

Condensed report of a paper read by MISS McMILLAN, a member of the Bradford School Board, on

MANUAL TRAINING.

MISS McMILLAN said that the subject of Manual Training was a very vast one, and could be studied from many stand-points. The masters of painting, drawing, Sloyd, wood-carving, metal work, or even of laundry work or cooking, might all come forward and give details of their methods, showing the utility of manual training, which, however, is only one side of the subject.

Carlyle told us that the epic of our age is no longer "Arms and the man," but "Tools and the man." If this is the epic of the age for adults, there has certainly been a corresponding change in education. We no longer say to a child "Know thyself," but "Try to find out what you will be able to work at."

There is little doubt that as our knowledge of the nervous system increases, the value of manual training as a means of development will be almost universally acknowledged. Nearly everyone experiences a certain kind of obstruction to the taking in of knowledge, though we do not observe this in normal persons, because they are always making semi-conscious efforts which veil much of this daily battle; but in feeble-minded children or in children of slow response we may study the difficulties or obstructions in receptivity of the nervous system.

One order of feeble-minded children is called "The order of children of slow response." Let us suppose that one of these hears an amusing remark. The meaning of the remark reaches the child slowly; after some pause, after considerable delay, perhaps, a smile breaks over the heavy features. Here we have an illustration of difficulty in transmission. Or take the echolalic type of child. This child answers no questions—never listens—resigns the task of dealing with a question, as it were, and falls back on repetition. In both cases we get a hint of real obstruction in the organism itself, a difficulty akin to that we ourselves experience when we rally our energies for some task too great for them.

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Neurology as a science is very modern, but the consciousness of this difficulty is very old.

I will ask you to think for a moment of the structure of the nervous system. It resembles a trunk running down the back of the body; from this trunk two bulbs or buds grow, and split up into a cluster of five, which resembles a cluster of fruit. The first outgrowth is the greatest, and it pushes forward and downward, and overlaps all the other outgrowths. The trunk is the spinal column. The buds are the brain, the first being the cerebrum. The nervous system is the educatable part of the human being; all the rest of the body exists only to serve it—the blood nourishes it, the bones are a framework for it, the senses are its servants.

Though we say that the eye sees and the ear hears, it is really something behind these sense organs which receives impressions, and these sense organs require training. Scientists tell us that the speaking centre is close to the centre representing the activities of the right hand.

Manual training affects the pupil, not merely physically or intellectually, but morally or spiritually. It is therefore quite as necessary to have a truly cultured person to teach wood carving as to have a moral person to teach ethics.

First, we ought to observe order in general manual training, as various centres of the nervous system develop in a certain order.

A child of three when drawing will often use both arms and even put out its tongue to help what is, or ought to be a physical exertion. The teacher who would stop this natural impulse, and teach the child any finer work, such as needlework or drawing, is wrong. Every teacher should observe the order of the child's exertions, and follow their natural sequence. In dealing with dull children this is especially important.

Séguin, the great authority on idiot children, made them do shoulder movements. At the end of two or three years he was able to get a sensible sentence and an occasional smile from more than one of his afflicted little patients.

As Rousseau told us, we must return to nature, make the pale student a manual labourer, and the workman an intellectual labourer, if we would have the illustrious personages [p 431]

whom Walt Whitman prophesied would once fill our land, but whom we now look for in vain.

MRS. BURNETT: If we are obliged to educate our children at home because they are weakly or from other causes, do you consider it possible to give them manual training?

MISS McMILLAN: I should think it would be easy to give such manual training as is afforded by wood-carving, for instance, at home. I should always let a boy make anything he wants, because it will be of great educational advantage to his character, and mothers, who are so clever in arranging many things for their children's amusement, would find no difficulty in contriving a carpenter's bench or something of the sort.

MRS. STEINTHAL: May I suggest that cardboard Sloyd is easily learnt, and that clay-modelling and brush-drawing are all excellent as manual training, and can be easily done at home.

The Conference was now adjourned.