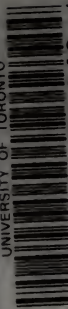


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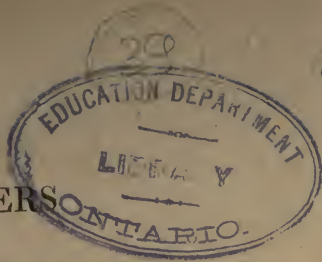


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LETTERS ONTARIO.

ON THE

ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES

OF

EDUCATION.

BY ELIZABETH HAMILTON,

AUTHOR OF THE MEMOIRS OF MODERN PHILOSOPHERS,  
COTTAGERS OF GLENBURNIE, &c. &c.

VOLUME II.

FIFTH EDITION,

WITH ADDITIONAL MATTER; THE WHOLE BEING  
REVISED AND NEWLY ARRANGED.

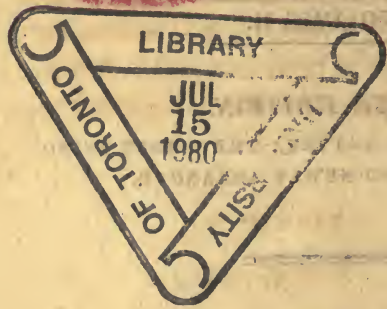
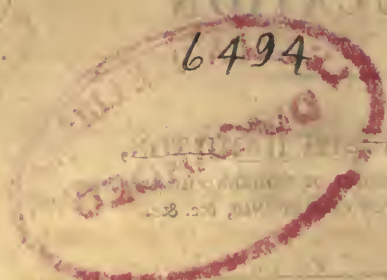
LONDON:

PRINTED FOR WILKIE AND ROBINSON, AND G. ROBINSON,  
PATERNOSTER ROW; A. K. NEWMAN AND CO. LEA-  
DENHALL STREET; AND J. JOHNSON AND CO.  
ST PAUL'S CHURCH YARD:  
AND W. LAING, AND MANNERS AND MILLER,  
EDINBURGH.

1810.

Elementary Principles  
of Education

Elementary Principles  
of Education



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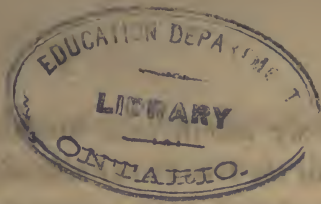
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NEW YORK: G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS, 1880



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### LETTER I.

*On the Necessity of obtaining a Knowledge of the Intellectual Faculties, in order to their proper Cultivation.—How this Knowledge is to be acquired.—Futility of endeavouring to cultivate the Faculties out of the Order prescribed by Nature.—A short Analysis of the Plan to be pursued.—Reflections.*

HAVING endeavoured to point out the necessity of paying an early and unremitting attention to the active powers of the human mind, it now remains for me to attempt an examination of the principles upon which we ought to proceed in the Improvement of the Intellectual Faculties.

If we admit, as a fundamental principle, *that the true end of education is, to bring all the powers and faculties of our nature to the highest perfection of which they are capable*; it evidently follows, that an adequate knowledge of these powers and faculties is absolutely necessary towards the accomplishment of the end we have in view. The diffusion of this species of knowledge would doubtless correct many errors, both in theory and practice; and did it once become general among those with whom the first years of life are commonly spent, would produce consequences of the utmost importance to society.

Let it not be imagined, that I mean to engage my sex in the nice subtleties of logic or metaphysics. It is not for the purpose of exercising their minds in useless speculation, that I exhort them to the species of inquiry alluded to; but it is to enable them to discharge, with fidelity and honour, the momentous duties to which Providence has been pleased to call them.

Parents are the agents of the Most High in extending the blessing of existence. But in giving life to a new race of beings, is their agency at an end? Ought they not still to consider themselves as the instruments of the DEITY, employed by Him to train up a certain portion of his rational offspring to capacity for the enjoyment of that felicity which He has prepared for those who love Him? In all that we know of his decrees, we behold a provision for the gradual improvement and final perfection of the human race. In this beneficent plan parents have the privilege of cooperating. Glorious privilege! Who that had a sense of its importance would sacrifice it at the shrine of vanity, or relinquish it at the suggestion of selfish indolence?

To mothers is entrusted the care of rational beings in the most important period of their existence; the springs of human conduct are in their hands. From them must the nascent passions and affections of the heart receive their direction; by



them must the germ of intellect be taught to expand; by them must the foundation be laid of all that is great, and good, and admirable, in human character. These are the important privileges by which our sex is honoured; these are the duties to which it is called. Let not assistance towards the due performance of them be despised, however humble the hand that offers it.

