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TROP DE ZÈLE.¹

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“We may outrun
By violent swiftmess that which we run at,
And lose by over-running.”
SHAKESPEARE

I MUST apologize to the audience for using a French phrase as my title, seeing that our mother-tongue is able to express almost every shade of meaning, but I have failed to come upon the right English phrase. Too much zeal without knowledge is cumbrous and fails to express just what I mean. Running after a thing, or as Shakespeare has it, “running at,” falls short, too, so trop de zèle with its light, half-humorous imputation will have to serve our occasion.

Now, we cannot begin to think of our subject without some sort of knowledge; we want to know what we are running after, or running at, before we think of how we run.

I suppose we all, each in his own way, have been reading and pondering the life of Florence Nightingale. Anyone who has been instrumental in setting a movement going will be reminded of the beginnings of that movement by the weariness and painfulness of Florence Nightingale’s early labours.

Better than a quarter of a century ago we, too, went through labour (though not to be named in comparison), to bring forth a society which we then claimed to be unique in history,—a body of parents associated for the purpose of acquainting themselves with the principles of education; not for the welfare of children (that is a consequence and not a cause);

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not for child study, for we take a child to be a human being, a person, like the rest of us, who does not lend himself to microscopic investigation; not to advance the science of education, because we doubt if education is a science; we doubt, too, if the methods of science can be applied to any branch of knowledge which, like history, poetry, education, is concerned with the spirit of man. No, our object as stated in a pamphlet, oddly called the “draft proof”—some 3,000 copies of which were distributed and discussed with many of the persons who formed the best public opinion of a quarter of a century ago,—our object was to associate parents for the purpose of acquainting themselves with the principles of education. Great were the heart-searchings, many the disappointments, much the correspondence, but how amazingly we have been prospered!

I was told the other day that we had discovered parents. That is, I suppose, we found out that parents, instead of being obstacles in the way of education, for that was the notion then, are the persons most interested, and most zealous to take their part in the greatest work of the world. I am most thankfully aware of how much is due to those zealous and inspired co-adjutors who have infused vitality into the work for a long term of years with little or no help from me, and to those earlier fellow-workers, many of them gathered to their rest, but some, breaking new ground with more than the old zeal; but they and I agree in thinking that it is to the

responsive parent we owe our success. My purpose to-day, however, is not to say nice things to parents, but to say a cautionary word about a tendency which I have described as *trop de zèle*.

How the phrase would have amused us in the old days when apathy and indifference were supposed to characterize parents! And how good it is to know that there are few to-day who do not know that the bringing up of children is the greatest thing in the world! I believe they knew it then, but did not tell, and that what we have been able to do is to collect many riverlets of opinion into a strong current. But here is our danger; instead of pouring our tributaries into the main stream, we are apt to run after any trickle of water destined to lose itself in a bog; here is the danger of mistaken zeal, not

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according to knowledge; and thus may we “outrun that which we run at and lose by over-running.” What we of the P.N.E.U. “run at” is a big thing,—a whole philosophy of education, which is practically a philosophy of life, because the children and we are equally persons,—designed for and pledged to an ordered life with definite aims.

Until the other day I thought that we, or shall I say I, was ploughing a lonely furrow. But about Christmas time a notice appeared in the *Spectator* of an important work (by Dr. Meyrick Booth), dealing with the philosophy of Eucken. We shall shortly have an opportunity of knowing more about the great Philosopher of Jena, as London is to have the opportunity of doing honour to him, and perhaps many of us who, like me, have until lately been content with a vague notion of his teaching may be glad of this opportunity. But my joy was very great to discover that for many years I had been working out a philosophy identical with his in many points, perhaps because we have both ploughed with the same heifer. By a singular contradiction, Eucken does not profess himself to be a Christian; yet, he confessedly founds his teaching very much upon the philosophy delivered in the Gospels. I think one or two of the points in which I am happy enough to find myself at one with this great man may serve to indicate what we “run at” in such a way as should save us from the calamity of loss by over-running.

I take it for granted that this audience and the members of the P.N.E.U. generally “mean intensely,” if only by fits and starts; and are out, not in search of good plans, but of a sound philosophy of education, of which good plans are the natural outcome. So I shall bring forward for your consideration two outstanding principles of Professor Eucken’s Philosophy which are ours also. One concerns the theory of education which we have developed, and the other, the curiously successful practice thereof, the *rationale* of which we should, I think, keep before us. Dr. Meyrick Booth regrets that the Jena Professor has not treated of education, but I think we are in a position to fill the gap because a system, long developed, and applied for nearly a quarter of a century, turns out to be an oddly exact application of his principles to that which I have called the greatest work of the world.

