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Book on the Soul, First part. Book on the Soul, Second part. By the Rev. T. H. Gallaudet, &c.

There is, perhaps, no field for benevolent enterprise, which has been more neglected, or which promises a richer harvest to the cultivator, than the preparation of suitable books for children. It is somewhat surprising that the attention of philanthropists has been so little turned to this subject, and that while so much has been published of late on the importance of education, and of commencing our efforts early, so little has been done in the way of furnishing the means of communicating knowledge to the minds of children. At first view, it seems an easy task to prepare such books as are needful for the instruction of youth; yet when we come to ponder the subject deeply, we cannot but confess, that it is a work of extreme difficulty. We do not speak of the elementary books which are needful to teach the art of reading: these, however useful, communicate no instruction to the mind; they only furnish one means of acquiring knowledge. We refer to books adapted to the minds of children in the several stages of their developement, and which are calculated, especially, to train the thoughts, 'to teach the young idea how to shoot;' and by which their

faculties may be invigorated, and habits of distinct and correct thinking established. It is, in our estimation, a common and pernicious error in education, that the first and principal object should be to store the mind with knowledge: for the chief end at which we should aim is, to prepare it for the acquisition of knowledge. Until the faculties are developed, exercised, and invigorated, the communication of knowledge, to any considerable extent, is impossible. The memory may, indeed, be loaded with ideas on a great variety of subjects; but this is not the way to acquire useful knowledge: The mere accumulation of ideas in the memory, tends rather to weaken than to strengthen the mind. Even the best books are in a great measure useless, until the mind, by various exercises, becomes so disciplined, as to be susceptible of improvement from the writings of profound thinkers. Injudicious parents are often misled on this point. They hear a particular author extolled by persons in whose judgment they repose great confidence; and without considering the age or improvement of their children, they insist upon their studying the work which has been so highly recommended. Even grave instructers often fall into this error, and put into the hands of children, books which, however excellent at a future period, can be of no manner of use at the present. We have known a case, where a boy of twelve years of age, feeling a desire to begin a course of useful reading, upon applying to his reverend instructer, had the *Tatler* put into his hands, which he found he could neither understand nor relish. In going into the house of a friend, we observed a little girl poring over an octavo volume; and upon inquiry, found that she was studying "Watts on the Improvement of the Mind." Often such works as Locke on the Understanding and Butler's Analogy are read when they can be of no real use to the pupil, and when the only effect produced is a distaste for those authors, which cannot afterwards be overcome, without great difficulty. Education is thus far a mere matter of experiment: and we are restricted from making new experiments which might lead to important discoveries, by the preciousness of the material on which we operate. No man, who is wise, is willing that his son or daughter should be conducted along some untried course, to verify some new hypothesis. Still there are many empirics who profess to work wonders with the human mind; and there are parents foolish enough to credit their pretensions,

and to subject children to their new processes of improvement.

But when it is conceded, that the primary object of education is the developement and invigoration of the faculties, and the constitution of good habits and associations, it may still be a question of great importance, whether we should hasten the developement of the intellectual faculties by such stimulants and exercises as may have that effect, or wait until nature brings forward her work, and then endeavour to guide and assist her efforts. This is a point which has not been sufficiently considered; and, therefore, there has been no hesitation among parents and teachers in accelerating, as speedily as possible, the developement of every faculty; an early indication of the mental power is hailed as a happy omen of success; and the more premature the developement of any faculty may be, the more pleasure, as well as wonder, does it excite. But all analogy is in favour of following, rather than going before nature, in her operations. Vegetables forced in a hot bed, produce earlier fruits than those which come forward under the common influence of the elements, but these precious fruits are seldom as good as those which arrive at maturity in the usual way; and it is so common for such plants to decay soon, that the fact has given rise to a proverb in many languages, that, *that which is soon ripe is soon rotten*. The same remarks are applicable to the growth of animals. And as far as there are facts within our observation, we cannot but think, that the analogy holds good in regard to the business of education. Hence it is, that many who are considered prodigies, when children, never arrive at any eminence of talent in mature age. Hence also, those children who are most constantly under the tuition of officious teachers, do not improve ultimately as much as some others whose education has been greatly neglected. In this, as in many other things, we do injury rather than good, by interfering too much with the processes of nature. There is a culpable vanity in most parents with regard to their children. They are extravagantly elated by their apparent success in literary pursuits; and both by parents and teachers the principle of emulation is too much excited; which, though natural and innocent in its proper exercise, readily degenerates into a vicious ambition; and in this form it is commonly found to exist in schools and colleges, where it is much calculated on as a means of accelerating the literary progress of the scholars.

