

Reminiscences of a Wayfarer

The Evolution of Schools.

Those best informed on the subject, or who think they are, tell us that men and women, that is, human kind, are what heredity and environment happen to make them. This, in a measure is doubtless true, but not entirely so. The inexorable law of heredity operates with invariable uniformity in all the multitudinous ramifications of sentient life wherever found in the cosmos, and is just as uniform in the lower orders, and in the vegetable kingdom.

Evolution, in the opinion of many may change the order of nature, in fact they claim it has done so, in the slow procession of the ages, in the case of man and some others of the animal species; but the claim, it seems to me, is based upon proofs of no substantial value whatever. Lamarck and Darwin contend that man descended from some arboreal animal, some animal whose habitat was in the woods,—monkey it is said, but as there are still about as many monkeys in the world as there ever were, a doubt obtrudes itself upon the mind that those animals ever parted with any of their nature to make a superior breed and still retained the integrity of their original nature, during the flight of immeasurable time. Descent from any other animal of the lower orders, would do as well—much nearer the truth maybe, if we say from some one not remotely related to the hog.

But it is not for the purpose of discussing that question that I mention it, but rather to say that the laws of heredity are as fixed and changeless as the stars in the heavens.

What we call heredity is merely a continuation of antediluvian life, the same kind of life we came into, making every one of God's children on earth, mere links in an everlasting chain, reaching backward in time to the beginning, whenever that was, and to continue till the original purpose of man's creation shall be accomplished. It is not an inheritance in any proper sense, but it is one of the determining forces in human character and human destiny.

Environment is what is meant by the surroundings of the individual, the conditions among which and under which, he is born, brought up or jerked up, to the life he lives while in the world; the good or bad—mostly bad—influences that attend him on his journey, and which make for his success or failure in a moral and material way. With what nature has given him, and his surroundings have left him uncorrupted, he must make his way as best he may; but without another aid, which is not generally taken into account,—education, the chances are an hundred to one

against ultimate success. What I mean by "success" I will try to explain later on. My notion in that respect is probably somewhat different from many others.

I therefore add a third element to the rule of the wise ones—education. And that I may not be misunderstood, I remark that I do not use that word in its popular sense, namely, the education that people get from what is written in books and taught in the schools. That is the smallest part of the real human education that is received by the individual, from the moment of birth to the moment of death. It may be urged with some real plausibility, that this element includes much of the other two, and I am disposed to think it does, but there is still a distinctive difference. Books are merely the record of the experiences and thoughts of others in times precedent, but as men were before books, the education I refer to, made them possible. Language and thought preceded all others which, coupled with the art of writing by which they might be made intelligible to others, the education of the schools came into vogue. Environment forms the character, not the schools, and the best education man ever received is not from the text books of the schools and the great institutions of learning so called, but from the vast and inexhaustible curriculum of nature of which man is a part, and with which he is constantly in contact as he passes through life. What he gets from books are valuable aids in properly understanding the things he meets with, because others have traveled the same road and met the same things and studied them, and their recorded conclusions serve as milestones on the broad and never ending highway of existence. But unless the wayfarer thinks for himself, the education he gets from books is a mere parrot accomplishment—a dull repeating of what somebody else has said or written.

None of us needs a guide to teach us ignorance, as at the outset of life nature furnishes us with a tolerable supply of the kind without ulterior aids, in the shape of teachers, though I have frequently thought that some of our university students have been to a school where they do that kind of educational stunt, for they have returned more jolter-headed, if that were possible, than they went. The new-rich and the old-rich, as well as the no-rich, are equally anxious that their offspring shall have the best their means will procure, if for no other consideration, than the name of having gone through some educational mill. The unimportant fact, that in the process they have received no real practical education to speak of, puts no figure so they come out with a diploma. That takes the place of everything else, and fills to repletion, the measure of their ambition. It is prima facie evidence of a university education and that is enough. It is another evidence of the controlling force of fashion. For all that, it must be set down to their credit that they are proud their children have been in the classic shades of some imposing institution of learning and have its authority for saying they graduated from it, though the very diploma that certifies to the fact, is couched in a language the student in many cases knows no more about, than he does of the Choctaw.