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Perhaps the outstanding feature of Eucken’s philosophy is his recognition of man as a spiritual being, having a sensible investment which adapts itself and as it were grows to his spiritual manifestations. I would not be understood to say that Professor Eucken is the only philosopher concerned in this spiritual movement; Bergson and Boutroux, certain great men of our own, perceive that spirit is not modified, or in any serious way affected, by matter; but that matter, including the human brain, is entirely amenable to spirit, that truth is of the spirit, not of

the flesh, and is not concerned finally with the well-being of men but with their clear thinking and well-knowing. To quote from Eucken's *Main Currents of Modern Thought*, "The essence of the conception of truth, and the life and soul of our search after truth, is to be found in the idea that in truth man attains to something superior to all his own opinions and inclinations, something that possesses a validity completely independent of any human consent; the hope of an essentially new life is thus held out to man, a vision of a wider and richer being, an inner communion with reality, a liberation from all that is merely human. On the other hand, when the good of the individual and of humanity becomes the highest aim and the guiding principle, truth sinks to the level of a merely utilitarian opinion. This is destructive of the inner life. All the power of conviction that truth can possess must disappear the moment it is seen to be a mere means. Truth can exist only as an end in itself. 'Instrumental' truth is no truth at all."

But what has all this to do with giving Tom and Bessie such a sensible practical education as shall give them a good start in life. Tom perhaps as a business man, Bessie as a wife and mother and a member of society? This is indeed an immediate question; it is the urgent question of the day, and one upon which we must all take sides. The whole trend of thought today is towards utilitarian education, and we take it for granted that the spiritual nature, that is, mind, heart and soul, is educated incidentally, as it were; that, in learning to cook a nice dinner, beautiful thoughts somehow find their way into Bessie's mind, say, of the wide and tender Providence which gives bread to men; that the making of an apple tart will bring refreshing thoughts of an

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orchard in bloom, and so on. Not a bit of it! If she is minding her business, her thoughts run upon the lines of her work with a never ending progression. Hundreds of dinners, thousands of apple pies, hundreds of improvements in the making of apple pies, that is how mind works upon the material in hand.

Of course Bessie must learn to make apple pies and Tom must learn whatever stands for these in his case. What I wish to point out is that education is the concern of the spirit and that no smallest amount of incidental education comes out of practical utilities. On the other hand, every sort of practical utility forces itself out of spiritual development. As I have said elsewhere, "I should be inclined to say of education as Mr. Lecky says of morals, that 'the Utilitarian theory is profoundly immoral!' To educate children for any immediate end—towards commercial or manufacturing aptitude, for example,—is to put a premium upon general ignorance with a view to such special aptitude. The greater includes the less, but the less does not include the greater. Excellent work of whatever kind is produced by a person of character and intelligence, and we cannot do better for the nation than to prepare such persons for its uses."

But the economist need not throw us over as impractical persons; what we have to offer is a scheme which is able to give every child, rich or poor, the education he has a right to in the things of the spirit,—poetry, pictures, history, literature, and above all, religion; and enable him to take it with such facility that ample time is left for that other proper function of the school, the preparation of a child for his vocation. In this way two lines of work, educational and vocational, may be carried on in the school, and there is need and opportunity for both; but that one should be mistaken for the other would be a serious calamity.

Every person with educational convictions should be a power in the land, but then he must know what he believes in; and must not go about the world like a yokel at a fair. This one

thing we of the P.N.E.U. must, I think, hold fast,—that education is of the mind or spirit and not of the senses and muscles. These no doubt must have their own training to do their own work, but let us not be deluded into the notion that

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a child is to be educated by the material influences brought to bear upon him from without, rather than by the ideas, the knowledge, the spiritual influences that reach him within. We may not be able to receive Carlyle's saying that, "Matter exists only spiritually and to represent some idea and body it forth"; but the question of the age is, I think, Is education of the flesh or of the spirit?