It is admitted, that there is a certain period of human life, at which the mind has attained its highest vigour; when all the faculties are finally developed, and are in their freshest vigour. After this period, knowledge may be acquired even with more facility and celerity than before, but we expect no new strength to be added to any of the faculties of the mind. Now this period of time occurs much later in life with some minds than others, and it deserves to be well considered, what relation this may have to the mode of education; and whether it is not a fact, that precocity of intellect reaches this acme much earlier than that which is slower in its progress. And it should also be considered, whether an undue maturity is not followed by feebleness, and a premature decay. We observe, in regard to this last particular, a remarkable diversity. The mind of one man begins to fail at the age of forty-five or fifty, while that of another flourishes in vigour to the advanced period of eighty. And this cannot be attributed to the more sound state of the body in one case, than in the other; for in regard to this, there may be no difference; or the advantage as to bodily health, may be altogether on the side of the person whose mind is subject to an early decay. Indeed, in general, strength of mental powers has a slender connexion with health; a soul of mighty energies may dwell in a frail tottering tabernacle.

And, while on this subject, we would remark, that we know of no method of postponing the decay of the intellectual faculties so effectual as to keep them in vigorous exercise. Let the old man never indulge the thought, that the time for mental exertion is over—let him never suffer his mind to sink down into indolence and apathy—let him still keep his eyes open, and his attention awake to all the objects of knowledge which interest others, and thus the rust of the mind will be prevented from accumulating.

Another mistake in education, which has some affinity to the one already considered, is, that of giving undue exercise and disproportioned energy to some one faculty, while the others are neglected. It is possible to concentrate much of the strength of the body, we know, in particular members; or so to direct and exercise its energies, that it shall be rendered capable of performing extraordinary acts of a particular kind. Thus blacksmiths and hammermen, have unusual power in their hands and arms; and balance-masters, vaulters, &c. are able to do what is impossible to others. But it

has not been found, that this mode of training the body is of any real use in preparing it for the performance of the necessary and useful labours of life. In the works requisite, in peace or war, by land or sea, these men are not found superior to those who have been educated in the common way. Indeed, that disposition of bodily force, and facility of putting it forth into action, which is equally adapted to all useful purposes, and which brings into vigorous exercise all the parts of the body, is evidently the best. Just such is the fact in regard to the mind. By a peculiar course of education, a particular faculty is exercised and invigorated to the neglect of others; or a habit of performing certain intellectual operations with facility, is acquired. Thus, by constant exercise, the memory may be trained to remember words in their connected series, while not the least attention is paid to the relations of ideas expressed by them; and by artificial associations with things easily recollected in a certain order, this power of memory may be improved to a degree which appears wonderful. Persons skilled in the art of mnemonics are able, therefore, to perform exploits with this faculty, which, prior to all experience, would appear almost impossible. Indeed to one, whose mind has been much neglected, it seems a prodigious exertion of memory to be able to repeat exactly all the words of a discourse, which it requires an hour or more to deliver; but, by exercise and long practice, this can be accomplished by many, after a second reading. It has also been found by experience, that children may be easily made to perform calculations by figures, which greatly exceed the powers of sensible adults who have never been exercised in these things. And in some systems of education, the teachers, availing themselves of this susceptibility of the human mind, seek to excite attention, and to obtain celebrity in the business of developing and training the mental faculties, by the extraordinary feats, which, under this mode of instruction, the pupils are able to perform. But all these attainments, however wonderful, are no better, as it relates to the education of the mind, than the ability to perform the feats of a wire dancer, or circus-rider, in the useful education of the body. Some persons seem to have by nature, or to have early acquired from some unknown cause, an extraordinary aptness to perform certain intellectual operations, which are far beyond the ability of other children, or even of most adults. The extraordinary developement of a faculty, by

