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Royal Institution of Great Britain.

WEEKLY EVENING MEETING,

Friday, January 30, 1857.

WILLIAM POLE, Esq. M.A. F.R.S. Treasurer and Vice-President, in the Chair.

REV. F. D. MAURICE, M.A. M.R.I.

Milton considered as a Schoolmaster.

MILTON was an actual schoolmaster: his letter to Mr. Hartlib, explains his idea of education. In the year 1639, after his return from Italy, he took a house in St. Bride's Churchyard; afterwards one in Aldersgate Street, for the instruction, first, of his two nephews, and then of the children of some of his friends. According to Dr. Johnson, several of Milton's biographers have shown a desire to shrink from this passage of his life altogether, and have wished to represent his teaching as gratuitous. Johnson himself, while he ridicules this folly, sneers at Milton for returning to England, because his countrymen were engaged (as he thought) in a struggle for liberty, and then vapouring away his patriotism in a private boarding-school.

The earliest biographer of Milton, Edward Phillips, his nephew and pupil, is not open to the charge of regarding this occupation of Milton as a disgrace, or of hinting that he undertook it without remuneration. The others had probably had a notion that Aldersgate Street was not the place for a poet to dwell in, and that his work ought to be of a specially etherial kind. But Chaucer was Comptroller of Petty Customs, in the port of London; Spenser was born in East Smithfield, and died, it is to be feared, "for lack of bread," in King Street, Westminster; Shakespeare was busy at the Globe Theatre during the most important years of his life; and Milton himself was not only born at the Spread Eagle, in Bread Street, not only received his education at St. Paul's School, but had evidently a lingering love for London, whenever for a short time he was separated from it. There is clear evidence that he preferred the Thames to the Cam. Even in the genial years that

he passed at his father's house in Horton, when he was writing "L'Allegro," "Il Penseroso," "Comus," "Lycidas," he was still paying frequent visits to London, that he might perfect himself in his father's favourite study of music, and in the mathematics. And finally, he left Italy, where he had passed so many months of exquisite delight, and where he had received homage so unusual for any dweller on this side of the Alps, as soon as he heard of the probable meeting of the new (the Long) Parliament.

Johnson's complaint is refuted by his own sensible opinion that Milton taught for money, and not for amusement. Since he had determined that he ought to oppose the measures of the Court, was it not the duty of an honourable and prudent man to secure himself against the bribes of the Court? The patronage of Charles I. was bestowed with liberality and discernment. The report that a young man had come to London, who had received panegyrics from the academies and from the most eminent men of letters in Italy, was likely enough to reach the queen or the archbishop. There was nothing in Milton's previous career to render it improbable that he might be induced to use his pen in their favour. Instead of denouncing court entertainments, he had written a mask; he could be favourably spoken of by the family at Ludlow Castle. Money was important to him, for he had tastes that were expensive. No one would have felt more the charms of cultivated and refined society. Might not his scheme of the private boarding-school then be a very reasonable means of *preventing* him from vapouring away his patriotism, first by making him independent of his pen; secondly, by making him a less creditable associate for those who would have been glad to amuse themselves with his learning and eloquence?

We learn from Howell's "Londinopolis," printed in 1657, that Aldersgate Street "resembled an Italian street more than any other in London." Phillips speaks of it as "freer from noise than any other." Mr. Cunningham shows, in his Handbook, that it was the residence of distinguished noblemen. Milton must have strained a point to hire a house in such a situation. That he did so, is one sign of the earnestness with which he entered upon his task. We know, from his letter to Mr. Hartlib, that he regarded the building in which the education was conducted as a part of the education itself.

