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Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis
The libertarian education
1899

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The libertarian education

Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis

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Thus spoke the great expert on the human heart, Goethe, and he is right. The Jesuits, who have studied human nature and especially its weak side – and therein lies the whole secret of their influence – always say: “give us the children,” because they know whoever has the children is the master of the future. So one must begin with the children. Fine! But here is the great difficulty: who is to begin with the children? The adult generation that is no good? What can one expect from such an undertaking? Suppose that someone has deviant ideas. Do you think that one will entrust him with education? Certainly not. Everyone fears him and a cordon is drawn around him as around infected cattle. The children hear it said that he is a bad man or a madman with dangerous theories, in any case someone to be avoided. Even if his ideas were a thousand times more logical and sensible than the ordinary ones, one would deprive him of all possibility of beginning with the children.

The astonishing influence of education on the formation of man is generally known and acknowledged, but nevertheless it is neglected. How else could it be that there was so little unity in education? I say education, but I ask you: how many of us have had an education in the real sense of the word? One in ten? One in a

hundred? One in a thousand? Look around you and ask yourself whether the great majority do not behave as if they were savages, and how few people give evidence in their behavior that they have had an education. Yes, how many are the people who know, who understand what education means? One learns everything except the art of education. When two young people start living together, it is true that they already know something about the art of house-keeping, but ask that future father or mother whether they have ever read a book on education, what their ideas about education are, and you will be amazed. Soon they have children and then the education of a person is in the hands of people who are completely ignorant of the task they have to fulfill. The education of a person – but do you know that this is the most difficult task of all and yet there are very few things for which people make so little effort.

Education, but what is that? The Latin word *educatio* says it well. It is composed of two words, namely: *educere* and *ducere*. It means to pull out, that is, to pull the innermost out of a person. In German there is the same word: *Erziehung*, composed of *er* and *ziehen*. It means to pull something from the outside in and not the other way around to bring something from the outside in.

The word *development* is also well chosen. It is formed from the two words *ont* and *wikkelen*, i.e. to wrap a thing in something and to develop is therefore to unwrap it, to remove what is around it, so that the object shows itself as it is.

What the child needs for its education is nothing other than what the plant requires for its development, its growth: air, light, nourishment. Education therefore does not consist in introducing something externally, but on the contrary in extracting from it what is in the seed.

Rousseau expresses it very correctly when he says in his *Emile*: “we are born weak, we need strength: we are born stripped of everything, we need help, we are born stupid, we need judgment. Everything that we do not have at birth and which we need greatly, is given to us by education. That education is given to us either

by nature or by people or by things. The inner development of our qualities and organs is the education of nature: the use that we are taught to make of that development is the education of people: and the acquisition of our own experience concerning the things that work on us is education”.

This division is very correct, but when he begins his book with the words: “All is good, which comes from the hands of the creator of things: all degenerates in the hands of man,” then we completely disagree with him. First, we cannot say that all is good; secondly, we know no creator of things, and still less a creator with hands, who like a skilled workman makes everything according to a model; thirdly, why must one say that all degenerates? What is degenerating? What kind of creator is that, whose work can be spoiled by men? But is not man also a product of his hands? Then one of his products spoils the other! What a quack, what a bungler, that creator of things!

People often forget that man is also a part of nature, that he does not stand opposite nature, but in the midst of nature of which he is a part. And who among us can say what is good? We can say what is pleasant or harmful to us, but we are not the whole of nature. The louse, for example, is very unpleasant to us, but do we have the right to say that it is not good that he exists? We forget that from the louse’s point of view, people are very harmful animals to him and that he has the same right to call us vermin as we have to give him that name.

Yet there is a good deal of truth in these words of Rousseau: our education does not consist in guiding nature, but in making it degenerate. We do not try to awaken independence, spontaneity, we have no other goal than to make of our children the second edition of themselves. And this second edition is by no means always a revised and improved one.

