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Three Instruments of Education¹

1.—Education is an Atmosphere

Seeing that we are limited by the respect due to the personality of children we can allow ourselves but three educational instruments—the atmosphere of environment, the discipline of habit and the presentation of living ideas. Our motto is,—'Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life.' When we say that education is an atmosphere we do not mean that a child should be isolated in what may be called a 'child environment' specially adapted and prepared, but that we should take into account the educational value of his natural home atmosphere both as regards persons and things and should let him live freely among his proper conditions. It stultifies a child to bring down his world to the 'child's' level.

Having cut out the direct use of fear or love, suggestion or influence, undue play upon any one natural desire, emulation, for example, we are no longer free to use all means in the education of children. There are but three left for our use and to each of these we must give careful study or we shall not realise how great a scope is left to us. To consider the first of these educational instruments; for a decade or two we have pinned our faith on environment as a great part of education; as, say, nine-tenths rather than a third part of the whole. The theory has been,—put a child in the right environment and so subtle is its influence, so permanent its effects that he is to all intents and purposes educated thereby. Schools may add Latin and sums and whatever else their curriculum contains, but the actual education is, as it were, performed upon a child by means of color schemes, harmonious sounds, beautiful forms, gracious persons. He grows up aesthetically educated into sweet reasonableness and harmony with his surroundings.

"Peter's nursery was a perfect dream in which to hatch the soul of a little boy. Its walls were done in warm, cream-colored paint and upon them Peter's father had put the most lovely patterns of trotting and jumping horses and dancing cats and dogs and leaping lambs, a carnival of beasts . . . there was a big brass fire-guard in Peter's nursery . . . and all the tables had smoothly rounded corners against the days when Peter would run about. The floor was of cork carpet on which Peter would put his toys and there was a crimson hearthrug on which Peter was destined to crawl . . . there were scales in Peter's nursery to weigh Peter every week and tables to show how much he ought to weigh and when one should begin to feel anxious. There was nothing casual about the early years of Peter."

So, Mr. [H.G.] Wells, in that inconclusive educational treatise of his, *Joan and Peter*. It is an accurate picture of the preparation for 'high-souled' little persons all over the world. Parents make tremendous sacrifices to that goddess who presides over Education. We hear of a pair investing more than their capital in a statue to adorn the staircase in order that 'Tommy' should make his soul by the contemplation of beauty. This sort of thing has been going on since the 'eighties at any rate and, as usual, Germany erected a high altar for the cult which she passed on

¹ Charlotte Mason, *Philosophy of Education*, chapter 6.

to the rest of us. Perhaps it is safe to say that the Young Intelligenza of Europe have been reared after this manner. And is the result that Neo-Georgian youth Punch presents to us with his air of weariness, condescension and self-complacency? Let us hear Professor Sir Jagadis Chandra Bose, the Indian scientist, on one of his conclusions concerning the nervous impulse in plants,

"A plant carefully protected under glass from outside shocks looks sleek and flourishing but its higher nervous function is then found to be atrophied. But when a succession of "blows" (electric shocks) "is rained on this effete and bloated specimen, the shocks themselves create nervous channels and arouse anew the deteriorated nature. Is it not the shocks of adversity and not cotton wool protection that evolve true manhood?"

We had thought that the terrible succession of blows inflicted by the War had changed all that; but, no; the errors of education still hold sway and we still have amongst us the better-than-my-neighbor folk, whose function, let us hope, is to administer the benefits of adversity to most of us. What if parents and teachers in their zeal misread the schedule of their duties, magnified their office unduly and encroached upon the personality of children? It is not an environment that these want, a set of artificial relations carefully constructed, but an atmosphere which nobody has been at pains to constitute. It is there, about the child, his natural element, precisely as the atmosphere of the earth is about us. It is thrown off, as it were, from persons and things, stirred by events, sweetened by love, ventilated, kept in motion, by the regulated action of common sense. We all know the natural conditions under which a child should live; how he shares household ways with his mother, romps with his father, is teased by his brothers and petted by his sisters; is taught by his tumbles; learns self-denial by the baby's needs, the delightfulness of furniture by playing at battle and siege with sofa and table; learns veneration for the old by the visits of his great-grandmother; how to live with his equals by the chums he gathers round him; learns intimacy with animals from his dog and cat; delight in the fields where the buttercups grow and greater delight in the blackberry hedges. And, what tempered 'fusion of classes' is so effective as a child's intimacy with his betters, and also with cook and housemaid, blacksmith and joiner, with everybody who comes in his way? Children have a genius for this sort of general intimacy, a valuable part of their education; care and guidance are needed, of course, lest admiring friends should make fools of them, but no compounded 'environment' could make up for this fresh air, this wholesome wind blowing now from one point, now from another.

