

**EDUCATION
AND
INDIVIDUALITY**

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THE aim and end of all true education should be to teach the individual to develop his individuality. One great weakness of our present system of education is that it does not do this. It makes men not thinkers, but cold-storage warehouses for facts. It is a system of constant acquisition, not of growth. Our system of education does not teach the individual how to think, how to know his own mind, how to strengthen and quicken its action, and how to control and direct it. The education of today gives the mind thousands of facts to learn and to memorize. At stated times examinations are held, stock-takings, inventories, not to determine the degree of the growth from the mental food, but to see what percentage still remains intact. It is like putting food into a refrigerator—the food may be retained, in some form, but the refrigerator itself is not strengthened. Thousands of individuals to-day, hear the same lessons, are questioned in the same way, taught to learn exactly the same facts, and unless they can present these same facts on examination they fail to progress to higher classes. This is death to originality, to individuality, to all true growth. It tends to make the educational system a machine conforming all men, so far as a system can defy nature, to the sameness and uniformity of bricks. Our education of today is grand in its eagerness, its liberality, its enthusiasm; but in so far as it fails to teach thinking, it is unpardonably weak. The claim is that anything like individual teaching is impossible, because of the enormous expense incurred by the increase of teachers. This is but a specious objection. The simplifying of the curriculum would permit the same number of teachers to do better work in less time. It would substitute “mental training” for “mental straining,” developing the mind instead of stifling it.

What is needed is that thinking be taught as a system, that studies which stimulate individual thinking be encouraged, that others which do not develop it be put aside as we would food that gives no strength to the body. If “thinking” in all its phases were taught, there would be assimilation and digestion of all mental food, there would be perfect classification and preparation of facts for use, everything would be made individual. This one study, introduced in all its fullness and strength into our school and college curriculum would act as a leaven that in natural development would work out the salvation of education in gentle, easy way. It is daring to speak thus of the “sacred school system,” as the orator terms it when he swings out in his orotund¹ voice: “Palsied be the hand that touches our sacred school system.” But if this “education” were not such a power for good its weakness might be passed over in hopeless silence. Whatever is not equal to its possibilities, its opportunities, is to that degree a failure. The education of today by giving too elaborate a course of studies, appeals too much to memory and fails to develop individuality. It does not teach the individual to know himself or his powers. Its growth has been so generous and wonderful that it has tended to diffuseness; but now it needs simplifying, it needs pruning. The locomotive of today is a great, heavy piece of machinery,

¹ **Orotund** *adjective*: (of the voice or speech) characterized by strength, fullness, richness, and clearness. Dictionary.com Unabridged. Random House, Inc. 18 Jan. 2012

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made up of nearly 6,000 pieces. In perhaps ten or twenty years, in our progress, it will be simplified to a dynamo and a few simple bars, levers and push buttons. So it is with our educational system. I believe that within twenty or thirty years from now we will look back upon the educational system of today as a most gigantic, complicated and involved process.

For from five to twenty years of age the student studies faithfully the prescribed course, and at the end of that time is pronounced ready for the battle of life. Those fifteen years have been years of preparation for this, and if they have not prepared him they have not been equal to the need. They should have taught him thinking, quick action of the mind, instant grasp of relation, power and command of the mind, conservation of its energy, and the thorough cooperation of the developed senses. Two or three years of athletic training develops the muscles, quickens them, strengthens them, and gives command and control of them. True education should give precisely this same power in the mind. And it can be done through trained thinking, a system that all teachers can master and can teach. Conversation, the instant ability to express one's thought, to defend one's position, to gain from others, to speak on any subject, is in its best forms rare in life. It is a vital subject as part of the development of the individual. It is vital because it concerns him not merely as spectator but as a participant. But it is not taught in our schools. It should form part of a course in trained thinking. So should the development of the senses, the quickening of memory, true reading, perfect observation and other exercises not necessary here to note. All this training would reveal to the individual his mind, it would vitalize latent powers, intensify natural aptitudes, and teach the individual to develop himself.

