

CHAPTER VII

FIRST STEPS IN EDUCATION

The first process of education is obviously not a mental process. When a mother talks to a baby, she is not encouraging its little mind to think. When she is coaxing her child to walk, she is not making a theoretic exposition of the science of equilibration. She crouches before the child, at a little distance, and spreads her hands. "Come, baby--come to mother. Come! Baby, walk! Yes, walk! Walk to mother! Come along. A little walk to its mother. Come! Come then! Why yes, a pretty baby! Oh, he can toddle! Yes--yes--No, don't be frightened, a dear. No--Come to mother--" and she catches his little pinafore by the tip--and the infant lurches forward. "There! There! A beautiful walk! A beautiful walker, yes! Walked all the way to mother, baby did. Yes, he did--"

Now who will tell me that this talk has any rhyme or reason? Not a spark of reason. Yet a real rhyme: or rhythm, much more important. The song and the urge of the mother's voice plays direct on the affective centers of the child, a wonderful stimulus and tuition. The words hardly matter. True, this constant repetition in the end forms a mental association. At the moment they have no mental significance at all for the baby. But they ring with a strange palpitating music in his fluttering soul, and lift him into motion.

And this is the way to educate children: the instinctive way of mothers. There should be no effort made to teach children to think, to have ideas. Only to lift them and urge them into dynamic activity. The voice of dynamic sound, not the words of understanding. Damn understanding. Gestures, and touch, and expression of the face, not theory. Never have ideas about children--and never have ideas for them.

If we are going to teach children we must teach them first to move. And not by rule or mental dictation. Horror! But by playing and teasing and anger, and amusement. A child must learn to move blithe and free and proud. It must learn the fullness of spontaneous motion. And this it can only learn by continuous reaction from all the centers, through all the emotions. A child must learn to contain itself. It must learn to sit still if need be. Part of the first phase of education is the learning to stay still and be physically self-contained. Then a child must learn to be alone, and to adventure alone, and to play alone. Any peevish clinging should be quite roughly rebuffed. From the very first day, throw a child back on its own resources--even a little cruelly sometimes. But don't neglect it, don't have a negative attitude to it. Play with it, tease it and roll it over as a dog her puppy, mock it when it is too timorous, laugh at it, scold it when it really bothers you--for a child must learn not to bother another person--and when it makes you genuinely angry, spank it soundly. But always remember that it is a single little soul by

itself; and that the responsibility for the wise, warm relationship is yours, the adult's.

Then always watch its deportment. Above all things encourage a straight backbone and proud shoulders. Above all things despise a slovenly movement, an ugly bearing and unpleasing manner. And make a mock of petulance and of too much timidity.

We are imbeciles to start bothering about love and so forth in a child. Forget utterly that there is such a thing as emotional reciprocity. But never forget your own honor as an adult individual towards a small individual. It is a question of honor, not of love.

A tree grows straight when it has deep roots and is not too stifled. Love is a spontaneous thing, coming out of the spontaneous effectual soul. As a deliberate principle it is an unmitigated evil. Also morality which is based on ideas, or on an ideal, is an unmitigated evil. A child which is proud and free in its movements, in all its deportment, will be quite as moral as need be. Honor is an instinct, a superb instinct which should be kept keenly alive. Immorality, vice, crime, these come from a suppression or a collapse at one or other of the great primary centers. If one of these centers fails to maintain its true polarity, then there is a physical or psychic derangement, or both. And viciousness or crime are the result of a derangement in the primary system. Pure morality is only an instinctive adjustment which the soul makes in every circumstance, adjusting one thing to another

livingly, delicately, sensitively. There can be no law. Therefore, at every cost and charge keep the first four centers alive and alert, active, and vivid in reaction. And then you need fear no perversion. What we have done, in our era, is, first, we have tried as far as possible to suppress or subordinate the two sensual centers. We have so unduly insisted on and exaggerated the upper spiritual or selfless mode--the living in the other person and through the other person--that we have caused already a dangerous over-balance in the natural psyche.