Education by nature does not depend on us, but what one can demand of people is that they do not put up any obstacles to education by their intervention. It is the same with education by things:

it is the product of the medium in which one finds oneself, and it is not in the power of the fathers to choose this medium.

But education by people — that is our business. What man must learn is to live. That may surprise you, for you will say: but we live! No, not really, at least as far as the great majority is concerned, we do not live, we lead a plant life, from morning till night we work to gather as much as is approximately necessary to fill the stomach, then we sleep to recover our strength and to gain new strength to be able to resume our work tomorrow, and so it goes on and on until death comes and takes us away. I ask you: is that life? Life means developing all one's qualities, realizing all one's abilities, not only for oneself but also for others. It is essential to know what it means to be human.

The poet sang: *Believe me, to be human, you must not think so little of it, It is called: being patient, just, brave and strong; It is called: to bravely tackle every noble cause To devote one's life and soul to a work. It is called: to devote all one's strength to the weak brother, To suffer with him, to share in his sorrow, To fight with unflinching courage for the oppressed, To carry the Disinherited all together in one's heart.* (Mrs. De Pressensé)

To be human, the necessary condition is: free study and free exercise of all our organs. In a secondary school for girls, health education was removed from the program, on the pretext that girls have nothing to do with this branch of science. What an absurdity! The woman, destined to become the manager of a household, would have nothing to do with health education! The woman, whose duties include the care of the kitchen, the laundry, the clothing — and these things are of great importance to the health of man — would have nothing to do with the doctrine of health! And soon, a mother, she will have in her hands the life of her child, and one dares to say that she has nothing to do with the doctrine of health! Love is a great benefactor, but you know that love is blind, and if it is not enlightened by reason, it can do much harm.

ple of character, full of hatred for all external authority and being themselves an authority and trying to arrange their whole life according to the principles of reason. And that is not possible unless the child is set free from his earliest youth. The sense of human dignity must be cultivated and that can only be done through knowledge of himself and of the environment in which he lives. Let us not separate man from nature, for he himself is a part of nature and belongs to it.

The libertarian school is an attempt in that direction. It must therefore be encouraged as much as possible and as far as I am concerned, it is my pleasure to be able to contribute something to the success of your attempt to obtain a rational, complete, mixed and libertarian education.

Let us be the vanguard in the work of education, as everywhere and elsewhere. Let the love of freedom be our guide in the great task for which we want to live, fight, suffer and even die, because without freedom the world is without sun, without fresh air, without warmth, without light. Life without freedom is no life, it is death and we who work for the future, let us cultivate the ideal, to form a world in which man will be able to live in a free society.

mal propensities, intellectual qualities, and moral qualities. These three kinds of things differ according to each person, and this is the cause of the diversity of individuals. Our care in education must be to remove the influences which can injure the development of each individual, so that he may become what he contains in germ. This nature, the result of heredity and temperament, germinates, but as soon as man lives in a certain environment, he is subject to the influence of external circumstances. The difficulty consists in finding for each an environment suitable to him. And man will develop himself only there, all his strength, the essence of his being, in all the fullness of his independence, where he is in the best sense of the word an individuality, a personality.

There is no more difficult work in the world than the education of children, because everyone, even with the best intentions, runs the risk of forming and shaping the child after his own model. And yet one must not work from the outside in, but on the contrary from the inside out. Therefore, visual education will also be the best. If you preach to your children the great advantage, the blessing of work and you do not work yourself, then you will not be surprised that the children do not believe you and do not respect work. But if they see that you yourself work, then they will follow your example, because preaching by example is by far the best.

According to Rousseau, every father who begets and educates children has three duties to fulfill: 1. He is indebted to his kind of people; 2. He is indebted to society as sociable men and 3. He is indebted to the state as citizens. Every man who can pay this triple debt and does not do so is guilty, and all the more guilty if he pays it only halfway. He who cannot fulfill his fatherly duties has no right to become a father. Money can buy anything, even a substitute for the father, but one does not forget that one gives one's children a hired hand, a servant, and the sad result of such an education is that one also forms servants.