We certainly may use atmosphere as an instrument of education, but there are prohibitions, for ourselves rather than for children. Perhaps the chief of these is, that no artificial element be introduced, no sprinkling with rose-water, softening with cushions. Children must face life as it is; if their parents are anxious and perturbed children feel it in the air. "Mummie, Mummie, you aren't going to cry this time, are you?" and a child's hug tries to take away the trouble. By these things children live and we may not keep them in glass cases; if we do, they develop in succulence and softness and will not become plants of renown. But due relations must be maintained; the parents are in authority, the children in obedience; and again, the strong may not lay their burdens on the weak; nor must we expect from children that effort of decision, the most fatiguing in our lives, of which the young should generally be relieved.

School, perhaps, offers fewer opportunities for vitiating the atmosphere than does home life. But teaching may be so watered down and sweetened, teachers may be so suave and condescending, as to bring about a condition of intellectual feebleness and moral softness which it is not easy for

a child to overcome. The bracing atmosphere of truth and sincerity should be perceived in every School; and here again the common pursuit of knowledge by teacher and class comes to our aid and creates a Current of fresh air perceptible even to the chance visitor, who sees the glow of intellectual life and moral health on the faces of teachers and children alike.

But a school may be working hard, not for love of knowledge, but for love of marks, our old enemy; and then young faces are not serene and joyous but eager, restless, apt to look anxious and worried. The children do not sleep well and are cross; are sullen or in tears if anything goes wrong, and are, generally, difficult to manage. When this is the case there is too much oxygen in the air; they are breathing a too stimulating atmosphere, and the nervous strain to which they are subjected must needs be followed by reaction. Then teachers think that lessons have been too hard, that children should be relieved of this and that study; the doctors probably advise that so-and-so should 'run wild' for a year. Poor little soul, at the very moment when he is most in need of knowledge for his sustenance he is left to prey upon himself! No wonder the nervous symptoms become worse, and the boy or girl suffers under the stigma of 'nervous strain.' The fault has been in the atmosphere and not in the work; the teacher, perhaps, is over anxious that her children should do well and her nervous excitation is catching. "I am afraid X cannot do his examination; he loves his work but he bursts into tears when he is asked an examination question. Perhaps it is that I have insisted too much that he must never be satisfied with anything but his best." Poor little chap (of seven) pricked into over exertion by the spur of moral stimulus! We foresee happy days for children when all teachers know that no other exciting motive whatever is necessary to produce good work in each individual of however big a class than that love of knowledge which is natural to every child. The serenity and sweetness of schools conducted on this principle is surprising to the outsider who has not reflected upon the contentment of a baby with his bottle!

There are two courses open to us in this matter. One, to create by all manner of modified conditions a hot-house atmosphere, fragrant but emasculating, in which children grow apace but are feeble and dependent; the other to leave them open to all the "airts that blow," but with care lest they be unduly battered; lest, for example, a miasma come their way in the shape of a vicious companion.

2.—Education is a Discipline

By this formula we mean the discipline of habits formed definitely and thoughtfully whether habits of mind or of body. Physiologists tell us of the adaptation of brain structure to habitual lines of thought, i.e., to our habits.

Education is not after all to either teacher or child the fine careless rapture we appear to have figured it. We who teach and they who learn are alike constrained; there is always effort to be made in certain directions; yet we face our tasks from a new point of view. We need not labor to get children to learn their lessons; that, if we would believe it, is a matter which nature takes care of. Let the lessons be of the right sort and children will learn them with delight. The call for strenuousness comes with the necessity of forming habits; but here again we are relieved. The intellectual habits of the good life form themselves in the following out of the due curriculum in the right way. As we have already urged, there is but one right way, that is, children must do the work for themselves. They must read the given pages and tell what they have read, they must perform, that is, what we may call the act of knowing. We are all aware, alas, what a monstrous quantity of printed matter has gone into the dustbin of our memories, because we have failed to

perform that quite natural and spontaneous 'act of knowing,' as easy to a child as breathing and, if we would believe it, comparatively easy to ourselves. The reward is two-fold: no intellectual habit is so valuable as that of attention; it is a mere habit but it is also the hall-mark of an educated person. Use is second nature, we are told; it is not too much to say that 'habit is ten natures,' and we can all imagine how our work would be eased if our subordinates listened to instructions with the full attention which implies recollection—Attention is not the only habit that follows due self-education. The habits of fitting and ready expression, of obedience, of good-will, and of an impersonal outlook are spontaneous bye-products of education in this sort. So, too, are the habits of right thinking and right judging; while physical habits of neatness and order attend upon the self-respect which follows an education which respects the personality of children.