To correct this we go one worse, and try to rule ourselves more and more by the old ideas of sympathy and benevolence. We think that love and benevolence will cure anything. Whereas love and benevolence are our poison, poison to the giver, and still more poison to the receiver. Poison only because there is practically no spontaneous love left in the world. It is all will, the fatal love-will and insatiable morbid curiosity. The pure sympathetic mode of love long ago broke down. There is now only deadly, exaggerated volition.

This is also why general education should be suppressed as soon as possible. We have fallen into a state of fixed, deadly will.

Everything we do and say to our children in school tends simply to fix in them the same deadly will, under the pretence of pure love. Our idealism is the clue to our fixed will. Love, beauty, benevolence, progress, these are the words we use. But the principle we evoke is a principle of barren, sanctified compulsion of all life. We want to put

all life under compulsion. "How to outwit the nerves," for example.--And therefore, to save the children as far as possible, elementary education should be stopped at once.

No child should be sent to any sort of public institution before the age of ten years. If I could but advise, I would advise that this notice should be sent through the length and breadth of the land.

"Parents, the State can no longer be responsible for the mind and character of your children. From the first day of the coming year, all schools will be closed for an indefinite period. Fathers, see that your boys are trained to be men. Mothers, see that your daughters are trained to be women.

"All schools will shortly be converted either into public workshops or into gymnasia. No child will be admitted into the workshops under ten years of age. Active training in primitive modes of fighting and gymnastics will be compulsory for all boys over ten years of age.

"All girls over ten years of age must attend at one domestic workshop. All girls over ten years of age may, in addition, attend at one workshop of skilled labor, or of technical industry, or of art. Admission for three months' probation.

"All boys over ten years of age must attend at one workshop of domestic crafts, and at one workshop of skilled labor, or of technical industry, or of art. A boy may choose, with his parents' consent, his school of labor, or technical industry or art, but the directors reserve the right to transfer him to a more suitable department, if necessary, after a three months' probation.

"It is the intention of this State to form a body of active, energetic citizens. The danger of a helpless, presumptuous, news-paper-reading population is universally recognized.

"All elementary education is left in the hands of the parents, save such as is necessary to the different branches of industry.

"Schools of mental culture are free to all individuals over fourteen years of age.

"Universities are free to all who obtain the first culture degree."

The fact is, our process of universal education is to-day so uncouth, so psychologically barbaric, that it is the most terrible menace to the existence of our race. We seize hold of our children, and by parrot-compulsion we force into them a set of mental tricks. By

unnatural and unhealthy compulsion we force them into a certain amount of cerebral activity. And then, after a few years, with a certain number of windmills in their heads, we turn them loose, like so many inferior Don Quixotes, to make a mess of life. All that they have learnt in their heads has no reference at all to their dynamic souls. The windmills spin and spin in a wind of words, Dulcinea del Toboso beckons round every corner, and our nation of inferior Quixotes jumps on and off tram-cars, trains, bicycles, motor-cars, buses, in one mad chase of the divine Dulcinea, who is all the time chewing chocolates and feeling very, very bored. It is no use telling the poor devils to stop. They read in the newspapers about more Dulcineas and more chivalry due to them and more horrid persons who injure the fair fame of these bored females. And round they skelter, after their own tails. That is, when they are not forced to grind out their lives for a wage. Though work is the only thing that prevents our masses from going quite mad.

To tell the truth, ideas are the most dangerous germs mankind has ever been injected with. They are introduced into the brain by injection, in schools and by means of newspapers, and then we are done for.

An idea which is merely introduced into the brain, and started spinning there like some outrageous insect, is the cause of all our misery to-day. Instead of living from the spontaneous centers, we live from the head. We chew, chew, chew at some theory, some idea. We grind, grind, grind in our mental consciousness, till we are beside

ourselves. Our primary affective centers, our centers of spontaneous being, are so utterly ground round and automatized that they squeak in all stages of disharmony and incipient collapse. We are a people--and not we alone--of idiots, imbeciles and epileptics, and we don't even know we are raving.

And all is due, directly and solely, to that hateful germ we call the Ideal. The Ideal is always evil, no matter what ideal it be. No idea should ever be raised to a governing throne.

