

# THE PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION.

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In bringing to a conclusion the series of leading articles which we have devoted to the Bilingual Programme, we may with advantage dwell on certain maxims and methods of modern educationists which are, indeed, applicable to unilingual equally with bilingual teaching, but which in our opinion are especially deserving of the study of every teacher who would make a success of the Bilingual Programme. Educational reform in Ireland has hitherto followed the language movement; it would be only in the nature of things that the introduction of the Bilingual Programme should be accompanied by the growth of truer educational ideals and the employment of saner educational methods amongst Irish educators generally. At all events we desire in connection with the Bilingual Programme to put forward, not indeed for the first time in these columns, the following suggestions for the consideration of Irish teachers. Though the subject is tempting, we shall compress what we have to say within the limit of two articles.

Now, the aim of education is not the imparting of knowledge but the training of the child to be a perfect man or woman—‘to prepare for complete living,’ said Herbert Spencer. Neither is the chief *means* of education the imparting of knowledge; the imparting of knowledge is, indeed, only an incident of the process of education. The real education consists in the forming of the child’s character, the drawing out of his faculties, the disciplining of his intellect. These are truisms, but they are truisms whose truth is not yet recognised in Ireland except in so far as the Gaelic League has been able to impress its ideas on our educators. We wish we were sure that every teacher in Ireland realised the dignity and responsibility and possibilities of his position. To have confided to one’s care the moulding for good or evil of the

most beautiful thing that God has made—the soul and the mind of a child—is surely a high dignity and a high responsibility.

Now, we conceive that in educating a child the inculcation of truth, manliness, purity, and reverence, is more important than the teaching of vulgar fractions and Latin roots. Under the National School system instruction in dogmatic religion is rigidly restricted to a single half-hour each day; but there is no hour of the day during which the teacher cannot, by precept and example, enkindle in his pupils' minds a love of truth and goodness and a hatred of falsehood and baseness. The whole life of a teacher should, indeed, be a sermon to his pupils. There is one virtue the inculcation of which is one of the special duties of a teacher—the virtue of Patriotism. We owe it to our children that they should be taught to know and to love their country. If we hide that knowledge from them we commit a crime. *A fortiori*, if actively or by acquiescence, we teach them to be ashamed of their country, to despise her speech, her song, her music, her traditions, we are morally as guilty as if we poisoned their minds against their own parents, and taught them to cast contumely on them; nay, we are, if anything, more guilty, for duty to country is paramount to duty to parents.

Every Irish child has, then, a fundamental right to be taught that Ireland is his mother, and that he owes a duty to that mother—the duty to know her, the duty to love her, the duty to work for her. This, of course, implies his right to be taught her language and her history, and to be shown how to study and appreciate her literature and lore. The systematic inculcation of patriotism is part of the school *régime* of every enlightened country. Its necessity is understood on the Continent, in America, and partially in Britain. In Denmark old Danish folk-songs are sung in the schools, in Belgium the children are taught that the Battle of Waterloo was a Flemish victory, and that Wellington and the British were mere items in the army which crushed Napoleon; in America school-children salute the American flag as they pass to their desks.

Far more effective than the mere didactic preaching of patriotism would be well-directed efforts to bring the children into some direct relation with the country they inhabit—its natural beauty, its wild

living things, its rocks, its rivers, its ruins. Saturday excursions should be made to the scenes of famous fights, the sites of famous *dúns* or churches. The story of the spot should be told in simple language by the teacher, to form afterwards the scheme for a composition exercise. The lives of the children should be brought into touch with the beautiful and mysterious life around them. Love of nature should be instilled, and minute and intelligent observation of the ways of nature encouraged. The children might be asked to bring to school each week some new wild flower or plant, together with its Irish name, gleaned from the old people. The specimens so collected should be preserved, and would form the nucleus of a botanical collection which would grow constantly until it was fully representative of the flora of the district. In places near the sea-coast the children might be asked to bring specimens of the various species of shell and sea-weed to be found on the shore, with the Irish name of each. Thus would be formed another collection in the schoolroom, another treasure-house to be drawn on in future object-lessons. Again, the children should be taught to know and to love every wild thing that flies in the air or creeps in the grass—to know their names, their haunts, their habits, to recognise their form and cries. They should, above all, be taught that the lives of animals are sacred, and that wantonly to kill or hurt a beast or bird or insect is a wicked and a mean thing. The children again might be asked to note the first appearance in the locality of the migratory birds—to bring the teacher word of the first swallow seen, the first cuckoo heard in spring or the last to leave in autumn. The appearance of rare birds and insects in the locality should also be noted. Every child ought to keep his own record, and the more interesting items in each could be transferred to a common school list kept by the teacher or a senior pupil.

Work of this sort forms part of the school programme in many Continental countries and in America. In America, indeed, the idea has of late years been immensely developed. There are school libraries, formed by the children, school museums, collected by them, school gardens, cultivated by them. Nay, children are taught at school to cultivate orchards, to grow corn, to rear chicken and pigs. To the

youngsters it is all play, but in reality they are being trained to habits of observation, of method, of cleanliness, of economy.

'In Illinois children are raising corn and oats, sweet peas and lilies, trying experiments with clover and alfalfa. In their arithmetic lessons they keep their accounts, do the book-keeping of their tiny farms; in their composition exercises they describe what they have done. Girls and boys, big and little, plan their home gardens, their school-gardens, and send samples of their results to the State university. Interested fathers are benefiting by the instruction colleges and teachers give their children. An estimate based on the actual results of school experiments credits one county in the next few years with hundreds of thousands of dollars' financial increase in agricultural business. A boy or a girl in a corner of Wisconsin owns hens, or a pair of pigs, a present from a father or an uncle. Close to his public school is a county agricultural school. He asks the director how to feed, how to house and care for his new stock. With the right care his animals thrive better than his father's. In his school composition there often figures the child's amount of the father's amused scepticism, and the father's conversion to new ways of farming. Interest in grain-growing, interest in the dairy, a love of the farm, are born that way. And the girl or boy bringing the discoverer's zeal to old tasks becomes a woman, not a drudge; a man, not a bumpkin.'<sup>1</sup>

In Ireland we are, under the aegis of the National Board, and facilitated by the absence of a National University, assiduously and successfully raising not women, but drudges; not men, but bumpkins.

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<sup>1</sup> Adele Mary Shaw in *The World's Work*.