The desire of every libertarian socialist is to see his children grow up into beings with a will of their own, full of initiative, peo-

A good and healthy diet — that is the first condition for health, because the little helpless creature that is called man is above all a creature with senses. The first lies by which children are prepared to swallow larger ones later on are swaddling, dressing, rocking, and the fear of the bogeyman. The greatest praise of some mothers is this: “the child is so sweet that one does not hear it, it is just as if I had no child.” So a child who acts as if it were not there — that is the ideal, the model child!

But then it is far surpassed by the doll, because one never hears it.

The body itself must not be trained in freedom. Prohibition of the lungs to learn to work, because it is actually naughty of the child to scream. The shaking of the brain and the immobility of our lungs, these are the two causes of which we understand so little and why we represent things so incompletely.

It is Rousseau again who shows us the way when he says: “Man is born, lives, and dies as if in slavery: at birth he is pinned into a suit: at death he is put into a coffin, so long as he retains his human form, he is chained to our institutions.” And let us say it freely: all our wisdom consists in slavish prejudices, all our customs are only submission, inconvenience, and coercion. I ask you, is it not cruel not to burden the newborn with a burden of prejudices, by which the journey through life, already so difficult, is made still more difficult? And the power of habits, customs, and morals is ten times more tyrannical than that of laws. However stupid, however cruel a law may be, morals are still more stupid and cruel. Let us add to this that together we commit a great many crimes, of which each one in particular would have been ashamed. And we allow them to continue day after day and everywhere without protest. The whole philosophy, the whole wisdom of life can be summed up for 99 hundredths in the dictionary: this is how our fathers thought and acted, we must think and act as they do; everyone around us thinks and acts this way, why should we think and act differently from everyone else?

Oh, what a sum of stupidities and crimes can be committed in the name of Mr. Everyone! One almost has the right to say that the human race has no more fierce enemy than that Everyone, behind whom everyone hides all the crimes he has committed.

And that from childhood. The principle of authority governs everything. It begins in the parental home, is continued in school, then in the workplace and finally in military service, and this principle follows us to the grave.

First the authority of the parents. Do you know of a greater tyranny than that of parents over their children? It is the right of the strongest in its most arbitrary form, because it is without any control. When a child asks questions, one often answers: a child is not allowed to know everything. If he asks for an explanation when he listens to a conversation, then one says: a child must be silent and listen. If it does something of its own accord that its parents do not like, then it is said: mind your own business and not this. The child may say nothing, ask nothing, do nothing ... without permission. If it says: I want, then one answers: a child has nothing to want. One suppresses its will, one kills its individuality. Its thoughts, its words, its actions, everything must be shaped according to those of its parents. It may be anything but itself; and the first principle of all education must be that the child is a child.

And the task of wise parents is to make themselves superfluous, so that when the children reach a certain age they are independent and can spread their own wings.

The authority of the parents rests on nothing. The children did not ask us to be born and we, by the fact of their birth, moderate the right to be their master. It is remarkable that in the Ten Commandments of Moses it is said: child, honor your parents, but not: parents, honor your children. Is it then a duty for us to honor our parents, if they do not deserve honor? As for me, speaking of duties, I think that parents certainly have the duty to care for their children, but that the duty of children to care for their parents can be questioned. And if a child says to us: "Why did you bring me

one has to work hard all one's life and walks around in constant poverty.

And then that "precious soil" on which the worker is born and where he must suffer, what does it give him? Nothing of that whole soil belongs to him, not even enough to be buried. Why love such a fatherland, which gives nothing but poverty, slavery and care?

Thus the school becomes for the children a school of lies and hypocrisy. And people count on the school as one of the means for the improvement of the future generation! No, it is true what the manifesto of the libertarian school says, that the school in today's society is "the antechamber of the barracks where the final training will take place for the enslavement of the people".