Here is the danger of that *trop de zèle* that I am anxious to indicate. Persons who care about education are naturally fervid. They are sometimes too idle to take stock of what they know and realize what they believe, so they run about after some new thing and see no reason why the new notion should not fit very well into the loose bundle of concepts they have already got hold of. Now, the world was never more alive to the importance of education than it is to-day, and the air is full of notions that masquerade as new. Conscientious mothers feel it is a duty to know and to try the last new thing; but let me entreat you and them to try the spirits whose they be; every new and promising theory that I have come across is of the flesh and not of the spirit; (in using the word spirit I am not just now referring to religion at all, but to that immaterial part of us which knows and thinks and feels).

Thoughtful men at home and abroad are seriously uneasy at this trend of modern thought; we talk piously, for example, of freedom in education; and I cannot resist introducing a serious warning (which Dr. Booth quotes), from Professor Foerster, of Munich,—“Human nature contains such remarkable contrasts that the freedom of one part is bound up with the subjection of another. Which part then is to receive freedom? It is of supreme importance to distinguish clearly and accurately, between true and false freedom. . . . The root error of many modern tendencies is the confusion of true personal freedom with mere individual licence, of the higher with the lower self. . . . The more the lower self is granted freedom, the more hopeless does the development of personality become.”

Another cult of the hour is the naturalism, taught long ago by Rousseau, and very much in the ascendant to-day. “Down with the books,” is the cry. “Boys and girls must learn from things. They must learn to do the work they will have to do

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later and that is all that education can do for them. Let them make puddings, lay bricks, learn to cast accounts, and whatever else they want comes incidentally.”

This is the rock on which the nation threatens to split. I have spoken so often on this subject that I shall now venture to quote Dr. Booth's forcible words instead of using my own,—“Much of the restlessness, discontent and spiritual uncertainty of the age is traceable to the failure of an educational system divorced from any truly authoritative, positive philosophy to furnish those who have been brought up within it with a valid view of life as a whole and to ensure that inward, spiritual training which is the absolutely indispensable complement of rational development.”

I need not say a word about the delightful facilities proposed to us for educating children through their finger-tips or, again, through the movements of the dance. These schemes and a dozen others propose to accomplish the whole education of man, and every one of them ends

where it began,—with the flesh, the external life; leaving the spirit in no wise enabled for that struggle towards the spiritual life, the life of thought, of love, of endeavour, which is our true vocation. Are the senses to be neglected? Are grace of movement, quickness at affairs, general preparation for life, things of no moment? These things are all important but each for its own sake, and to take up any one of them by way of education is a disastrous error. Nor can we play at picking up a bit here and there from one system and another. We must cultivate the eye for the joy of seeing, the hand for the pleasure and duty of doing, but not with a notion that education travels from without inwards.

Must then the educational alertness upon which we rather pride ourselves be thrown away, as it will be if we may not go about looking for some new thing? On the contrary, I think that a great world-mission is open to members of the P.N.E.U. There is reason to believe that we are carrying on in the quiet way in which natural forces work a far-reaching revolution, and, if we do not as a society exist for nothing, we must each of us take our part in furthering this revolution. If we will believe it, the world is waiting for what we have to give, but we must know our principles, or, at any rate, the one grand

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principle, that education is of the spirit and not of the flesh. “It is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing,” is as true of things of the mind as of those of the soul. The material of education is knowledge, and the appeal to the mind must be direct; for no appeal through muscle or sense carries beyond what is rightly called the sensuous nature.

Everybody knows that education is generally unsatisfactory, and many at home and abroad are beginning to look to us for such help as we have to give; to render such help, should be the definite life-work of every member of the P.N.E.U., who has taken the trouble to know our philosophy. As for opportunities, they occur at every street corner. Two or three of our members have used the leaven to such good purpose that an educational society of European and Egyptian ladies has already sprung up in Cairo,—a society with great possibilities. Only yesterday, I heard from a friend that “the other day I met Mr. X, the Head of the large Council Schools in _____, who told me that a member of the P.N.E.U. had asked if she could meet him and his teachers and explain our principles: he says he is much interested in them and will call to see the papers you sent me.”

I could multiply instances, but it is enough to say that every member of a Branch, every parent of a child in the school, possesses the means of giving vital assistance to neighbours, rich and poor. And the opportunities are so frequent and the effort so delightful that I think no space will be left for the sort of fictitious zeal spent in going about to hear or see some new thing in the faith that everything is as good as everything else and that bits of everything combine to make a whole. But education is not a patchwork, it is a vital growth working according to its own laws; and we have reason to think that these laws, many of them old, a few of them new, all of them belonging to a comprehensive and vital whole, are the laws that we profess and hold.