But I like those simple people, if for no other reason, than that their chief desire was to give their children advantages they never had themselves.

Something over forty years ago, it fell to my lot to assist in founding one of the many state universities that abound in our great republic, and though I have been in the city where it stands hundreds of times, I have never been inside of it, nor am I conscious of the fact that I ever wanted to be. It was a matter of pride with all of us that a generous general government had given us out of its great bounty, man-bread acres of the public domain as a fund out of which to build it. It was our tribute to a growing educational fad that has become general. At the same time, and located in the same city, we provided for two other institutions as necessary as the other, and in a way educational too—black flowers of our advanced and advancing civilization—a penitentiary and a hospital for the insane. They are all there now, and then some, in other cities,—full to the brim and running over,—their inmates, students if you please, are all drawn from the same population, and more coming. The impelling cause that fills these finishing institutions—for none of them are primary in any sense—inheres in the social fabric and have their roots and sources in the republics of the homes of the people.

A little less for costly churches,

costly high schools, costly universities, and a little more for the amelioration of the condition of the unnumbered proletariat whom law and custom as old as the race itself have made poor, ignorant and degraded, the less use the community will have for its jails, prisons and penitentiaries—for the animal man must be fed, clothed and housed, and he will acquire the means to those ends honestly if he can,—by force or otherwise if he must.

Whoever has read, or will read, the history of the French Revolution may know all that is necessary on these propositions, and what has once happened in human affairs, under like conditions will happen again.

Society cannot be judged by its highest types, but by its lowest. A cable is no stronger than at its weakest point. It must be taken in its entirety, and as a whole it is no stronger than its weakest place; and the same thing is true of human society, it is no better than its worst and most vicious elements. A house cannot be raised by beginning at the top. It must be raised from its mud-sills, and then the whole house will go up. A little more of the spirit that was breathed upon the world in an older day in those words that will never fade from the memories of men while the world stands, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me," and a little less of the loud praying Pharisee, will do something towards destroying the distinction of caste and insure a more equitable distribution of God's bounties among men to the manifest advantage of all. The real education—reformation perhaps—of the world—will never be complete until every man in it, at all times, and under all circumstances has an equal chance in the battle of life with every other man. As things now stand—however much men deny the fact—the laws govern the poor, while the rich and the powerful, made so by customs that have grown into usurpations, govern the laws. However, this is not exactly germane to my present purpose, but I may resume the subject at another time.

It is characteristic of our American people never to do anything without overdoing it. This will hold good in every social and business relation, and it is just as true in our moral and educational relations. From no system of schools at the beginning of the Nineteenth century, we have little else than schools and systems of schools at the beginning of the Twentieth century. Seventy years ago there was no general common school system west of the Wabash and east of the Mississippi. There were schools of a sort, but they were purely private enterprises. A tramp teacher, self-styled of course, would visit a given neighborhood or settlement as the phrase was then, and organize a school in this way: He would go from house to house in a radius of a couple of miles or so, from the school house—there was nearly always one in each neighborhood, and ascertain how many scholars each family would subscribe, at the rate of \$3 or \$3.50, to be paid for each, for a term of three months, generally in the winter. If he could get from twenty to twenty-five or more with his board thrown in—he would stay a while at one house and then at another till he made the rounds of all his scholars' homes, and so continued to do till the end of the term—it was a go, and the school became a fact. Two or three of the oldest and generally most ignorant men in the community were selected, but not in pursuance of any law, as school directors, and they were the supreme authority in everything pertaining to the school, from judging of the qualifications of the teacher, down to the minutest and most trivial detail of the business. The teacher was required to be sufficiently learned to teach reading, writing and arithmetic, and if he happened to be able to teach a little grammar it did not detract from his qualifications to conduct the school, and this was the curriculum of the people's colleges, the common school, and it remains unaltered to this day, even in Nebraska.