means of which the person is able to perform operations of a particular kind, has, in several remarkable instances, been witnessed in relation to arithmetical calculations. Now, it has been found in some instances of this kind, that this extraordinary talent was accompanied by a remarkable deficiency in the other faculties of the mind. A man of colour, as we have been informed, in Rhode Island, who possessed the extraordinary faculty of telling, after a moments consideration, the result of the multiplication of a number of figures, was so stupid in other matters, that he could never be taught to read. And in other cases which have fallen under our observation, we have never known this extraordinary faculty to be united with other mental powers in just proportion, so as to constitute a well-balanced and vigorous mind. We are persuaded, that in the business of education, it is not wise to attempt to elicit and strengthen one faculty, while the others are neglected; for, however successful the means used may be, and however extraordinary the talent which may be acquired, it is nothing more than giving undue vigour to one faculty at the expense of all the rest, which are found to exist in a state of proportionable ability. The vanity of the parents and friends of such children may be gratified by the extraordinary things of which they are capable, but the wise and considerate will prefer to have all the mental faculties brought into exercise and vigour in just proportion. We are led from this subject to remark, that all persons who engage with ardour in intellectual pursuits, which require the exercise of some one faculty, are very apt to contract a twist or distortion in their mental constitution; and to this cause much of that obliquity and eccentricity, for which some men are remarkable, must be attributed. The whole force of their mind is concentrated in some one faculty. Thus a man may pursue mathematical studies with so much ardour, that after awhile he becomes incapable of weighing the force of moral or analogical reasonings; and may appear so destitute of taste, that it may be doubtful whether any vestige of this faculty is left. We have, ourselves, known men who have made high attainments in mathematics, who did not appear to have more sense than a mere child about common affairs. And most persons have heard the anecdote of a celebrated mathematician of the university of Cambridge, who was particularly requested by a friend to peruse Milton's Paradise Lost, and give his opinion of the work; and who, when he returned the

book, gravely said, that he had read it from the beginning to the end, but had failed to meet with a single demonstration in the whole work. Yet the danger of destroying the proper balance of the mind is not peculiar to those who are occupied too ardently in the pursuit of the exact sciences. The same thing more frequently takes place in those who become absorbed in studies, when the imagination is the faculty which is brought principally into exercise. Thus it has been found, that the study of the Prophecies has proved dangerous to men of imaginative minds. By degrees, they come to see coincidences which are concealed from other minds; and, at length, fall into a degree of extravagance in their opinions, which clearly indicates, that the proper balance of the mind has been disturbed. In all such cases, there is contracted a certain degree of insanity in relation to the favourite object of pursuit; and it is the more important to give precautionary counsels to prevent this aberration of mind; because, when it is once contracted, advice comes too late. It is one symptom of this disease, to adhere to the suggestions of a disordered imagination with a confidence which no arguments can shake; and in this state of mind, nothing is more natural than for the enthusiast to believe that he possesses light which others do not see; and their incredulity is attributed to their ignorance, or want of attention to the subject. How far it may be practicable by a judicious system of education to prevent this evil, we cannot say; but certainly, dangers of this kind are more likely to be avoided when seasonably pointed out, than when persons are permitted to go forward without any warning.

But it is time that we should take some notice of the little, unpretending volumes, which have been recently presented to the public, by the Rev. Mr. Gallaudet, of Hartford, Conn. It ought to be a subject of immense congratulation with the friends of education, that a gentleman, every way so well qualified, has undertaken the humble, but very important work, of preparing elementary books for children. Plato thought, that the state of the world would be felicitous, when kings should all be philosophers; but after the trial of the inefficacy of philosophy alone, for several thousand years, we may be permitted to say, that the prospects of society will be bright, when pious, Christian theologians, shall condescend to become the teachers of children. Mr. Gallaudet has enjoyed peculiar advantages for studying the developement of

the human mind, during the long period in which he has been engaged in superintending the instruction of the deaf and dumb; and the American public owes him a debt of gratitude, for his patient, persevering, and successful efforts, in establishing institutions for this benevolent object in our land; and in the page of the impartial historian, he will undoubtedly be enrolled as one of the benefactors of his country.

It will readily occur to any one, that the successful instruction of mutes requires a knowledge of the faculties of the mind; but it is known to few how necessary it is, in this kind of instruction, to enter into a discriminating analysis of the various modes of thinking: nor is it understood by most, what a circuitous course must often be pursued to communicate to this unfortunate class of pupils, some one single idea. Now, as the success of the instructer will depend very much on the ingenious devices which he adopts for the purpose of conveying ideas to the minds of those who cannot acquire them in the usual way, teachers, whose minds are fertile in resources, will naturally be led to study the relations of thought with an attention which is uncommon with other persons; and in a long course of such studies, they will make discoveries of leading principles in the exercises of mind, which may be very beneficial in promoting education in general. For occasions such as these, we are much gratified to find a gentleman of Mr. Gallaudet's talents and experience, turning his attention to a system of education adapted to young children; for we are persuaded, that any plan which is effectual must commence with the pupil at an early age. And from what we know of the character of Mr. Gallaudet, we are not acquainted with any person better qualified to give a right direction to this momentous concern. We must not, however, expect too much from the efforts of any man, when so much rubbish lies in the way. Even to make an auspicious beginning, in a business so vital to human happiness—merely to lay a good foundation, on which others may hereafter build, is doing a great deal.