In entering upon the Cultivation of the Understanding, it is necessary to premise, that I do not intend to prescribe any particular course of study, or to point out the best methods of instruction in any branch of learning or of science. To those, therefore, who confine their views solely to the acquirement of this or that accomplishment, my observations will necessarily appear dull and uninteresting, being totally destitute of rules that may facilitate the attainment of their particular object.

It is observed by an authority to which I am always proud to refer, that “to in-

struct youth in the languages and in the sciences is comparatively of little importance, if we are inattentive to the habits they acquire; and are not careful in giving to all the different faculties, and all their different principles of action, a proper degree of employment. Abstracting entirely from the culture of their moral powers, how extensive and difficult is the business of conducting their intellectual improvement! To watch over the associations which they form in their tender years; to give them early habits of mental activity; to rouse their curiosity, and to direct it to proper objects; to exercise their ingenuity and invention; to cultivate in their minds a turn for speculation, and at the same time preserve their attention alive to objects around them; to awaken their attention to the beauties of nature, and to inspire them with a relish for intellectual enjoyment; these form *but a part* of the business of education, and yet the execution even of this part requires an ac-

quaintance with the general principles of our nature, which seldom falls to the share of those to whom the instruction of youth is commonly entrusted."\*

The sketch that is here drawn by a masterly hand, will better explain my notions upon the subject of intellectual improvement, than the most laboured definition. Still I must agree with the enlightened author, that these particulars form *but a part* of the business of education: They are but a few of the necessary means that must be employed in accomplishing our great end.

To qualify a human being for the true enjoyment of existence, the highest cultivation of the intellectual powers will not be sufficient, unless these powers be properly directed: this direction they must receive from the bias that has been given to the desires and affections of the heart. If these desires and affections have been

\* Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind, p. 24.



corrupted by improper indulgence, or perverted and depraved by means of powerful impressions made upon the tender mind; we may give our children knowledge, we may give them learning, we may give them accomplishments, but we shall never be able to teach them to apply these acquirements to just or noble purposes.

I assume it as an incontrovertible principle, that the greatest perfection of which our nature is susceptible, consists in the capability of exerting, in an eminent degree, not one or two of the faculties with which Providence has endowed us, *but the whole of these faculties*; and of having the direction given to this exertion, under the constant influence of the pious and benevolent affections.

As the body is composed of a variety of organs, of which each is equally necessary to the well-being of the whole; so the mind is a compound, if I may so speak, of a variety of faculties, none of which can be defective, without enfeebling or injur-

ing the rest. The lungs are not more necessary to the functions of the heart, than accurate conception to sound judgment. The circulation of the blood is not more necessary to the animal economy, than memory is to the mental. But memory depends upon attention; the accuracy of conception has the same source: and if both are not duly exercised by means of the perceptions, neither will attain perfection.

Where any one of the faculties has obtained a manifest ascendancy, the character will be imperfect, unhappy in itself, and useless to society. This irregular shoot is sometimes dignified by ignorance with the name of *genius*; but genius is not the partial vigour of a single faculty,—it implies the possession of all the powers of the mind in an eminent degree. The new combinations which genius produces, either in literature or in the arts, are the production of vigorous conception and sound judgment, aided by the creative power of

imagination, and modelled by taste. Where any of these appear to be wanting, the inventions of genius must be proportionally defective. To suppose that genius can exist without, them is absurd.

◦ The same want of reflection leads into other errors, which are frequent causes of disappointment. In the present state of refinement, the cultivation of Taste is an object of much importance: in the education of young ladies, it indeed often appears to be the only object that is deemed worthy of attention. To ascertain the best and most certain method of cultivating this faculty, will therefore, I doubt not, be considered as a very desirable object. If these Letters are read with attention, I hope the discovery will be made. I do not despair of convincing the most incredulous, of the utter impossibility of cultivating Taste, without the previous cultivation of the leading faculties. It is here, however, necessary to premise, that by Taste, wherever the word occurs, I in-

variably mean that faculty of the mind, whereby we are enabled to *perceive*, and to *feel*, whatever is beautiful or sublime in Nature or in the Arts. It is necessary to give this definition, because the term is often applied to denote *predilection*; and this application of it has given rise to much confusion, not only in colloquial language, but in the writings of some ingenious authors. A predilection for music or painting may be acquired by means of habit and of association; but these are inadequate to the production of the *emotions of Taste*, which have their origin in other sources. All animals that have nice perceptions, are capable of acquiring a predilection for certain sounds or colours; but the emotions of taste are peculiar to the human race, and even in man are confined to the circle of the cultivated.