People boast of having abolished the stick in education and at school. But I ask you: have you also removed coercion, violence and pain from your methods of education? Are not all your punishments another form of the stick? Why was the advice of Fourier and Robert Owen not heeded, who in the field of education spread broad and healthy ideas, which, when applied, would have given a race much higher than our own? According to Fourier, education must be general and not isolated, according to disposition and not arbitrary, converging and not diverging, active and not passive, complex and not simple, whole and not partial, developing and not by force.

In this way education becomes attractive and a whole.

Educators of youth, turn to Fourier's book and you will study the child as he is; you will trace his nature, his disposition, in order to develop what is involved in it. "In the egg there is a germ; it is the nature of that germ to hatch, but this will not take place unless the egg is placed in a suitable temperature. In the child there are many germs of industrial qualities, many dispositions, but these dispositions do not develop unless they are surrounded by conditions favorable to their development." The knowledge of human nature is still very incomplete, and yet it is that which must guide us if we are to obtain good results. Human nature is composed of ani-

To store the memory, not a mass of things that are good for nothing but to be forgotten; to unlearn to think freely and independently — that is the task of the school. That is why the teacher was made a civil servant, one of the wheels in the state chariot, who must work to maintain the state. If the teacher does not prevent thought, he has already done much. How many lies do not serve as spiritual food in the school! The holy love of one's country, in which one has the freedom to go hungry, to walk about unemployed, the best of all countries, although it provides no sustenance for its own children; the glory of the army, which is one of the misfortunes of modern times, because it ruins countries; obedience to the laws, created by the rich to oppress the poor; respect for property by the proletarians who call nothing their own, for right and justice by those who have nothing to defend, for freedom by those who are themselves slaves, who will die tomorrow if they are not fortunate enough to find work; contentment when one has at most what is necessary to live, resignation when one lacks only. These are what are called the social virtues which must be learned and whose application one desires in an antisocial society by those who are the victims of these laws under which they live and to which they must submit on pain of prison or banishment. As a child one must learn all this so that one can apply it as an adult as a citizen. In our schools in the Netherlands the children learn a little song that goes: We live free, We live happily, on the dear soil of the Netherlands. Three lies in three lines! And yet they say to the children: you may not lie. When the child goes out into the world after school, he soon notices that the worker, far from being a free man, is a slave, who, if he does not want to die of hunger, is obliged to sell his labor power for a wage that one can say is too much to die from and too little to live on. Is that the much-vaunted freedom for the masses, bent as they go under the yoke of slavery?

And happy? What share do they have in the earth with all its beauty and wealth? Nothing, nothing belongs to them except a few crumbs that fall from their table. There is no reason to be happy if

into the world? I did not ask you to come into the world," what can the parents answer?

I have also always noticed — perhaps it will seem paradoxical to you, but think about it — that parents are the worst educators of their children. I have even known people who were excellent educators of other people's children, but who corrupted their own children in a terrible way. The authority of the schoolmaster is later added to parental authority, and there too the principle is the same: "Obey and remain silent." Imagine the child at that age, so full of life and energy, forced to remain silent for whole hours! You must have attended the school exit. What a movement! What joy!

What a life! The comparison always occurred to me with a herd of animals, usually locked up in a cage and then let loose at a given moment. It is certainly not flattering to compare school with a cattle shed, but I ask you whether that comparison is not correct?

School and freedom! Can these two words be reconciled? Oh, we feel that school is not what it should be, and yet what a difference between the old school of my youth and the one today! I think I have noticed that the children's reluctance to go to school is much less than it used to be.

