

THE TEACHER'S UNCONSCIOUS SUCCESS

Our respected friend, in honor of whom we are met to-day, furnishes me the first illustration of the sentiment you have offered me. I remember him as he used to visit the schools of Hartford forty-five or fifty years ago when I was a boy in one of them. We schoolboys were familiar with his figure and I recall him distinctly as we used to see him. Our teachers honored him and taught us to honor him. In some way which we did not understand he embodied the care and providence which was giving us our schooling. We then attributed to him more patriarchal dignity perhaps than he then deserved. We know now that he first introduced some system and regularity, some economy of time and money, into the old happy-go-lucky system of the district schools, but my mind goes back with more affection and reverence still to the man who, in my childhood, seemed to be the responsible moving agent of the whole school system. We thought that he would not work for us unless he loved us and he seemed to have a fatherly care for all the school children in the State. He never spoke to me and I presume never let his eyes rest on me, but I have to thank him for a part of the inspiration which has entered into my life and work. I am a part of his unconscious success.

This case leads us to reflect how much of this kind of success every faithful worker in the cause of education wins without knowing it; and is it not the best success of all? We warn ourselves and we are warned by all our critics that education is something far different from

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schooling. Unfortunately they do not necessarily go together. Unfortunately also our people are pinning their faith on schooling. The faith in book-learning is one of the superstitions of the nineteenth century and it enters for a large part into the bequest which the nineteenth century is about to hand over to the twentieth. On the walls of our schoolroom our teacher had pasted up in large letters: "Knowledge is power." Yes, that is what knowledge is. It is power and nothing more. As a power it is like wealth, talent, or any power, that is, it is without any moral element whatever. The moral question always comes in when we ask, in respect to the man who has power: What will he do with it? It is so of wealth. The man who has it can realize purposes which are entirely impossible to the man who has it not. What purposes will the holder of wealth choose? If he chooses one set of purposes he may bring things to pass which the rest of us can only dream of and wish for. If he chooses another set of purposes, he will be only so much the greater curse to himself and all around him than he would be if he were poor. The same is true of talent. The same is true of any other power. It is true of knowledge. The man who has it is equipped for action both with tools and weapons. What will he do with it? If he so chooses he may, by virtue of it, be far more useful to himself, his children, and his country than he would be without it, but if he chooses otherwise, he may simply be a far more efficient and harmful rascal than he would be without it. This is why it is simply a crude and empty superstition to believe that a knowledge of reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography makes good husbands and fathers and citizens. It does not. There is no connection of cause and effect. In truth, half-culture is one of the great curses of our time. Half-culture makes man volatile

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and opinionated. It makes them the easy victims of fads and fallacies and makes them stubborn in adhering to whims which they have taken up. It makes them impervious to reason and argument because they hold to their pet ideas with a pertinacity which has a great deal of vanity in it. It makes them quick to talk and slow to think or study. We sometimes rejoice in the amount of reading that our people do in newspapers, magazines, and light literature, and we are multiplying libraries and reading-rooms with an easy confidence that it is all in the right direction. It is like other human devices, however; it is in the main good, but it is not all good. There is one disturbing reflection which we must take earnestly to heart. If a people's desire for literary food is met by light literature, it is satisfied and put at rest by light literature, and then there is no desire or energy to get anything better. The argument against novel reading which we used to hear forty years ago, has almost entirely died out, but it had some sense in it, on this ground if no other. The consumption of vast masses of diluted literary food destroys the tone of the intellect and the moral stamina also.

Such observations and reflections as these force us back again to our resources of moral strength. Where do they lie? Without disparaging the value of homiletical instruction and exhortation, it will be admitted by everybody that it takes character above everything else to make character. Here is where the personality of the teacher has a transcendent function in connection with imparting book-learning. The school educates the teacher quite as much as it educates the scholars. The life and work together under forms which involve discipline and orderly co-operation cannot go on without friction which tells upon both parties. The in-

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cidents of the schoolroom easily provoke the temper or the vanity, the jealousy or the rancor of the teacher. Who does not know what pitiless critics scholars are, how sharply they detect evidences of human weakness, and what severe standards they employ? Even parents are exposed to no such criticism. They are shielded, and presumptions are created in their favor which teachers do not enjoy. When it comes to demands upon character there is no profession and no relation in life which makes such heavy demands as teaching.

It would, of course, be absurd to make superhuman demands on teachers, and exaggerated demands could have no other effect than to discourage. Such is not the point to which my thoughts tend. On the contrary I have in mind, in what I say, the encouraging fact that a faithful teacher who is always trying to do the best possible is sure to enjoy a large measure of success of which he or she is not conscious. When I look back to my own school-days I know that two or three of my teachers had decisive effect upon my character and career, yet I have no reason to suppose that any one of them knew that it was so or was to be so. We had one teacher whom I never saw put in a difficult position but what he extricated himself from it in such a way that we all felt that that was just the right way to act in an emergency of that kind. That is the way in which character is educated by character. Its fruits are abundant, and the crop of them is produced over and over again for many a year afterwards, and it is planted and gathered by many workers over many fields.

I was led into this line of thought by my recollections of our honored guest. I think that the reflections I have suggested may be welcome to him in the retrospect of a long career, during which, no doubt, he has had many

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failures and disappointments to lament. Like all the rest of us he has, no doubt, felt that the results of his labors were not what he hoped for and had a fair right to expect. Let me assure him that there has been more fruition than he has been aware of. It is the chief purpose of this meeting to assure him of it and to give him that explicit proof of it to which he is entitled.