It is useless to speculate whether any of the friends to whom his letters or his sonnets are addressed committed their sons or kinsmen to his care. The names of John and Edward Phillips are all that have come down to us. Of these men, through the labours of Mr. Godwin, we have more information than it is generally possible to obtain respecting persons of their calibre. They were the younger brethren of that "fair infant whose death by a cough" is immortalised in one of Milton's early poems. When his sister married a second time, he took the boys into his house. Both

became industrious literateurs. Both, even before the Restoration, became Royalists. Both for a time fell into the licentiousness which so commonly accompanied that reaction. John Phillips began with answering an anonymous reply to his uncle's defence; then wrote a vulgar satire upon Presbyterians; became a travestier of Virgil; a dishonest translator of Don Quixote; a hack of the booksellers; in one discreditable passage, a reviler of Milton. No doubt the elevation of his uncle's character may have exasperated the grovelling tendencies in him. If he had been under the direction of a high-minded Royalist, he would probably have become a self-willed Puritan. The flogging of Busby would have been the most useful discipline for him. But he nowhere attributes his disgust at Puritanism to Milton's austerity. Edward Phillips, who shared that disgust, proves such a notion to be impossible. Nearly the last of his long series of books was the biography of his uncle. In it he recurs with affectionate reverence to the education he had received in Aldersgate Street, gives an account of that education, which shows that it embraced, as we might expect it would, every kind of study; that the tone of the teaching was noble, and that Milton knew when to unbend the bow as well as to nerve it. Edward Phillips speaks with warmth, and something of remorse, of the blessings which his school years might have been to him if he had passed them aright.

Johnson, who knew nothing concerning the Phillipses, except that one of them had written the "Theatrum Poetarum," speaks of the small fruit which proceeded from the "wonder-working academy" in Aldersgate Street. The fruits may have been unripe and unsatisfactory. Milton may have been disappointed in this as in his other hopes; other noble men have been so before and since. No one ever doubted that his own Samson was the image of himself; that the strong warrior became the blind and despised sufferer. But Samson was victorious in his death. There was a "Paradise Regained" as well as a "Paradise Lost" in Milton's history. His book on Education tells us what he learnt, and what we may learn by his school experiments. He never pretended that these worked any wonders; he does not even allude to them in his writings. His scheme of education certainly resembles in its principles that which Edward Phillips speaks of. It was not, therefore, a mere paper scheme; it referred to actual living boys, whom he had seen and tried to form. But the scale of it is one which he could never have attempted; and for aught that appears in the letter, he may have been led to it as much by a sense of his failures as by pride in his success.

In England we have grammar schools, and what are called commercial schools. In Germany there are gymnasia and real schools. The idea of the letter to Mr. Hartlib is, that this division is unnecessary and artificial, that the knowledge of words is best obtained in union with the knowledge of things; that each is helpful

and necessary to the other. His maxim that "language is but the instrument conveying to us things useful to be known," might lead us to think that he did not regard language as a direct means of culture. This would be a hasty inference. He looked upon the reading of good books as the best and only means of obtaining a knowledge of language. He protests, therefore, against "the preposterous exaction of forcing the empty wits of children to compose themes, verses, and orations," as a way to obtain a knowledge of the language. But the author of a host of Latin elegiacs, the Latin correspondent of foreign courts, is not so inconsistent with himself as to despise such exercises. He regards them as "the acts of ripest judgment, and the final work of a head filled by long reading and observing, with elegant maxims, and copious invention." This is not the language of a rebel against scholarship, but of a severe and fastidious scholar. His compassion for boys is combined with horror for their solecisms.

Milton's idea of education is strictly Baconian: not in this sense, that he had Bacon's preference for physical studies to humane or moral studies; but in this, that he protests against that method which starts from abstractions and conclusions of the intellect, and maintains that all true method must begin from the objects of sense. He may not have been well read in the "Novum Organum;" but he could not have applied its maxims more strictly in a new direction than he has done. Possibly his protests against making logic and metaphysics the introduction to knowledge in the Universities, when they ought to be the climax of knowledge, were more suitable to his own day, when boys went to Cambridge or Oxford at fifteen or twelve, than to ours. But if it be so, we ought to be very careful that our youths do acquire the early experimental training that he recommends, before they venture upon the higher and more abstract lore: otherwise we may have to complain, as he had, that "they grow into a hatred and contempt of learning," and that when "poverty or youthful years call them importunately their several ways, they hasten to an ambitious and mercenary, or ignorantly zealous divinity," or to the mere "trade of law," or to "state affairs, with souls so unprincipled in virtue and generous breeding, that court shifts and tyrannous aphorisms appear to them the highest points of wisdom," while "some of a more airy spirit live out their days in feasts and jollity."