In two respects, *the Book of the Soul* demands our unqualified approbation. The first is, the unaffected simplicity of the style. The words selected are generally pure English; and while every idea is presented in the plainest and most perspicuous manner, there are none of those diversities, into which most persons naturally fall, when they write books for children. Our author has happily shunned the

common extremes, of being too learned on the one hand, or too quaint and vulgar on the other. Although, to a superficial observer, it may seem to be the easiest thing in the world, to write in the plain simple style of these little volumes; yet, we have no doubt, that it has cost the writer more sedulous attention and labour, to write in this manner, than to compose in that florid and elegant style, in which many admired books are written. But while we wish to bestow high commendation on the purity, simplicity, and unaffected ease of the style of these little volumes, there are some trivial points on which we would remark. It did not strike us favourably, that the word *think* is so repeatedly used, where the mental exercise intended to be expressed is *willing*. *I think* to move my hand, is a form of expression which sounds very awkwardly to us, and we do not see why the appropriate word might not be as well used. *I will* to move my hand or feet, is, in our opinion, as intelligible to a child, as the form of expression here adopted. We are of opinion, that no form of speech should be used in such an elementary work which is not correct, and which it would be improper for the child to use when the age of infancy is past. In other instances, when the author has occasion to use a word not likely to be understood by children, he seizes the opportunity of explaining its meaning; and thus a new word is learned by the pupil. And it appears to us, that this would have been the correct course here; for sooner or later, the proper word to signify that act of the mind termed *willing*, a volition, must be known; but the child, having been accustomed to the phraseology here employed, will be long subjected to embarrassment.

The only other thing which we have observed in the style of these volumes, which calls for a remark, is the occasional use of the sign of the infinitive mode, without expressing the verb itself, when it can readily be understood: an idiom, which as far as we know, is confined to the inhabitants of New England and their descendants in the other States. In answer to the question, *Do you go to town, to day?* they say, *I intend to*, or *I want to*. Now, however, this method of abbreviation may be tolerated in familiar conversation, it ought not to be admitted in any written composition; and especially in a book from which thousands of children will form their habits of speaking the English language.

The other particular in which Mr. Gallaudet seems to us to have formed a correct judgment of the true principles on which a system of early education should be founded, is the inculcation of one thing at a time, and the continual repetition of the same idea, until it is completely understood. No fault is more common than the attempt to teach children too much at once; and this is connected with the passing from thing to thing in too much haste; by which means nothing is learned well, and a strange confusion of ideas is produced in the mind of the child. This fault our author has carefully avoided. He has proceeded upon correct knowledge of the state of the infant mind, and has attempted the inculcation of truth in a very gradual manner; and will not be hurried forward too rapidly even by the impatient curiosity of the pupil, until by a distinct knowledge of the primary ideas, the way is prepared for a further developement of the subject. This gradual and distinct method of conveying knowledge, is, in our view, of the utmost importance to the improvement of the human mind. In the whole of the first of these volumes, nothing further is aimed at, than to give the child a distinct idea of the soul, and how it is distinguished from the body; and in the second it is attempted to give him some idea of the leading attributes of God. This, upon the whole, is well executed, but we think is susceptible of improvement. The dialogues on the power of God are too much extended, and the subject is made to assume too abstruse a form for the feeble intellects of children. We are of opinion, that the simple idea of God as the Creator of the world, without much enlargement or explanation, would answer best. That every thing must have a cause, is a truth which is apprehended by children as soon as any other; and from the fact that God made the world and all things in it, the idea of his power can be easily inferred. And we confess, that we were disappointed in not finding an allusion to the Saviour of sinners, in the whole of these two books. We entertain no doubt, but that the author intends to bring this subject forward distinctly in a future volume; but we should be better pleased, if this most interesting of all subjects had been presented to the mind of the child, in some aspect, before it has proceeded so far. But we may be here charged with a departure from our own principles, in requiring this part of the divine character to be exhibited before every notice is taken of his moral attributes, or of the moral law. Well, we will

agree to suspend our judgment on this point, until the author has proceeded further in his analysis; but we have a strong impression, that the best method of conveying to ignorant minds the true knowledge of God, is not to proceed systematically, but to rush, as it were, into the middle of the subject, and to present such ideas as are most likely to seize the attention, and engage the feelings. If light is let into the mind from any radiant point of divine truth, it will illuminate every other point which has any relation to the one which is the object of primary contemplation. Perhaps we have taken up this idea from the facts which have been reported by the Moravian missionaries, in relation to the methods of instruction which they found most successful in their attempts to instruct the ignorant heathen; and which have been generally pursued by other evangelical missionaries. But we are not sure, that this idea may not fairly be deduced from the practice of the Apostles themselves, who made Christ crucified, the centre of all their preaching. Method is a very excellent thing, and knowledge, to be most useful, must be reduced to system, but we doubt, whether, in the earliest acquisition of knowledge, the systematic order of ideas is useful; we are rather inclined to the opinion, that it will often be found best to begin with whatever is likely to interest most, and to make the deepest impression.