The same faculties which must unite their operations in order to render the mind susceptible of the emotions of sublimity or beauty, are equally necessary to

the imagination. An early and partial cultivation of this faculty, is an evil pregnant with so much mischief, that it cannot be too severely deprecated. To it are we indebted for those thousand extravagancies in opinion and in conduct, which extort the pity of the wise, and the censures of the severe. To it we owe the motley absurdities, which, under the name of Novels, deprave the taste, and corrupt the affections, of the youthful heart; and in the early incitement that is given to the imagination, while judgment is suffered to lie dormant, we see the reason why such books are read with avidity and delight. A predilection for the wild and extravagant, must be the inevitable consequence of introducing trains of thought, made up of unnatural combinations, at a period when the mind has obtained few accurate ideas, and the judgment has been but little exercised.

The imagination that is not regulated by judgment, is pernicious in exact pro-



portion to its strength. It presents to the mind's eye a false glass, through which no object is seen in its natural size and just proportion. All is distorted; though, by the glare of false colouring, the deformity escapes detection. Thus, by injudicious management, is that faculty which, under proper regulation, is the ornament and blessing of our present state, converted into a source of error and delusion. Thus, what was intended for our happiness is rendered productive of misery, and confusion is introduced into the works of God!

Nor is the partial cultivation of the faculties confined to taste and imagination. Upon a strict investigation of this important subject, I am afraid we should find, that it is no uncommon thing to attempt the cultivation of the reasoning faculty, without having paid any regard to the culture of those by which, in the order of nature, it is preceded. Is it not to the neglect of the judging faculty, that we must attribute

the favourable reception which the crude dreams of speculative visionaries meet with not only from the young and inexperienced, but from the multitude of all ages and of every rank? How, indeed, can they detect sophistry, whose minds have never been exercised on truth?

Where the judgment has not been duly cultivated, it is in vain that we endeavour to lead the mind to general reasoning; on such minds, the sciences that afford the most powerful aid to the faculty of abstraction, are lost. Those who know what assistance is to be derived from a knowledge of mathematics in this particular, are apt to envy such as have been favoured with opportunities of making this acquirement. But on what numbers is this useful branch of science totally thrown away? By how few is it made use of as a means of further improvement! Without the cultivation of judgment, the means will ever be rested in as the end. The knowledge of various languages opens a rich and in-

exhaustible mine to the cultivated understanding; but if judgment do not lend its assistance, the ore will never be extracted. While we devote the most precious years of life to the study of languages, it is surely proper to take some precautions against the possibility of so much pains proving utterly abortive. Let it be remembered, that to be able to construe Greek and Latin is one thing, and to be inspired with a taste for classical literature is another. The first, you will perhaps say, is sufficient to qualify your sons for the professions to which you destine them. But who, in any profession, ever rose to distinguished eminence, without taste and judgment?

Is a taste for classical literature acknowledged to be an accomplishment worthy of a gentleman? Do not flatter yourself that it will ever be acquired, without accuracy of conception, and soundness of judgment. Nor will these be sufficient, if pains be not at the same time taken, to fix such associ-



ations as may introduce habits of thinking favourable to the cultivation of sentiment. How much this is attended to at great seminaries, I leave it to parents to inquire. However ill directed their anxiety may in other respects appear, the anxiety of parents with regard to the intellectual improvement of their sons, is in general sufficiently obvious. But are the mental faculties of their daughters of so much less importance, as not to demand an equal portion of attention? This point deserves serious consideration.

If, in analysing the faculties of the human mind, we find that Providence has made a manifest distinction betwixt the sexes, by leaving the female soul destitute of any of the intellectual powers, it will become us to submit to the Divine decision. But if, upon inquiry, we find that no such partiality has been shewn by Heaven, it is incumbent upon us to consider, by what right we take upon us to despise the gift of GOD. When we neglect

the cultivation of the faculties which He has so graciously bestowed, can we flatter ourselves that we act in concert with our Almighty Father? Let us examine the mode of education adopted at our great boarding-schools, and say, which of the faculties of the soul it has a tendency to improve? Let us reflect on the manner in which education is too often conducted at home, and pronounce how far it is calculated to bring to perfection those high intellectual endowments with which Heaven has entrusted us? Could it be proved, that the rational faculties are indeed useless to the sex; and that the duties to which they are called, as intelligent and accountable beings, as daughters, sisters, wives, mothers, and members of society, could be equally well performed by means of those powers which they have in common with the brute creation; then might the higher faculties of the soul be neglected with impunity.