But what is the individual and how can things be made individual to him? The individual is the sum of his memories, physical, mental, moral. It is the sum of these that makes the man. We enter this world with a certain stock of memories, through heredity. These memories are but dispositions, traits, tendencies and the like. As the days go on, through the developing senses, we receive new impressions, and these impressions become memories. We think over them and our deductions then become memories. In the true sense of individuality we may say that nothing is of real importance to man's individuality except as it reaches his mind and affects his memories. The more constant, instant, unconscious and perfect is the cooperation and harmony between the memories the more delicate and developed is the individuality. The mind with all its memories is like a great society with a million members. When a new fact is admitted, a new impression enters into mind, it should be presented to all the others, it should be permeated by the spirit of all. It is as when a grain of carmine² is put into a hogshead³ of water; there is thorough absorption. Every drop of that water is a perfect union of water and carmine. This is but a type of what I mean by making anything individual. If the mind receives a new impression and gets no good from it, makes no deduction from it, does not seek to bring it into harmony

² **Carmines:** A red or purplish-red pigment obtained from cochineal, a red dyestuff extracted from the dried bodies of certain female scale insects native to tropical and subtropical America. Carmine was used extensively for watercolors and fine coach-body colors before the advent of synthetic coloring materials. © Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.. Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 18 Jan. 2012. [Dictionary.com](http://www.britannica.com).

³ **Hogshead:** A large cask, especially one containing from 63 to 140 gallons. Historically these were used to store and transport wines and spirits.

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with its other memories, it is not making that impression individual. Trained thinking would do this. All these impressions that are brought to the mind come but as elements.

To properly understand individuality we must see it in three circles of relationship: First, the duty of the individual to the individual; second, the duty of the individual to his neighbor, his city, and his country; and, third, the duty of the individual to his God. There can be no perfect individuality unless there is perfect harmony in these three unities of relationship. There is no natural opposition between them, nor can perfect justice be done to one if either of the others be slighted. The failure of the best men and women in life is in the first relation—the failure to realize the duty to their individuality. There are women to-day who suffer for others, suffer sorrow, suffer blindly, suffer for fear of gossip, trials, brutality—suffer perhaps, because they feel it is a virtue to bear and forbear. They carry self-sacrifice too far. Their self-sacrifice becomes mental, physical, spiritual suicide. That life is changing them, fretting them, weakening them, lessening their powers to do their duty to their children, to themselves, to society, and to their God. And they are bearing for what? There is perhaps no clearly defined object, but self-sacrifice is not always a virtue. Self-sacrifice in this spirit, if made universal, would make all the best surrendering to the worst in life, the good all paying heavy tribute constantly to the selfishness, the weakness, the brutality of the wicked; it would make the angels all slaves to the devils of the world. A certain amount of self-sacrifice, of bearing meekly whatever, others give, is beautiful, it is a virtue. Beyond that it is a sin against individuality, a wrong to one's self. Science today can tell the precise melting point of all the metals, a point at which they can no longer bear the heat. The individual should have his melting point beyond which his justice to himself should assert itself. Bear quietly, bear meekly as long as it is just, then there is but one step—rebellion! Righteous rebellion is the beautiful crown of beautiful suffering. It is the assertion of justice to one's individuality. The Almighty himself bore with the wickedness of the cities of the plains for a time, then He smote Sodom and Gomorrah from the face of the earth forever.