We live in a time of transition, which we say with the lay poet that we hope will soon be behind us. Here and there one sees new paths being opened up. The Roches school of Edmond Demolins, the Cempuis school, founded by Robin, the Yasna Poliana school of Tolstoy, in which the pupil is his own master. Tolstoy says so well: "we cannot rid ourselves of the old prejudice which wants the school to be regarded as a company of soldiers, commanded today by this one and tomorrow by another non-commissioned officer." For the schoolmaster, who is fond of freedom, each pupil has his own particular personality, his personal taste, which is worth taking into account. Without that freedom, without that apparent disorder, which is found so strange and generally considered impossible in its execution, we should not have five methods of learning to read. We could not use them ourselves or modify them according

to the wishes of the children; we would not be able to obtain the remarkable results that we have obtained in recent times in the art of reading.

Rousseau says that reading is the nightmare of children. That may have been so in the past, but from what I have seen in our schools with the modern method, this is no longer the case, and I was very surprised to see in an article by my young friend Henri Roorda¹ in the *Humanité Nouvelle* — he is a teacher in a school, but in a secondary school — that he agreed with Rousseau and that in his opinion the child should not learn to read before he is ten or eleven. My experience has taught me that as a rule the child of six or seven wants to learn to read, and nowadays he makes such rapid progress that he is happy to be able to do it so soon.

The least that can be demanded of the school is that it should endeavor not to hinder the intellectual and physical life of the child, and the teacher should do his best to make the pupil enjoy life with joy.

Many changes have been made, many improvements, but the master cannot do what he wants. And it is undoubtedly true that the master who says to his pupils on the beautiful days of spring and summer, even on beautiful days of autumn and winter, let us begin the day's work for today, instead of saying let us go out and walk in the sunshine, commits a pedagogical error, if not a crime, against the youth².

¹ This is the son of our late friend Roorda van Eisinga, the dishonorably discharged engineer, who is a teacher in Lausanne. He wrote a very fresh and beautiful article, worthy of being translated in its entirety, under the title: "L'école et l'apprentissage de la docilité".

² Teachers as professionals stand in the way of most reforms in education the most. Natural complacency serves man and once education is rolling along according to a certain routine, then people are reluctant to break with it and take a new path. Moreover, the teacher is a civil servant and nowhere has it been seen that civil servants were bearers of progress. The teacher's own initiative is curtailed and so the desire disappears. This is the reason why very little sympathy

admired it for 2000 years. It is the classic beauty. Your father was pleased with it. Admire it too, otherwise you will get a bad sign. In that book you will find the truth. The parents who had more experience than you have shown it. You also know the good. It is written in golden letters in the hearts of people, but for greater certainty we have written it in the law books, which you now only need to learn by heart. You see that it is very easy, you need not concern yourself with anything."

Characteristic, isn't it? Consult your experience and you will agree that this is how it is at school. This scene is taken from life. How many bad notes are given to the pupils, which the teachers have deserved! The German method is summed up in these words: "the boys must be obedient and submissive. The schoolmaster must teach them this", is a bit national, because wherever there is a school, there is a schoolmaster, the representative of authority.

Our rulers understand very well that truly educational and therefore free education, brought among the people, is the death of every government, because only as a result of the stupidity of the peoples can the rulers play their game at the expense of the peoples, who one day cry: Hosanna! and the next: Crucify him! Who indiscriminately applaud two orators, one of whom says exactly the opposite of the other.

Thiers once said: "There are only two means to restore peace and quiet to our country and to destroy dangerous ideas: war abroad or the abolition of the public school." He understood, then, what means the bourgeois need to maintain order: to brutalize the proletariat or to turn them into cannon fodder. And then you would think that a government seriously wants to have rational and educational education? Not at all. No, schools are for them a necessary evil that one cannot do without, but an education that makes the people intelligent and wise is far beyond their intention. Schools are set up to breed docile citizens who are obedient to the government.

contempt for the people who are so cowardly and so low as to tolerate his rule.

Let us begin with the children. Instead of suppressing the feeling of freedom that is common to all beings, we must encourage it. Above all, let us not banish all freedom from education, from school or anywhere else. The teacher or rather the guide of the child will not teach his pupils in the true sense of the word, his intervention will have no other purpose than to create the circumstances that facilitate the observations of the child or to watch out for any questions that he does not get lost.