Passing from his principles to his application of them, we may find abundant excuses for criticism, and, if we covet the reputation of wits, for ridicule. He wished his college to be both school and university; the studies therefore proceed in an ascending scale, from the elements of grammar to the highest science, as well as to the most practical pursuits. The younger boys are to be especially trained to a clear and distinct pronunciation, "as like as may be to the Italian." Books are to be given them like Cebes or Plutarch, which will "win them early to the love of virtue and true labour."

In some hour of the day they are to be taught the rules of arithmetic and the elements of geometry. The evenings are to be taken up "with the easy grounds of religion, and the story of scripture." In the next stage they begin to study books on agriculture, Cato, Varro, and Columella. These books will make them in time masters of any ordinary Latin prose, and will be at the same time "occasions of inciting and enabling them hereafter to improve the tillage of their country." The use of maps and globes is to be learnt from modern authors; but Greek is to be studied, as soon as the grammar is learnt, in the "historical physiology of Aristotle and Theophrastus." Latin and Greek authors together are to teach the principles of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and geography. Instruction in architecture, fortification, and engineering, follows. In natural philosophy we ascend through the history of meteors, minerals, plants, and living creatures to anatomy. Anatomy leads on to the study of medicine.

The objections to some of these plans are too obvious to need any notice. No one will suppose that natural philosophy is to be learnt from Seneca, or agriculture from Columella. Every one will admit readily that his own amazing powers of acquisition led Milton to overrate the powers of ordinary boys. But it would seem a poor reason for not availing ourselves of the hints that he gives us, that we have means of following them out which he had not: a poorer reason still for not profiting by the warnings which he gives us against filling our pupils' heads with a mere multitude of words, that he perhaps asked them to take in more both of words and things than they would be able comfortably to carry. If he is an idealist, he is certainly also a stern realist. He would have us always conversant with facts rather than with names. He aims at the useful as directly as the most professed utilitarian. The pupils are to have "the helpful experiences of hunters, fowlers, fishermen, shepherds, gardeners, and apothecaries," to assist them in their natural studies. These studies are to increase their interest in Hesiod, in Lucretius, and in the Georgics of Virgil. The incentive for studying medicine is, that they may perhaps "save armies by frugal and expenseless means, and not let the healthy and stout bodies of young men under them rot away for want of this (medical) discipline."

Two other objections have been raised by Dr. Johnson against this scheme of education. The first will, probably, not have great weight with the members of the Royal Institution, for it turns upon the comparative worthlessness of the physical sciences. The other is expressed in some very elegant sentences, maintaining that the formation of a noble and useful character is the true end of education. One cannot help deploring that maxims so good and well-delivered, should be so utterly thrown away. They are absurdly inapplicable to Milton's letter. It is throughout a complaint that the existing education was not sufficiently directed to the purpose of

forming brave men and good citizens. It is throughout an assertion that that is the only purpose which any education ought to aim at. The classics are not resorted to for the purpose of forming a style, but of instilling manly thoughts, which a higher wisdom may purify and make divine. Because the Englishman is a poor creature when he is busy with abstractions, and the strongest of all when he is dealing with realities, Milton would have him trained in these. All exercises and all recreations are to contribute to the same end. The pupils are to learn "the exact use of their weapon," both as "a good means of making them healthy, nimble, and well in breath, and of inspiring them with a gallant and fearless courage, which being tempered with seasonable precepts of true fortitude and patience, shall turn into a native and heroic valour, and make them hate the cowardice of doing wrong." In their very sports they are to learn the rudiments of soldiership.

Music is not recommended as a graceful recreation to a few, but as an instrument of making all the pupils "gentle from rustic passions and distempered passions."

Certainly whatever the errors of Milton's system may have been, its ends were as noble and as practical as those of any that was ever conceived. An institution trained, as this is, to profit by the experiments of honest seekers in natural science, even if those experiments prove failures, will not despise the experiments of a moralist and a patriot who may have committed mistakes which the most ignorant may detect, who had a righteousness of purpose which the wisest will be most ready to admire and most eager to possess.

[F. D. M.]