wait
"On noble deeds cancelled a sense misused"

Compare this view of nature with that given of the same tale by Roger of Wendover, about 150 years after Leofric. His tale is as follows:—
"Whereupon the countess beloved of God loosed her hair and let down her tresses, which covered the whole of her body like a veil, and then mounting her horse and attended by two Knights, she rode through the market place without being seen except her fair legs." You will notice here there is no proclamation to stay in, no sense of shame because there was no nakedness and no peeping. Attended by two Knights she rode and no eye was marred, no soul stained. Which of these tales gives the highest ideal of purity? Is it not the second? So long as we see nature in her nakedness and behold visions that make us shrink, so long will we reveal a nakedness, not of the body but of the soul, and so long will the sad tragedy be re-enacted of eyes peeping and the cancelling of a sense misused. Ladies and gentlemen, on the one who shrinks in shame where no nakedness is I can look only with feeling of deepest pity, but before the man or woman who faces all facts of human life and yet is not ashamed, I lift my hat in honor of the purity of heart that has seen all nature laid bare and yet needeth not to be ashamed.

The other way of perverting the imagination to which I would refer is that of giving exercises in imagining words that the speaker thinks it more modest to suggest than name. People say d-d, d-l, b-, and so forth ad nauseam and fancy it less gross than saying 'damned' or 'devil' or 'bitch'. Yet if you will reflect, the very contractions are an exercise of the imagination and if one wanted to print such words and the thoughts suggested in the mind he could devise no better way than by giving the exercise of working out such contractions. Let me say if it is right to use the words at all, and all these words have a proper use, give them their full sound. With Shakespeare in the might of passion say
"Lay on Macduff, and damned be he
"That first cries hold! enough!"

On proper occasion say with Paul "O full of all guile and all villainy thou son of the devil." If need be denounce your Caliban as "A fleckled whelp, hag born not honored with a human shape," but if the occasion is unworthy of the use of any such words, as most occasions are, then be silent, at least never try to shelter your poor soul by saying: "I did not say any bad word anyway." I must confess it is always a peculiar irritation to me when one appeals in that way to my imagination. It is saying in effect—"The word is too vile for me to utter, but of course you are so familiar with it that you can easily supply it." Thus you force the listener to trail his own mind through all the slim of your own base imagining. I entreat you be men and women and when you dare not speak the word do not meanly insinuate it. Ladies and gentlemen I have to apologize for the length at which I have spoken. I thank you for your kind attention, and in conclusion would in one sentence express my conviction that all good education is imagination well directed and all bad education is either imagination neglected or imagination perverted.

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