We can never appreciate individuality in all its importance until we see it in a three-fold light. Individuality is the song and the singer, the possessor and the possession. It is the man, and the instrument by which he meets the world. If this individuality be not recognized in its duty to itself, man not only suffers, but he weakens the *means* by which he can do good to his fellows. This view of individuality would not develop *selfishness*, caring only for one's self, making that ultimate: it would develop *selfness*, making self but an individual to whom we should render justice. In the development of selfness there will be harmony in the two other relations of the individual, for the true perfecting needs all. In this developed selfness a man in his education would not be satisfied with mere memory absorption, he would think. He would say: "To me, in honesty with myself, the symbol of power, the semblance of knowledge, is nothing. I want that power, that strength of knowledge itself. I am not strengthened because others think I have it. My real, my only true life, must commence with perfect justice from my individuality to me, an individual." Such a man, in perfect *selfness* could not wrong his neighbor by mere *selfishness*. He would say: "I would be doing injustice to myself, to my neighbor, to that large extending circle of relation to God and external law." These three circles of relation are so true, so perfect, that there can be no perfect obedience to one until the others are satisfied, and the larger

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includes the lesser as the duty of the individual to his God can only be satisfied when he has done his duty to himself, his neighbor, society, and the state.

We fail in our duty to our individuality when we have our thinking done for us by proxy. The pressure of modern civilization has developed this to an alarming degree. We have had the "Stone Age," and the "Bronze Age," and the "Iron Age," and the other ages. Today is the Canned Food Age. Our opinions are formulated for us, our views on political and social questions are condensed and put in "extract" form by our favorite paper. Boston issues its bulletins of the literary god to be worshiped for the season as London decrees the cut of our clothes. The special phrases current for the month in art and musical circles are all given to us "ready for use," like our canned foods. "Cut the can carefully at the thin end and serve hot or cold." But in this "prepared" sameness in conversation we rebel occasionally and long for a sample of individuality, something a man has thought out for himself—to feel we are plucking a peach from the tree where it has been *growing*, not from a can where it has been *packed*. But for the most part this individuality, in its fresh, delightful form, is missing. It would be real and living if the costly educational menu of our schools were cut down to a few studies with "trained thinking" constantly on the table as a relish. But we do not get much of this individual thinking; it is done like all other work—by "syndicates." Man may feel it is right for him to do a certain thing; from his careful study of it in all its relations it seems to him, in his honest judgment, to be right. But society will not understand it. He then perhaps stands in terror before some presbytery, social or ecclesiastic, so he silences his conscience, and bows before Public Opinion. His conscience was his own—his duty to his individuality should make him obey. Public Opinion is but a conscience owned by a syndicate. If it were right what does it matter what "people say?" In the Dark Ages man stood in terror of one lord or master. This he called "slavery." We throw our individuality, our right to think for ourselves, to the winds. We stand in terror of a million masters, prostrate before society, before Public Opinion; but this we call "liberty." There is not in this plea for individuality the slightest trace of anarchy in thought. It is most perfect recognition of law and the duty of obedience to it, for it represents perfect harmony in the three great relations of life. The plea for individuality is but a plea for "thinking," so that man may use the beautiful mind that has been put into him to the full of its power to serve himself, society, and the world.

All the great questions of life come to man as an individual. All our deepest sorrows come to us alone. We all pass nights alone in our Gethsemanes face to face with the awful majesty of sorrow as individuals. Every moment of life is one of choice, of decision, of weighing, of accepting, of taking position, of revealing our standard, of meeting issues as individuals. If we would reform the world we must reform the individual. Let us begin to perfect that individual who is nearest to us—ourselves. Let us put this individual into perfect harmony in the three unities of individual relation, and we have modified the life of the whole world. All nature is most beautiful recognition of individuality. We see anything only by the light that comes from it, the light it individually sends, yet on all earth and in the endless heavens the billions of lines of relation between each object and our eye are preserved perfect and complete. So in each of the other senses nature recognizes individuality in all things.

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There was something beautiful about that prayer of the Pharisee: “Lord, I thank Thee I am not as other men are.”⁴ But he should have thanked God not that he was superior, or greater, or richer, but only that he was a little different; that he was himself—individual.

⁴ Luke 18:11 “The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.”