This does not mean that man should immediately cut off his head and try to develop a pair of eyes in his breasts. But it does mean this: that an idea is just the final concrete or registered result of living dynamic interchange and reactions: that no idea is ever perfectly expressed until its dynamic cause is finished; and that to continue to put into dynamic effect an already perfected idea means the nullification of all living activity, the substitution of mechanism, and all the resultant horrors of ennui, ecstasy, neurasthenia, and a collapsing psyche.

The whole tree of our idea of life and living is dead. Then let us leave off hanging ourselves and our children from its branches like medlars.

The idea, the actual idea, must rise ever fresh, ever displaced, like the leaves of a tree, from out of the quickness of the sap, and

according to the forever incalculable effluence of the great dynamic centers of life. The tree of life is a gay kind of tree that is forever dropping its leaves and budding out afresh, quite different ones. If the last lot were thistle leaves, the next lot may be vine. You never can tell with the Tree of Life.

So we come back to that precious child who costs us such a lot of ink. By what right, I ask you, are we going to inject into him our own disease-germs of ideas and infallible motives? By the right of the diseased, who want to infect everybody.

There are few, few people in whom the living impulse and reaction develops and sublimates into mental consciousness. There are all kinds of trees in the forest. But few of them indeed bear the apples of knowledge. The modern world insists, however, that every individual shall bear the apples of knowledge. So we go through the forest of mankind, cut back every tree, and try to graft it into an apple-tree. A nice wood of monsters we make by so doing.

It is not the nature of most men to know and to understand and to reason very far. Therefore, why should they make a pretense of it? It is the nature of some few men to reason, then let them reason. Those whose nature it is to be rational will instinctively ask why and wherefore, and wrestle with themselves for an answer. But why every Tom, Dick and Harry should have the why and wherefore of the universe rammed into him, and should be allowed to draw the conclusion hence

that he is the ideal person and responsible for the universe, I don't know. It is a lie anyway--for neither the whys nor the wherefores are his own, and he is but a parrot with his nut of a universe.

Why should we cram the mind of a child with facts that have nothing to do with his own experiences, and have no relation to his own dynamic activity? Let us realize that every extraneous idea effectually introduced into a man's mind is a direct obstruction of his dynamic activity. Every idea which is introduced from outside into a man's mind, and which does not correspond to his own dynamic nature, is a fatal stumbling-block for that man: is a cause of arrest for his true individual activity, and a derangement to his psychic being.

For instance, if I teach a man the idea that all men are equal. Now this idea has no foundation in experience, but is logically deduced from certain ethical or philosophic principles. But there is a disease of idealism in the world, and we all are born with it. Particularly teachers are born with it. So they seize on the idea of equality, and proceed to instil it. With what result? Your man is no longer a man, living his own life from his own spontaneous centers. He is a theoretic imbecile trying to frustrate and dislocate all life.

It is the death of all life to force a pure idea into practice. Life must be lived from the deep, self-responsible spontaneous centers of every individual, in a vital, non-ideal circuit of dynamic relation between individuals. The passions or desires which are thought-born

are deadly. Any particular mode of passion or desire which receives an exclusive ideal sanction at once becomes poisonous.

If this is true for men, it is much more true for women. Teach a woman to act from an idea, and you destroy her womanhood for ever. Make a woman self-conscious, and her soul is barren as a sandbag. Why were we driven out of Paradise? Why did we fall into this gnawing disease of unappeasable dissatisfaction? Not because we sinned. Ah, no. All the animals in Paradise enjoyed the sensual passion of coition. Not because we sinned. But because we got our sex into our head.

When Eve ate that particular apple, she became aware of her own womanhood, mentally. And mentally she began to experiment with it. She has been experimenting ever since. So has man. To the rage and horror of both of them.

These sexual experiments are really anathema. But once a woman is sexually self-conscious, what is she to do? There it is, she is born with the disease of her own self-consciousness, as was her mother before her. She is bound to experiment and try one idea after another, in the long run always to her own misery. She is bound to have fixed one, and then another idea of herself, herself as woman. First she is the noble spouse of a not-quite-so-noble male: then a Mater Dolorosa: then a ministering Angel: then a competent social unit, a Member of Parliament or a Lady Doctor or a platform speaker: and all the while, as a side show, she is the Isolde of some Tristan, or the

Guinevere of some Lancelot, or the Fata Morgana of all men--in her own idea. She can't stop having an idea of herself. She can't get herself out of her own head. And there she is, functioning away from her own head and her own consciousness of herself and her own automatic self-will, till the whole man and woman game has become just a hell, and men with any backbone would rather kill themselves than go on with it--or kill somebody else.