The remarks last made, suggest to us what we believe will be found to be the most material defect in these elementary books. They will not be so attractive to most children as is desirable. This opinion we have formed, not merely from the nature of the subjects treated, but also from some trial with children of a somewhat volatile disposition, but fond of reading entertaining stories. They read these little volumes without any manifest dislike, but did not seem to have their feelings much interested: and while some children of a serious, or contemplative turn will not only be gratified but delighted with the dialogues, the majority will not be so much interested, as, of their own accord, to read the work a second time. Now, we would respectfully recommend to the author, that he would study some embellishments or attractions, which might be interspersed through these books: and if anecdotes or narratives could be introduced, which would bear to be connected with the didactic matter, it would be so much the better.

The truth is—and it is an important fact in education, as

well as in commerce—that there must be a want created before much exertion will be made to obtain a supply. As far as our experience goes, this *desideratum* is the main thing in leading children or adults to pursue knowledge with ardour. Now, a general sense of duty, or feeling of interest, is not strong enough to counteract the numerous temptations to idleness and sport, which are presented to all children. It is necessary, therefore, to furnish books which will afford present pleasure; so that the child will prefer taking his book to read, to going to play. There is, no doubt, much danger lest this appetite should become morbid, and should crave unwholesome food. This danger cannot, however, be avoided by a rigid prohibition of all works of fiction and fancy: nor by attempts to keep children from all opportunity of looking into such books. Restraints of this kind may be maintained, while children are under the immediate eye of their parents; but when they are grown up, and go abroad, they will be in danger of resorting with uncommon avidity to this species of reading, as we have known to be the fact in more instances than one. While, therefore, we are deeply convinced that the great mass of fictitious writings have an injurious tendency, we are of opinion, that the only effectual remedy against this evil, is to furnish a substitute;—to prepare such books for children and youth as shall be entertaining, and, at the same time, moral and religious in their character. Why should it be supposed, that no books can be prepared which will captivate and delight the youthful mind, but such as have a tendency to corrupt it? And why is it unlawful to avail ourselves of the disposition in children to become deeply interested in connected narrations? How far it is lawful or expedient to go in making fiction the vehicle of instruction and moral improvement, is a question on which there exists some difference of opinion, and it is a point which it would be out of place to discuss here. We are pleased, however, to observe, that those narratives which are founded in fact, do unceasingly gain a preference with the religious part of the community over works of fiction, however good and pious their tendency. And we believe, that if pains were taken to collect facts, narratives might be formed for the entertainment and instruction of youth, which would be as interesting as any of those fictitious stories which are found to be so fascinating to young persons. And such histories would, in one respect, possess a decided advantage. It always produces an unplea-

sant revulsion of feeling, when the reader comes to the winding up of a fictitious narrative, in which he has been much interested, to reflect, that there is no reality in the whole affair. But when we read what we have reason to believe is a true statement of facts, and a true description of persons, even if we were not so much interested while reading, as we might have been in some highly wrought fiction; yet, afterwards, the reflection on the scenes which have occupied our attention, will be far more agreeable, when we entertain the belief that they were real, than if we know them to have no foundation in fact.

We are not acquainted with Mr. Gallaudet's plan for future publications: but, as we hope that he will devote the remainder of his life to this important work, which he has commenced in the composition of these two little volumes; so we trust, that he will take a comprehensive view of the subject on which we have now made some remarks. Could not some well selected histories or anecdotes, be every where interspersed between the dialogues? And although they might not have a very close connexion with the subject discussed, this would make no material difference. What we want is something to attract and interest the minds of volatile children. We are persuaded, that the ingenious author, although he has probably thought much more profoundly on the subject of early education than ourselves, will readily pardon the freedom of our remarks, and the officiousness of our suggestions, in relation to the work in which he is engaged. The spark which is attended by the most momentous effects, is produced by the collision of different substances. If we should be so happy as to be able to suggest one new idea, or to confirm one truth by our remarks, we shall be satisfied with this as an adequate reward for what we have written.