The mind is very subtle and has a way of mixing up things that differ, and probably while we speak of the spiritual character of education the thoughts of some of us wander to what is called the “sub-conscious mind,” mystical intuitions, and other vague things which are taken account of by Pragmatic Psychology. I wonder how far the lamentable

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increase of neurotic symptoms amongst us is due, not as we are apt to say, to our rapid living, but to a school of philosophy which holds knowledge in little esteem; and which takes “self-expression” for the individual, and human well-being for the general, as the object of all endeavour. But, as Eucken has well said,—“Knowledge is not to be gained on the path of Pragmatism.”

We do not seek for self-expression but to express those things which are beyond and without ourselves, and just as there are possibilities in our physical nature that it is the business of life to struggle against and escape from, so in our psychical nature, our “sub-conscious mind,” are there inclinations and indications,—all of them leading to self-complacency, self-importance, self-expression,—which it is one part of the battle of life to ignore and get rid of, because they are of the flesh and not of the spirit; are they not included by the Apostle when he says,—“I keep under my body and bring it into subjection”?

For these reasons which can only be very briefly indicated, we eschew educational means which proclaim that their object is self-expression, though we may do the things indicated for the simple sake of doing them. We dance, for example, not to seek self-expression in rhythmic movement but for the joy of dancing and, incidentally, for the sake of exercise and for pleasure in graceful movement. The object of Education is not to give us the means of self-expression or of utility. We learn because knowledge is life, and the chief knowledge is, we know, eternal life.

Let me close this part of my subject by a few words from Eucken’s *Knowledge and Life*,—“True Knowledge calls upon man not merely to re-organize what is given to him as a natural human inheritance but to transform such an inheritance from its very foundation.” But who, after all, is Eucken? we may be tempted to ask, Has he arrived? Is he in truth a philosopher who should influence our thought? The question is,—what is Philosophy? “If it be the attempt to think clearly and cogently about the world and lay bare its actualities and necessities,” without the endeavour to interpret its actualities and indicate any spiritual provision for its necessities, then perhaps Eucken is not a philosopher: but if “philosophy [p 410]

be an attempt to inspire men with noble and elevating sentiments,” to teach them to think clearly and cogently about the world, from a spiritual rather than a material standpoint, then is Eucken the philosopher for our needs. If, however, Eucken be still on his trial, we may allow that the place of Plato is assured; let us hear him,—“I do not think that the body, however good as a body, can by any excellence of its own make a good mind, but on the contrary I think that a good mind by its own excellence brings the body into the best state possible.”

II.

We come now to consider the serious questions of what a child should learn and of how he should learn. Here again we find ourselves working on a philosophic axiom to which Eucken gives the name of *Activism*: that principle of struggle, striving against opposition, with which the Gospels have made us familiar and which belongs to intellectual and moral, as truly as to religious life. Out of this struggle, this Activism, proceeds something new, a quickened life of thought or aspiration.

Now, the common Educational error is to cultivate Passivism in children; they are, as Carlyle says, “poured into like a bucket”: teachers explain, tell, illustrate, expound, and question until there is never an intellectual crust left for a child’s mind to bite at. We believe that to give a

child his proper right of 'Activism,' intelligent and imaginative effort, we have only to put books of literary value into his hands and let him deal with them in his own way, only securing that he knows by requiring him to tell what he has read. This telling shows that a spiritual process has taken place; something new, some little touch of originality, some quaint expression, shows that spontaneous mental activity has been set up; and from this, which would seem to be a small change in the methods of a school, the results are rather extraordinary. Indeed, from those two principles, which coincide curiously with those of Eucken, we hope to bring about a momentous educational revolution;—I mean, the recognition of the spiritual character of education; and, the application of the principle of Activism.