Roorda says: "the child will learn the life of animals and plants only slowly, he will be taught arithmetic, geometry, physics, cosmography, in short the earth and all things that he sees on it. With four times fewer lessons, by removing the monstrous trivialities that are on the school programs, one could give the pupil a sufficient education so that he could then teach himself. This education would be incomplete, because the pupils who have received a complete education, "know their history like the back of their hand." Let the child choose his work freely." He cites as an example this conversation, which has been exchanged for centuries between the pedagogue and the child. The child comes rushing in cheerfully with his irreverent curiosity.

Pedagogue. What does the child ask? He must turn to me. Child. Mister... Pedagogue. Be silent, do not touch that. I guess what you want. You want to see the beautiful. I have prepared everything for you; look in this box. There you see the beautiful ... But what are you doing? Do not look out of the window. Come here ... And what do you say? ... Isn't that nice? Child. Mister ... Pedagogue. Be silent, do not say anything. I know what is necessary for you. You want to know the true. I have prepared that too. Take this little book, the truth is written in it. Child. Mister... Pedagogue. Be silent, yes, yes, I understand you: that does not satisfy you. I will also teach you the good, because education is nothing without upbringing. Here are the commandments ... You now know the beautiful. People have

Is not the following reflection of Rousseau taken from our hearts: "Our first teachers in philosophy are our feet, our hands, our eyes. To put books in place of these is not to teach us to reason, it is to teach us to believe much and never to know anything. The good constitution makes the working of the mind easy and certain." Undoubtedly the study of nature is the best means of free study. For existence does not lie. Whoever studies the laws of existence, he kills prejudices with the greatest certainty. What the Latins say: *rerum cognoscere causas*, to know the causes of things, is the surest way to avoid shipwreck on the rocks of superstition and stupidity. Two French proverbs deserve mention here because in education one must avoid everything that spreads or maintains prejudices, for these are the greatest obstacles to the exercise of thought and to the arrival at truth. The first is Rochefoucauld's word, "the desire to appear competent often prevents one from becoming so." Appearances are deceptive and are the enemy of all sound knowledge. The second is "that doubts nothing." The absence of doubt is an infallible means of ever knowing anything. "He who does not set out cannot arrive. He who does not exert himself cannot achieve anything. He who does not seek will not find."

That doubts nothing, that is to say: he is a presumptuous fool; worse still, he is condemned to remain stupid all his life because he blocks the way to inquiry. The true scholars doubt everything, investigate everything, and the prohibition of doubting is the best means of killing free inquiry, because it forces us to blindly follow the words of others, whether of parents or of teachers. The warning: Forbidden entrance, is always an obstacle to truth, and the great enemy of the progress of the human race is the commandment: "thou shalt not doubt." How can one attain to the better, if one does not begin by being dissatisfied with what one has? It is not the

can be expected from teachers for the libertarian school; on the contrary, it will be fought most vigorously by them.

satisfied people, those who follow in the footsteps of custom, who will advance the world. On the contrary, the dissatisfied who seek new paths; the heretics were and are still the salt of society, through which salt is given to everything, according to the so just word of the lay poet:

The heresy that, they say, stinks — A word that does not sound melodious! But I for my part, Consider Heresy precisely the salt of society, Which, without it, would long be the prey Of lust for power, Stupidity, Superstition. Only, where it becomes immoral, there It is to me a stinking Annoyance!

Not the authority of the saints So and So, of the learned So and So, of the tradition of yesterday, of the wisdom of the whole world, but the right of doubt must be recognized as the necessary condition of progress, of the intellectual exercise of the student, and wherever this path is blocked, the school becomes an obstacle to free inquiry, to the truth. And the path of the child is full of such obstacles.