Yet we are going to inculcate more and more self-consciousness, teach every little Mary to be more and more a nice little Mary out of her own head, and every little Joseph to theorize himself up to the scratch.

And the point lies here. There will have to come an end. Every race which has become self-conscious and idea-bound in the past has perished. And then it has all started afresh, in a different way, with another race. And man has never learnt any better. We are really far, far more life-stupid than the dead Greeks or the lost Etruscans. Our day is pretty short, and closing fast. We can pass, and another race can follow later.

But there is another alternative. We still have in us the power to discriminate between our own idealism, our own self-conscious will, and that other reality, our own true spontaneous self. Certainly we are so overloaded and diseased with ideas that we can't get well in a minute. But we can set our faces stubbornly against the disease, once

we recognize it. The disease of love, the disease of "spirit," the disease of niceness and benevolence and feeling good on our own behalf and good on somebody else's behalf. Pah, it is all a gangrene. We can retreat upon the proud, isolate self, and remain there alone, like lepers, till we are cured of this ghastly white disease of self-conscious idealism.

And we really can make a move on our children's behalf. We really can refrain from thrusting our children any more into those hot-beds of the self-conscious disease, schools. We really can prevent their eating much more of the tissues of leprosy, newspapers and books. For a time, there should be no compulsory teaching to read and write at all. The great mass of humanity should never learn to read and write--never.

And instead of this gnawing, gnawing disease of mental consciousness and awful, unhealthy craving for stimulus and for action, we must substitute genuine action. The war was really not a bad beginning. But we went out under the banners of idealism, and now the men are home again, the virus is more active than ever, rotting their very souls.

The mass of the people will never mentally understand. But they will soon instinctively fall into line.

Let us substitute action, all kinds of action, for the mass of people, in place of mental activity. Even twelve hours' work a day is better

than a newspaper at four in the afternoon and a grievance for the rest of the evening. But particularly let us take care of the children. At all cost, try to prevent a girl's mind from dwelling on herself, Make her act, work, play: assume a rule over her girlhood. Let her learn the domestic arts in their perfection. Let us even artificially set her to spin and weave. Anything to keep her busy, to prevent her reading and becoming self-conscious. Let us awake as soon as possible to the repulsive machine quality of machine-made things. They smell of death. And let us insist that the home is sacred, the hearth, and the very things of the home. Then keep the girls apart from any familiarity or being "pals" with the boys. The nice clean intimacy which we now so admire between the sexes is sterilizing. It makes neuters. Later on, no deep, magical sex-life is possible.

The same with the boys. First and foremost establish a rule over them, a proud, harsh, manly rule. Make them know that at every moment they are in the shadow of a proud, strong, adult authority. Let them be soldiers, but as individuals not machine units. There are wars in the future, great wars, which not machines will finally decide, but the free, indomitable life spirit. No more wars under the banners of the ideal, and in the spirit of sacrifice. But wars in the strength of individual men. And then, pure individualistic training to fight, and preparation for a whole new way of life, a new society. Put money into its place, and science and industry. The leaders must stand for life, and they must not ask the simple followers to point out the direction. When the leaders assume responsibility they relieve the

followers forever of the burden of finding a way. Relieved of this hateful incubus of responsibility for general affairs, the populace can again become free and happy and spontaneous, leaving matters to their superiors. No newspapers--the mass of the people never learning to read. The evolving once more of the great spontaneous gestures of life.

We can't go on as we are. Poor, nerve-worn creatures, fretting our lives away and hating to die because we have never lived. The secret is, to commit into the hands of the sacred few the responsibility which now lies like torture on the mass. Let the few, the leaders, be increasingly responsible for the whole. And let the mass be free: free, save for the choice of leaders.

Leaders--this is what mankind is craving for.

But men must be prepared to obey, body and soul, once they have chosen the leader. And let them choose the leader for life's sake only.

Begin then--there is a beginning.