For the masses no other educational advantages are possible, and in very truth no other is needed, or is used in the every day practical affairs of life. If the student wants something more the means of its acquisition are always at hand. There is room for the scholar everywhere, but the disposition and ability to be one must exist in the student himself, and for those he is dependent on heredity and environment—and brains. But everybody cannot be scholars, nor do they want to be, but all should have a fair knowledge of the four fundamental branches of an ordinary English education to fit them for the duties of business, and for the enjoyment of literature, agreeably to taste and capacity. The Greek scholar is no more efficient as a bank clerk than one who got his entire education in an old fashioned country school, and I now say what I know to be true, that an ordinary bright and healthy boy could with reasonable industry in three or four winter terms in the old country school, master those fundamentals mentioned, which, under the present system takes twelve or fifteen years of his life to acquire and then not at all satisfactory, in the majority of cases. It is true much has been added to the modern system of teaching, such as chemistry, botany, philosophy, bug and snake-ology, and kindred useless matters that the young would be better without; but they help to round out the system, give employment to the teachers, and load the minds of the students with useless and burdensome tasks, and their parents and guardians with mountainous tax charges to pay at their leisure.

—Eat Sowl's Candy.

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In the early days in Nebraska, the school facilities—differed very little from those in the pioneer days of the other states. The first school in Falls City was organized much in the way I have described, by an old fellow named Bradshaw. There was nobody to pass on his qualifications in any particular and the school he opened, sometime in the fall of 1862, was unique in character and decidedly grotesque in its operation. He marshaled quite a respectable number of the youth hereabouts, and for some time seemed to progress swimmingly, till one day the old man took it into his head to get drunk and then the very old Nick was to pay. After getting outside of a goodly quantity of bad whiskey he concluded to take a nap on one of the benches, and proceeded to do so; while the children taking in the situation with tolerable accuracy, proceeded to decorate his face, which was large and quite fat, with some soot from the stove. Of course, the riot that followed attracted the attention of the people on the street and prompt investigation followed.

Bradshaw was found with a long black streak down his nose, one over each of his eyebrows, and one or two under each eye and similar ornamentations about his mouth and upper lip, on which the artist painted an elaborate mustache after the French style. The situation can better be imagined than described. Uncle John, as he was usually called, was quite dignified in appearance in his sober moments, which generally became intensified as the process of elevation by the use of whiskey progressed. He concluded, on being awakened by the riot created by the children and the entrance of the investigators from the street, that somebody had been taking unwarranted liberties with his school, and talked in a language that I don't care to repeat here. It put an end to the school, however, and it stayed ended.

I saw some of the fun towards the last of the performance, and although many years have elapsed since, in which I have witnessed many other ridiculous exhibitions, a strict adherence to truth compels me to say that this one, as first-class comedy, stands preeminently first in the list.

Everything in time has to have a beginning, and that is how our schools commenced in Falls City. The old man was a native of New York, and was one of a very respectable family, often contending in his periods of elevation that he descended from one of the ancient Dutch families that settled in New York in the seventeenth century. I think our late president puts up some claim on his own part. He frequently made it known that his children had asked him to make himself scarce as he was not particularly ornamental in the circles in which they moved. I know of my own knowledge that he was tolerably correct in that particular, as on a visit to New York in 1864, at his request I called on his son, whose place of business was somewhere on King street, as I now remember it, and he told me how the old man had come to go west. I found him to be quite a gentlemanly appearing man, quite intelligent and gave evidence of being a man of affairs in the city. He inquired about his father, and showed some interest in the old gentleman's welfare. Some years afterwards I received a letter or two from him, making similar inquiries touching the fortunes of his father. One I call to mind just now, addressed to me about the time of the old man's death, which occurred in the fall of 1879. The son forwarded money here to pay the funeral expenses and otherwise manifested the usual interest of a son in a father. The latter is at rest in the old cemetery to the west. I am not certain I could point out the grave, but inclined to think it doubtful. However this may be, he sleeps as peacefully among the forgotten dead in that neglected spot, as he would if entombed among his ancestors on the banks of the historic Hudson. He is entitled to a monument for he was Falls City's first school master.