As for what a child should learn we believe that his knowledge
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(like that of the infant prodigy described by Wordsworth), should be, as far as may be, encyclopædic. Let us hear once again the description of the little prig of the Maria Edgeworth School, whom I have before this had occasion to mention:—

“With gifts he bubbles o’er
As generous as a fountain, selfishness
May not come near him nor the little throng
Of flitting pleasures tempt him from his path;
The wandering beggars propagate his name,
Dumb creatures find him tender as a nun,
And natural or supernatural fear,
Unless it leap upon him in a dream,
Touches him not
A miracle of scientific lore,
Ships he can guide across the pathless sea
And tell you all their cunning; he can read
The inside of the earth, and spell the stars;
He knows the policies of foreign lands;
Can string you names of districts, cities, towns,
The whole world over, tight as beads of dew
Upon a gossamer thread; he sifts, he weighs;
All things are put to question; he must live
Knowing that he grows wiser every day
Or else not live at all, and seeing too,
Each little drop of wisdom as it falls
Into the dimpling cistern of his heart:
* * * * *
Oh! give us once again the wishing-cap
Of Fortunatus, and the invisible coat
Of Jack the Giant killer, Robin Hood,
And Sabra in the forest with St. George!
The child, whose love is here, at least, doth reap
One precious gain, that he forgets himself.”

We know him quite well. There are only two things which this marvellous boy lacks—a wise and understanding heart and the simplicity of childhood.

Of course, he knew that he himself and not knowledge was the end and aim of all the teaching he received and the poor little fellow was never allowed that most generous of all childhood's pleasures, a passionate joy in knowledge for its own sake:—

“Many are our joys
In youth, but oh! what happiness to live
When every hour brings palpable access
Of knowledge, when all knowledge is delight.”
We hold ourselves happy to have rediscovered this joy for

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youth is so far as it has been lost. Children take to knowledge, as we give it to them through living books, with such eagerness and pleasure that half the time spent on routine work is saved; and this time may be given when necessary to vocational instead of educational work. In this way, while the general demand for practical teaching in our schools is satisfied, boys and girls need not be defrauded of the intellectual delight, the resources and interests within themselves, which are the best part of life and for the lack of which the country and the world are suffering.

But here again comes in the danger of *trop de zèle* on the part of injudicious parents. Children are observed to learn so much and so easily and joyously that the temptation to put in a few extra subjects is irresistible; and in the spare time which should be their own possession children are rushed about from class to class, from this eminent teacher to the other, in order that no accomplishment should be left unmastered. Happy for the child when he finds himself in the sanctuary of school where at any rate he has some natural freedom! That he is overworked is not the chief evil of this sort of grabbing at accomplishments. The child perceives that all is done for his sake; the knowledge he gets is of the sort that puffeth up, and he becomes an infant prig, losing that happy delight in learning which comes to him when knowledge for its own sake is put before him with inviting simplicity:—

“They who have the skill
To manage books and things, and make them act
On infant minds as surely as the sun
Deals with a flower; the keepers of our time,
The guides and wardens of our faculties,
* * * * *

When will their presumption learn,
That in the unreasoning progress of the world
A wiser spirit is at work for us,
A better eye than theirs, most prodigal
Of blessings, and most studious of our good
Even in what seem our most unfruitful hours.”

The Prelude.

We, of the P.N.E.U. must order our ways carefully because we hold in trust a great charge. The nation is at the parting of the ways. We all recollect the discussion of the new Educational Bill which, recently, united Liberals and Unionists, a drastic Bill granting to Local Authorities the

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power of extending the age of leaving school from fourteen to fifteen years, abolishing the half-time system, giving power to require attendance at continuation classes, and so on. "The debate was helpful and suggestive," and though it met with strong opposition, "in the main," says *The Times*, "the discussion of the Bill was something like a chorus of praise, and it passed its second reading with a large majority." If it should become law, here is our great opportunity. We should be able to satisfy both those who clamour for vocational instruction and those who further the Bill for the sake of humane learning. Much, however, may be done with things as they are. Boys and girls of all classes may be sent out into the world with intellectual resources which shall gladden their lives as well as with the necessary sense-training and manual dexterity. But the passing of such a Bill as this would increase our opportunities.

Lord Haldane warned us not long since that while the British workman finished his education at thirteen, that in many parts of the Continent training was now going on till sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, and not a training merely in general education but in the calling which the workman was going to exercise in the future. Here is, as I have said, our opportunity. We who have seen the great joy that our children find in humane learning ought to urge the duty of giving such learning to children of all classes. Schoolmasters and mistressess [sic] are, we find, eager to hear what we have to tell them, eager to try what has proved successful; and, because the labour we delight in physics pain, because children learn with very great facility when they are given the manner of learning proper to their nature, I think no system of education affords such opportunity as ours for the combination of vocational and educational work. Here is opportunity for the employment of our zeal, and here is a field in which it would be hard to show too much.

¹ Read at the P.N.E.U. Conference, held at Darlington, March, 1914.