Physiologists tell us that thoughts which have become habitual make somehow a mark upon the brain substance, but we are bold in calling it a mark for there is no discernible effect to be quoted. Whether or no the mind be served by the brain in this matter, we are empirically certain that a chief function of education is the establishment of such ways of thinking in children as shall issue in good and useful living, clear thinking, aesthetic enjoyment, and, above all, in the religious life. How it is possible that spirit should act upon matter is a mystery to us, but that such act takes place we perceive every time we note a scowling brow, or, on the other hand,—

"A sweet attractive kind of grace,
A full assurance given by looks;
Continual comfort in a face,
The lineaments of gospel books."

We all know how the physical effort of smiling affects ourselves in our sour moods,—

"Nor soul helps flesh more now, than flesh helps soul"

Both are at our service in laying down the rails, so to speak, upon which the good life must needs run.

In the past we have, no doubt, gone through an age of infant slavery, an age of good habits enforced by vigorous penalties, conscientiously by the over scrupulous eighteenth century parent, and infamously by the school masters, the 'Creakies' and the 'Squeers' who labored only for their own ease and profit. Now, the pendulum swings the other way. We have lost sight of the fact that habit is to life what rails are to transport cars. It follows that lines of habit must be laid down towards given ends and after careful survey, or the joltings and delays of life become insupportable. More, habit is inevitable. If we fail to ease life by laying down habits of right thinking and right acting, habits of wrong thinking and wrong acting fix themselves of their own accord. We avoid decision and indecision brings its own delays, "and days are lost lamenting o'er lost days." Almost every child is brought up by his parents in certain habits of decency and order without which he would be a social outcast. Think from another point of view how the labor of life would be increased if every act of the bath, toilet, table, every lifting of the fork and use of spoon were a matter of consideration and required an effort of decision! No; habit is like fire, a bad master but an indispensable servant; and probably one reason for the nervous scrupulosity, hesitation, indecision of our day, is that life was not duly eased for us in the first place by those whose business it was to lay down lines of habit upon which our behavior might run easily.

It is unnecessary to enumerate those habits which we should aim at forming, for everyone knows more about these than anyone practices. We admire the easy carriage of the soldier but shrink from the discipline which is able to produce it. We admire the lady who can sit upright through a long dinner, who in her old age prefers a straight chair because she has arrived at due muscular balance and has done so by a course of discipline. There is no other way of forming any good habit, though the discipline is usually that of the internal government which the person exercises upon himself; but a certain strenuousness in the formation of good habits is necessary because every such habit is the result of conflict. The bad habit of the easy life is always pleasant and persuasive and to be resisted with pain and effort, but with hope and certainty of success, because in our very structure is the preparation for forming such habits of muscle and mind as we deliberately propose to ourselves. We entertain the idea which gives birth to the act and the act repeated again and again becomes the habit; 'Sow an act,' we are told, 'reap a habit.' 'Sow a habit, reap a character.' But we must go a step further back, we must sow the idea or notion which makes the act worth while. The lazy boy who hears of the Great Duke's narrow camp bed, preferred by him because when he wanted to turn over it was time to get up, receives the idea of prompt rising. But his nurse or his mother knows how often and how ingeniously the tale must be brought to his mind before the habit of prompt rising is formed; she knows too how the idea of self-conquest must be made at home in the boy's mind until it become a chivalric impulse which he cannot resist. It is possible to sow a great idea lightly and casually and perhaps this sort of sowing should be rare and casual because if a child detect a definite purpose in his mentor he is apt to stiffen himself against it. When parent or teacher supposes that a good habit is a matter of obedience to his authority, he relaxes a little. A boy is late who has been making evident efforts to be punctual; the teacher good-naturedly foregoes rebuke or penalty, and the boy says to himself,—"It doesn't matter," and begins to form the unpunctual habit. The mistake the teacher makes is to suppose that to be punctual is troublesome to the boy, so he will let him off; whereas the office of the habits of an ordered life is to make such life easy and spontaneous; the effort is confined to the first half dozen or score of occasions for doing the thing.