At the Reception. "I understand, Miss Araminta," said the professor, "that you are inclined toward literature." "Yes," said the blushing spinster. "I wrote for the Bugle Magazine last month." "Indeed! May I ask what?" asked the professor. "I addressed all the envelopes for the rejected manuscripts," said Araminta, proudly.—Harper's Weekly.

The Boss of the Place. "Yes," said the determined man, "when that waiter resented the smallness of my tip I took the case to the proprietor of the restaurant." "And what did the proprietor do?" "He gave the waiter some money out of his own pocket and apologized to him for having such a customer."

EVER HAVE LIBRARY FRIGHT?

Awful Feeling That Sometimes Attacks People Asking for Books in a Strange Place.

"Library fright is an awful feeling," said the librarian. "It attacks people who go into a strange library to look around or rest for a few minutes and are told that in order to enjoy the hospitality of the reading room they will have to ask for a book and make at least a pretense of reading."

"I have had library fright twice myself. My first attack was in the Congressional library in Washington. I wanted to read there for a few minutes, just to be able to say afterward that I had read there. Used as I was to handling books, I couldn't think of even the dictionary when it came to making a choice. After a few minutes of hopeless floundering 'Taine's History of English Literature' came into my mind. I had no desire on earth to look at Taine's English Literature then or at any other time, but I give you my word I couldn't think of any other book to save my life."

"Another time in a library right here in town I was stricken with a similar panic and after stumbling through the catalogue in a dazed sort of way I asked for 'David Copperfield'—Copperfield, mind you, that I had read forty-seven times and knew by heart. A person who has never experienced library fright cannot imagine how foolish and helpless the sufferer feels."—Exchange.

FLOWER CARPETS IN SPAIN

Religious Festival That Calls Forth Most Remarkable Floral Displays.

Once a year rich Spaniards have a real "flower-strewn way" prepared for them. That is when the Corpus Christi festival is held and beautiful flower carpets are laid in the streets of Villa Orlava, Teneriffe. All the richest produce of the fertile gardens of the island is brought into use in weaving the most wonderful floor coverings in the world.

Often the patterns are elaborate, especially those designed for old Spanish families, who place them in the street before their houses, and thus gain local estimation according to the value of their floral display. Not only are the ordinary blooms known to gardeners used to make the design of carpets, but also some rare flowers and grasses growing only in the Canary islands. The slopes of the peak of Teneriffe, bearing layers of lava from the now dormant volcano, are rich in these unusual forms of floral beauty.

Killed by Curiosity.

There is an African insect, the larvae of which prey upon ants. The larvae puts its head into a small hole in the ground and quivers its tail quickly. The ants come near to examine the novel object, and, goaded by curiosity, go too closely, when suddenly they are seized by the forceps or graspers with which the tail is furnished, and thus are killed. Not only do insects and the lower animals understand that the curiosity of their victims may be employed as a snare for them, but human beings understand and act upon the same principle. Many young men and young women have been ruined by adopting the apparently harmless course of "going to see what it was like."

Inertia of the Nerves.

The researches and experiments of a French scientist have led him to the conclusion that the cerebral nervous system is incapable of perceiving more than an average of ten separate impressions per second. After each excitation of the nerves a period of inertia follows, lasting about one-tenth of a second, and during this period a new impression cannot be made. According to the investigations of this scientist a person cannot make more than ten, or at the most a dozen, separate voluntary movements of any kind in a second, although the muscles, independently of the will, are capable of making as many as 30 or 40.

Of No Use.

"When I was your age," said the man to his little son, "I was the best behaved boy in town. My parents would not allow me to play in the street; they made me keep my face washed and my hair brushed; they compelled me to be well mannered at all times, and I was sent to bed early every night and awakened early in the morning. My parents trained me to be a model, obedient, polite boy. Why can't you be like I was at your age?" "But, papa," answered the lad, "what would be the use? It doesn't seem to have done any good in your case."

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