“That is not what one says” ... “That is not what one does” ... “That is not asked” — these are the words that the child hears every moment, and in this way the development of personality is extinguished and youth is laced into the corset of fashion, tradition, custom, public opinion that is often prepared in advance by the government.

Before and above all things, one must proclaim to the child the right to think, to speak freely, to doubt, to have one’s own opinion and also to rebel. That must be the code of the rights of the child, and if the libertarian school had no other result than proclaiming these rights in education, than having them recognized everywhere, then it would already have done an excellent job.

How sad it is when someone, in response to the encouragement: be yourself, gets the answer: Impossible, because he is nobody! And I ask you with all seriousness how many people can truly be said to be somebody and show themselves as such?

that the struggle is not so painful, not so difficult for them as for us. Let us see to it that every generation gets a little further than we do: let us gladly lend our shoulders so that the youth can climb on them and get a broader view than we have, who stand on the flat ground.

Rousseau said: “the only habit one should teach a child is not to have one”. The maxim is good, as is the ideal that calls for it, but in practice it is impossible to implement, because we are all creatures of habit. And of course! Man loves his comfort and it is much easier to let him think and act than to think and act himself. The Catholic Church has understood this well and, speculating on the weaknesses of man, she thinks for all and, if she is allowed to do so, she acts for all. What the Church does not do, the State does and under the tutelage of Papa the State and Mama the Church, humanity groans without being able to arrive at independence and freedom.

How well does the Church know man and especially his weak points. People complain about the Jesuits and their influence on the world, but they are mistaken if they think that the Jesuits make people hypocrites, on the contrary it is human hypocrisy that makes the Jesuits find a suitable field for their work. If people did not have such a tendency to hypocrisy, what would the Jesuits be able to do? It is the same with tyrants. It is not the tyrants who enslave a people, on the contrary the slavish spirit of the people makes tyranny possible. Let us not forget that the tyrant is always higher than others, otherwise he would not be a tyrant. It is easy to curse tyrants, but let us curse ourselves, because our cowardice, our indifference make tyrants possible. The fault lies in us and not always in others, for do you think that a free people would tolerate a tyrant for a week, for a single day? Our servility, our meekness gives us tyrants.

In fact, we cannot pity the people who bear the yoke of tyranny, because they deserve no other fate. A people must bear the fate it deserves and if the tyrant has character, he will feel the greatest

- fourthly: the interest that many have in maintaining profitable lies;
- fifthly: the strange opinion that Free Study would consist either in a wanton inaction, or in the disdain of rule and effort, as if nature wasted her treasures on drunken people, dreamers and idlers;
- sixthly: the neglect of the opportunity to be made aware of the truth by others;
- seventhly: the exclusive listening to voices that come from one side with neglect of: hear the other side too;
- eighthly: the attachment of too much value to short, apparently powerful sayings;
- ninthly: doubt disease, especially not to be confused with legitimate and dutiful doubt, a disease that does not lead to knowledge after doubt, through investigation, but from knowledge, without investigation, to nothing;
- tenthly: the struggle against material deprivation, because the most persevering fighter perishes when he has to devote the greater part of his time and energy to solving the problem: how he will continue to fight in life. Does one not realise how

the glow of higher enthusiasm is extinguished. When life is but one fight with the low And delayed succumbing highest prize.

Certainly, it is not easy to get rid of ingrained prejudices, because every new generation finds at its cradle a whole world of ideas, imaginations and feelings which it receives as an inheritance from bygone centuries and we know from experience how painful that constant struggle against religious, political and social prejudices is. But let us spare this as much as possible to our children so

Therefore education must be individualized in the sense of freedom. One must beware of the training of character, of mind, of heart, and the goal to be pursued must be no other than the attainment of freedom. The worship of freedom for each and all, of justice, not in the legal but in the human sense, of reason, not in the theological nor in the metaphysical sense, but as science and labor, both manual and intellectual labor — that is the foundation of all dignity and right for all.