Consider how laborious life would be were its wheels not greased by habits of cleanliness, neatness, order, courtesy; had we to make the effort of decision about every detail of dressing and eating, coming and going, life would not be worth living. Every cottage mother knows that she must train her child in habits of decency, and a whole code of habits of propriety get themselves formed just because a breach in any such habit causes a shock to others which few children have courage to face. Physical fitness, morals and manners, are very largely the outcome of habit; and not only so, but the habits of the religious life also become fixed and delightful and give us due support in the effort to live a godly, righteous and sober life. We need not be deterred by the fear that religious habits in a child are mechanical, uninformed by the ideas which should give them value. Let us hear what the young De Quincey felt about going to church:—

"On Sunday mornings I went with the rest of my family to church: it was a church on the ancient model of England having aisles, galleries, organ, all things ancient and venerable, and the proportions were majestic. Here, whilst the congregation knelt through the long litany, as often as we came to that passage so beautiful amongst many that are so where God is supplicated on behalf of 'all sick persons and young children' and 'that He would show His pity upon all prisoners and captives,' I wept in secret, and raising my streaming eyes to the upper windows saw, on days when the sun was shining, a spectacle as affecting as ever prophet can have beheld . . . there were the Apostles that had trampled upon earth and the glories upon earth, there were the

martyrs who had borne witness to the truth through flames . . . and all the time I saw through the wide central field of the window where the glass was uncolored white fleecy clouds sailing over the azure depths of the sky."

And then the little boy had visions of sick children upon whom God would have pity.—

"These visions were self-sustained, the hint from the Litany, the fragment from the clouds, those and the storied windows were sufficient. God speaks to children also in dreams and by the oracles that lurk in darkness; but in solitude, above all things when made vocal to the meditative heart by the truths and services of a national church, God holds with children 'communion undisturbed.'"

With such a testimony before us, supported by gleams of recollection on our own part, we may take courage to believe that what we rightly call Divine Service is particularly appropriate to children; and will become more so as the habit of reading beautifully written books quickens their sense of style and their unconscious appreciation of the surpassingly beautiful diction of our liturgy.

We have seen the value of habit in mind and morals, religion and physical development. It is as we have seen disastrous when child or man learns to think in a groove, and shivers like an unaccustomed bather on the steps of a new notion. This danger is perhaps averted by giving children as their daily diet the wise thoughts of great minds, and of many great minds; so that they may gradually and unconsciously get the courage of their opinions. If we fail in this duty, so soon as the young people get their 'liberty' they will run after the first fad that presents itself; try it for a while and then take up another to be discarded in its turn, and remain uncertain and ill-guided for the rest of their days.

3.—Education is a Life

We have left until the last that instrument of education implied in the phrase 'Education is a life'; 'implied' because life is no more self-existing than it is self-supporting; it requires sustenance, regular, ordered and fitting. This is fully recognized as regards bodily life and, possibly, the great discovery of the twentieth century will be that mind too requires its ordered rations and perishes when these fail. We know that food is to the body what fuel is to the steam-engine, the sole source of energy; once we realize that the mind too works only as it is fed education will appear to us in a new light. The body pines and develops humors upon tabloids and other food substitutes; and a glance at a 'gate' crowd watching a football match makes us wonder what sort of mind-food those men and boys are sustained on, whether they are not suffering from depletion, inanition, notwithstanding big and burly bodies. For the mind is capable of dealing with only one kind of food; it lives, grows and is nourished upon ideas only; mere information is to it as a meal of sawdust to the body; there are no organs for the assimilation of the one more than of the other.

What is an idea? we ask, and find ourselves plunged beyond our depth. A live thing of the mind, seems to be the conclusion of our greatest thinkers from Plato to Bacon, from Bacon to Coleridge. We all know how an idea 'strikes,' 'seizes,' 'catches hold of,' 'impresses' us and at last, if it be big enough, 'possesses' us; in a word, behaves like an entity.

