

Of Education

Charles Fourier

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There is no problem upon which people have gone more astray than upon public instruction and its methods. Nature has, in this branch of social politics, taken a malign pleasure in all ages in confounding our theories and their exponents, from the time of the disgrace incurred by Seneca, the instructor of Nero, to that of the failures of Condillac and Rousseau, of whom the first fashioned only a political idiot and the second did not dare to undertake the education of his own children.

It will be observed that in Harmony the only paternal function of the father is to yield to his natural impulse, to spoil the child, to humor all his whims.

The child will be sufficiently reprov'd and rallied by his peers. When an infant or little child has in the course of the day passed through half a dozen such groups and undergone their jokes, he is thoroughly imbued with a sense of his insufficiency, and quite disposed to listen to the advice of the patriarchs and venerables who are good enough to offer him instruction.

It will, after that, be of little consequence that the parents at the child's bed-time indulge themselves in spoiling him, telling him that he has been treated too severely, that he is really very charming, very clever; these effusions will only skim the surface, they will not convince. The impression has been made. He is humbled by the railleries of seven or eight groups of little ones which he has visited during the day. In vain will it be for the father and mother to tell him that the children who have repulsed him are barbarians, enemies of social intercourse, of gentleness and kindness; all these parental platitudes will have no effect, and the child on returning to the infantile seristeries the following day will remember only the affronts of the day before; it is he who in reality will cure the father of the habit of spoiling, by redoubling his efforts and proving that he is conscious of his inferiority.

Nature endows every child with a great number of instincts in industry, about thirty, of which some are primary or guiding and lead to those that are secondary.

The point is to discover first of all the primary instincts: the child will seize this bait as soon as it is presented to him; accordingly, as soon as he is able to walk, to leave the infant seristery, the male and female nurses in whose charge he is placed hasten to conduct him to all the workshops and fill the industrial reunions which are close by; and as he finds every where diminutive tools, an industry in miniature, in which little tots of from two and a half to three years already engage, with whom he is anxious to associate, to rummage about, to handle things, at the end of a fortnight one may discern what are the workshops that attract him, what his industrial instincts.

The phalanx containing an exceedingly great variety of occupations, it is impossible that the child in passing from one to the other should not find opportunities of satisfying several of his dominant instincts; these will exhibit themselves at the sight of the little tools manipulated by other children a few months older than himself.

According to civilized parents and teachers, *children are little idlers*; nothing is more erroneous; children are already at two and three years of age very industrious, but we must know the springs which Nature wishes to put in action to attract them to industry *in the passionate series and not in civilization*. The dominant tastes in all children are:

1. *Rummaging* or inclination to handle everything, examine everything, look through everything, to constantly change occupations;
2. Industrial *commotion*, taste for noisy occupations;
3. *Aping* or imitative mania.
4. Industrial *miniature*, a taste for miniature workshops.
5. *Progressive attraction* of the weak toward the strong.

There are many others; I limit myself to naming these five first, which are very familiar to the civilized. Let us examine the method to be followed in order to apply them to industry at an early age.

The male and female nurses will first exploit the mania for rummaging so dominant in a child of two. He wants to peer into every place, to handle and examine everything he sees. He is consequently obliged to be kept apart, in a bare room, otherwise he would destroy everything.

This propensity to handle everything is a bait to industry; to draw him to it, he will be conducted to the little workshops; there he will see children only two and a half and three years old using little tools, little hammers. He will wish to exercise his imitative mania, termed APING; he will be given some tools, but he will want to be admitted among the children of twenty-six and twenty-seven months who know how to work, and who will repel him.

He will persist if the work coincides with any of his instincts: the nurse or the patriarch will teach him some portion of the work, and he will very soon succeed in making himself useful in some trifling things which will serve him as an introduction; let us examine this effect in regard to an inconsiderable kind of labor, within the reach of the smallest children, the shelling and sorting of green peas. This work which with us would occupy the hands of people of thirty, will be consigned to children of two, three, four years of age: the hall is provided with inclined tables containing a number of hollows; two little ones are seated at the raised side; they take the peas out of the shell, the inclination of the table causes the grains to roll towards the lower side where three tots are placed of twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five months, charged with the task of sorting, and furnished with special implements.

The thing to be done is to separate the smallest peas for the sweetened ragout, the medium ones for the bacon ragout, and the largest for the soup. The child of thirty-five months first selects the

little ones which are the most difficult to pick out; she sends all the large and medium ones to the next hollow, where the child of thirty months shoves those that seem large to the third hollow, returns the little ones to the first, and drops the medium grains into the basket. The infant of twenty-five months, placed at the third hollow, has an easy task; he returns some medium grains to the second, and gathers the large ones into his basket.

It is in this third rank that the infant *debutante* will be placed; he will mingle proudly with the others in throwing the large grains into the basket; it is very trifling work, but he will feel as if he had accomplished as much as his companions; he will grow enthusiastic and be seized by a spirit of emulation, and at the third *seance* he will be able to replace the infant of twenty-five months, to send back the grains of the second size into the second compartment, and to gather up only the largest ones, which are easily distinguished.

If civilized education developed in every child its natural inclinations, we should see nearly all rich children enamored of various very plebeian occupations, such as that of the mason, the carpenter, the smith, the saddler. I have instanced Louis the XVI, who loved the trade of locksmith; an Infanta of Spain preferred that of shoemaker; a certain king of Denmark gratified himself by manufacturing syringes; the former king of Naples loved to sell the fish he had caught in the market-place himself; the prince of Parma, whom Condillac had trained in metaphysical subtleties, in the understanding of intuition, of cognition, had no taste but for the occupation of church-warden and lay-brother.

The great majority of wealthy children would follow these plebeian tastes, if civilized education did not oppose the development of them; and if the filthiness of the workshops and the coarseness of the workmen did not arouse a repugnance stronger than the attraction. What child of a prince is there who has no taste for one of the four occupations I have just mentioned, that of mason, carpenter, smith, saddler, and who would not advance in them if he beheld from an early age the work carried on in blight workshops, by refined people, who would always arrange a miniature workshop for children, with little implements and light labor?

No attempt will be made, as is the case in existing educational methods, to create precocious little *savants*, intellectual primary school beginners, initiated from their sixth year in scientific subtleties; the endeavor will by preference be to secure mechanical precocity; capability in bodily industry, which, far from retarding the growth of the mind, accelerates it.

If one wishes to observe the general inclination of children of from four and a half to nine years of age, he will see that they are strongly drawn to all material exercises, and very little to studies; it is right then, that, in accordance with the desire of nature or attraction, the cultivation of the material should predominate at that age.

Why this impulse of childhood toward material exercises? Because Nature wishes, above all, to make man husbandman and manufacturer, to lead him to wealth before leading him to science.

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