If I had the time, I would read to you the hymn of freedom which Bakunin sang so beautifully in God and the State, and we would draw strength from his words: “I am not truly free unless all the beings who surround me, men and women alike, are equally free. The freedom of others, far from being a limitation or a negation of my freedom, is on the contrary its necessary condition and confirmation. I do not become truly free unless through the freedom of others, so that the more numerous the number of free men who surround me and the wider and deeper their freedom, the more extensive, deeper and wider my freedom becomes. On the contrary, it is the slavery of men which constitutes an obstacle to my freedom, or what amounts to the same thing, their animality is a negation of my humanity, because once again I cannot be truly free unless my freedom, or what means the same thing my dignity as a man, my human right, which consists in not obeying any other man and determining my actions solely by my own conviction, are equally free. considered by the conscience of all, is confirmed by the approval of all. My personal freedom, thus confirmed by the freedom of everyone, extends to infinity.” I must break off my quotation here, although I do not lack the desire to continue it.

We all sin against freedom, no doubt, for it seems to me that each of us has within us the devil of authority, for from the moment we possess any power we abuse it by becoming great or small tyrants according to circumstances. But already we feel ourselves loftier and better as soon as we experience the influence of this Song of Songs of Freedom, this glorious hymn of freedom.

Let the children be free — to be free is the desire of every being in nature — for the child learns to think, compare, judge, act by itself. To develop, that is, to remove the entanglement of the I, so that it can unfold itself in all its magnitude — that is our task. And when we look at the work of many educators, we feel like shouting with the English: Hands off! Hands off! For you are corrupting the children by your meddling.

The lack of attractiveness in work often comes from the child's being subjected to the pressure to which it is subjected, an intellectual food is forced upon it that it does not ask for. If the stomach cannot tolerate a food and it is given to it against its will, the child becomes ill. Do you not think that if the mind is given food that it does not ask for, the mind will also become ill? I do not believe in laziness in children, I have never seen a normal and healthy child who was lazy. And this is so true that if the child has nothing to do, he will do evil, because he cannot do without doing something. It is we adults who make children lazy. We always look for the blame in the child and we always find it in the educator. Why should we force children to take up things that do not interest them? Arouse the child's interest and he will ask you to tell him.

Schools are institutions where children are forced to take an interest in things that do not concern them. The result is that their interest is extinguished forever. One must learn to think; and often premature instruction dulls the mind, for instance by giving it at an age when the child is not yet ready for it. One does not encourage the art of swimming by throwing eggs into the water. These must first be hatched. Now, the faithful incubator, nature, undertakes the incubation. The impressions also need time to be processed. And childhood is the time of life during which the greatest mass of impressions is aroused in the child. There are so many that it cannot process them all, and in any case one must give them time to be processed. The withered fruits of education are often due to the neglect of these remarks.

In our country there lived a philosopher whose name is certainly familiar to you, because in the *Supplément littéraire* of the *Temps Nouveaux* there were several translated pieces of his, above all his immortal fairy tales of authority, which deserve to be preserved as the golden book for all anti-authority people. I mean Multatuli³ — this pseudonym means: I have suffered a lot — and he gave a lecture on Free Study and when he looks for a definition — and the art of definition is one of the most necessary! — he says: “free study is the unhindered striving for truth or the absence of hindrance in the search for the truth.”

And then he distinguishes above all three obstacles that stand in the way of success:

- first: imposing a prejudice;
- second: preventing research;
- third: unsuitability of the person doing the research.

He also mentions others:

- first: incorrect reading or incorrect understanding;
- second: official distortion of the truth;
- third: swearing by the words of the masters.

He recalls Pythagoras and the conclusion of his pupils in every argument: he (the master) said it. And he disapproves of this in Pythagoras and thinks that he should have taught his pupils to unlearn that curse.

Furthermore:

³ Later a French anthology of Multatuli's works appeared, compiled by Alexander Cohen. It should be remembered that this lecture was given to a French audience in Paris.