If we enquire into any person's habits of life, mental preoccupation, devotion to a cause or pursuit, he will usually tell us that such and such an idea struck him. This potency of an idea is matter of common recognition. No phrase is more common and more promising than, 'I have an

idea'; we rise to such an opening as trout to a well-chosen fly. There is but one sphere in which the word idea never occurs, in which the conception of an idea is curiously absent, and that sphere is education! Look at any publisher's list of school books and you shall find that the books recommended are carefully desiccated, drained of the least suspicion of an idea, reduced to the driest statements of fact. Here perhaps the Public Schools have a little pull over the rest of us--the diet they afford may be meager, meager almost to starvation point for the average boy, but it is not destitute of ideas; for, however sparsely, boys are nourished on the best thoughts of the best minds.

Coleridge has done more than other thinkers to bring the conception of an idea within the sphere of the scientific thought of to-day; not as that thought is expressed in psychology, a term which he himself launched upon the world with an apology for it as *insolens verbum* ("we beg pardon for the use of this *insolens verbum* but it is one of which our language stands in great need." Method, S. T. Coleridge) but as showing the re-action of mind to an idea. This is how in his Method Coleridge illustrates the rise and progress of such an idea:—

"We can recall no incident of human history that impresses the imagination more deeply than the moment when Columbus on an unknown ocean first perceived that baffling fact, the change of the magnetic needle. How many instances occur in history when the ideas of nature (presented to chosen minds by a Higher Power than Nature herself) suddenly unfold as it were in prophetic succession systematic views destined to produce the most important revolutions in the state of man! The clear spirit of Columbus was doubtless eminently methodical. He saw distinctly that great leading idea which authorized the poor pilot to become a 'promiser of kingdoms.'"

Here we get such a genesis of an idea as fits in curiously with what we know of the history of great inventions and discoveries "presented to chosen minds by a higher Power than Nature herself." It corresponds too, not only with the ideas that rule our own lives, but with the origin of practical ideas which is unfolded to us by the prophet Isaiah:—

"Doth the ploughman plough continually to . . . open and break the clods of his ground? When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches and scatter the cummin and put the wheat in rows . . . for his God doth instruct him aright and doth teach him . . . Bread corn is ground for he will not ever be threshing it . . . This also cometh from the Lord of Hosts which is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." [Isaiah xxviii.]

Let us hear Coleridge further on the subject of those ideas which may invest us as an atmosphere rather than strike as a weapon:—

"The idea may exist in a clear and definite form as that of a circle in that of the mind of a geometrician or it may be a mere instinct, a vague appetency towards something . . . like the impulse which fills a young poet's eyes with tears."

These indefinite ideas which express themselves in an 'appetency' towards something and which should draw a child towards things honest, lovely and of good report, are not to be offered of set purpose or at set times: they are held in that thought-atmosphere which surrounds him, breathed as his breath of life.

It is distressing to think that our poor words and ways should be thus inspired by children; but to recognize the fact will make us careful not to admit sordid or unworthy thoughts and motives into our dealings with them.

Coleridge treats in more detail those definite ideas which are not inhaled as air but are conveyed as meat to the mind:—

"From the first or initiative idea, as from a seed, successive ideas germinate." "Events and images, the lively and spirit-stirring machinery of the external world, are like light and air and moisture to the seed of the mind which would else rot and perish." "The paths in which we may pursue a methodical course are manifold and at the head of each stands its peculiar and guiding idea. Those ideas are as regularly subordinate in dignity as the paths to which they point are various and eccentric in direction. The world has suffered much in modern times from a subversive and necessary natural order of science . . . from summoning reason and faith to the bar of that limited physical experience to which by the true laws of method they owe no obedience. Progress follows the path of the idea from which it sets out requiring however a constant wakefulness of mind to keep it within the due limits of its course. Hence the orbits of thought, so to speak, must differ from among themselves as the initiative ideas differ." (Method, S. T. C.).

Is it not a fact that the new light which biology is throwing upon the laws of mind is bringing us back to the Platonic doctrine that "An idea is a distinguishable power, self-affirmed and seen in unity with the Eternal Essence"?

I have ventured to repeat from an earlier volume this slight exposition of Coleridge's teaching, because his doctrine corresponds with common experience and should reverse our ordinary educational practice. The whole subject is profound, but as practical as it is profound. We must disabuse our minds of the theory that the functions of education are in the main gymnastic, a continual drawing out without a corresponding act of putting in. The modern emphasis upon 'self-expression' has given new currency to this idea; we who know how little there is in us that we have not received, that the most we can do is to give an original twist, a new application, to an idea that has been passed on to us; who recognize, humbly enough, that we are but torch-bearers, passing on our light to the next as we have received it from the last, even we invite children to 'express themselves' about a tank, a Norman castle, the Man in the Moon, not recognizing that the quaint things children say on unfamiliar subjects are no more than a patchwork of notions picked up here and there. One is not sure that so-called original composition is wholesome for children, because their consciences are alert and they are quite aware of their borrowings; it may be better that they should read on a theme before they write upon it, using then as much latitude as they like.

In the early days of a child's life it makes little apparent difference whether we educate with a notion of filling a receptacle, inscribing a tablet, molding plastic matter, or nourishing a life, but as a child grows we shall perceive that only those ideas which have fed his life, are taken into his being; all the rest is cast away or is, like sawdust in the system, an impediment and an injury.

Education is a life. That life is sustained on ideas. Ideas are of spiritual origin, and God has made us so that we get them chiefly as we convey them to one another, whether by word of mouth, written page, Scripture word, musical symphony; but we must sustain a child's inner life with ideas as we sustain his body with food. Probably he will reject nine-tenths of the ideas we offer, as he makes use of only a small proportion of his bodily food, rejecting the rest. He is an eclectic; he may choose this or that; our business is to supply him with due abundance and variety and his to take what he needs. Urgency on our part annoys him. He resists forcible feeding and loathes predigested food. What suits him best is pabulum presented in the indirect

literary form which Our Lord adopts in those wonderful parables whose quality is that they cannot be forgotten though, while every detail of the story is remembered, its application may pass and leave no trace. We, too, must take this risk. We may offer children as their sustenance the Lysander of Plutarch, an object lesson, we think, showing what a statesman or a citizen should avoid: but, who knows, the child may take to Lysander and think his 'cute' ways estimable! Again, we take the risk, as did our Lord in that puzzling parable of the Unjust Steward. One other caution; it seems to be necessary to present ideas with a great deal of padding, as they reach us in a novel or poem or history book written with literary power. A child cannot in mind or body live upon tabloids however scientifically prepared; out of a whole big book he may not get more than half a dozen of those ideas upon which his spirit thrives; and they come in unexpected places and unrecognized forms, so that no grown person is capable of making such extracts from Scott or Dickens or Milton, as will certainly give him nourishment. It is a case of,—“In the morning sow thy seed and in the evening withhold not thine hand for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that.”

One of our presumptuous sins in this connection is that we venture to offer opinions to children (and to older persons) instead of ideas. We believe that an opinion expresses thought and therefore embodies an idea. Even if it did so once the very act of crystallization into opinion destroys any vitality it may have had; pace Ruskin, a crystal is not a living body and does not feed men. We think to feed children on the dogmas of a church, the theorems of Euclid, mere abstracts of history, and we wonder that their education does not seem to take hold of them. Let us hear M. Fouillée on this subject, for to him the idea is all in all both in philosophy and education. But there is a function of education upon which M. Fouillée hardly touches, that of the formation of habits, physical, intellectual, moral.

“Scientific truths,’ said Descartes, ‘are battles won.’ Describe to the young the principal and most heroic of these battles; you will thus interest them in the results of science and you will develop in them a scientific spirit by means of the enthusiasm for the conquest of truth . . . How interesting Arithmetic and Geometry might be if we gave a short history of their principal theorems, if the child were meant to be present at the labors of a Pythagoras, a Plato, a Euclid, or in modern times, of a Descartes, a Pascal, or a Leibnitz. Great theories instead of being lifeless and anonymous abstractions would become living human truths each with its own history like a statue by Michael Angelo or like a painting by Raphael.”

Here we have an application of Coleridge's 'captain-idea' of every train of thought; that is, not a naked generalization, (neither children nor grown persons find aliment in these), but an idea clothed upon with fact, and story, so that the mind may perform the acts of selection and inception from a mass of illustrative details. Thus Dickens makes 'David Copperfield' tell us that,—“I was a very observant child,” and that “all children are very observant,” not as a dry abstraction, but as an inference from a number of charming natural incidents.

All roads lead to Rome, and all I have said is meant to enforce the fact that much and varied humane reading, as well as human thought expressed in the forms of art, is, not a luxury, a tit-bit, to be given to children now and then, but their very bread of life, which they must have in abundant portions and at regular periods. This and more is implied in the phrase, “The mind feeds on ideas and therefore children should have a generous curriculum.”