To the wretched beings who are destined to be shut up in the zenanas of Eastern despots, reason would be not only an useless, but a cruel gift. The accomplishments, however superficial, which can help to amuse the listless hours of hopeless captivity, ought by them to be prized as a resource from wretchedness. Considering themselves in no higher light than as mere objects of sensual appetite, it is to this point that their whole endeavours will necessarily be directed.

“ Bred only and completed to the taste

“ Of lustful appetite—to sing, to dance,

“ To dress, and troll the tongue, and roll the eye—

“ Yet empty of all good, wherein consists

“ Woman’s domestic honour and chief praise.”\*

Such education to women so destined is perfectly appropriate; and the sole inconsistency which we can detect in the Eastern system, is in permitting their sons, as well as daughters, to pass the most im-

\* Milton.

portant period of youth under the tuition of such degraded beings. By them are the seeds of moral depravity effectually sown; and sloth, and ignorance, and pride, and self-importance, with every species of corruption, become the inheritance of the children committed to their care. Such are the consequences that must necessarily follow, when those who are destined to instruct others are themselves destitute of instruction!

Where the chief aim in education is directed to any other point than the improvement of the intellectual and moral powers, an artificial character will be produced, which, neither guided by reason, nor inspired by any noble or generous sentiment, will be the mere puppet of opinion, and the creature of imitation. But if imitation is made to supply the use of reason, is it probable, that the early associations will be such as to lead the mind to chuse the brightest patterns of virtue? Alas! experience has fully proved the contrary.

Experience shews us daily examples of the fatal consequences of carrying the system of *zenana* education into practice, in a country where women are called to act an important part on the theatre of society. Without intellect there can be no principle, and without principle there can be no security for virtue.

In order to cultivate the intellectual faculties to advantage, it appears to me, that we ought to accompany Nature in her progress; and as she gradually unfolds the powers of the mind, that we should devote ourselves to the improvement of each faculty, in the order it is by her presented.

Assuming this as a principle, I shall proceed in the following Letters to examine, in the first place, the faculty of PERCEPTION; shewing the advantages that are to be derived from its assiduous cultivation, and the very great disadvantages that accrue from its neglect.

ATTENTION is the next subject that will naturally fall under our consideration. I



shall be at some pains to illustrate its importance; and shall not scruple to advance upon it arguments which appear convincing to my own mind, though they are unsupported by the authority of others. If they are founded in truth, they will stand the test of investigation; if otherwise, I should be sorry to protract their fall.

CONCEPTION is the next faculty brought forth by Nature. By conception, I mean the power which the mind has of forming ideas of absent objects, and of combining these ideas. Much depends upon the vigour of this faculty; I shall, therefore, do all in my power to urge the necessity of its careful cultivation, by an explanation of the important consequences to which it leads; and shall give such hints with respect to its improvement, as, I hope, may be found of use to those who are concerned in the practical part of education.

The faculty of JUDGMENT is the next that will demand our attention. I shall

trace its progress from its first dawn in the infant mind, to its maturity; and though conscious that my abilities are inadequate to the magnitude of my subject, I shall do what in me lies to enforce its importance. To the neglect of this faculty, all the follies, and many of the vices, which abound among us, may be fairly traced. Where the judgment is sound and unperverted, the unruly desires and affections will not revel without control; but in order to the cultivation of sound judgment, it is not only necessary that the affections be uncorrupted, but that they be *early engaged on the side of truth*.

Having dwelt at large on the cultivation of Judgment, we shall then proceed to an examination of the faculty of ABSTRACTION. This faculty, though common to all, and susceptible of great improvement, is seldom cultivated to any perfection, but by the few whose course of studies has led them to cherish a turn for speculative inquiry. If general reasoning

were indeed useful to none but the philosopher, we should leave the philosopher to enjoy it as his peculiar prerogative. But if it can be proved to be no less necessary in the conduct of life than in the speculations of philosophy, it becomes our business to endeavour to find out the means which are best adapted to its improvement. These, the circumscribed limits of my present plan will not permit me to explain at large; neither are my abilities equal to such a task: but having proved the advantages which result from the cultivation of this faculty, the hints which I shall offer, may be sufficient to direct the mind in search of higher guides.

Subsequent to Abstraction I shall place what offers upon the cultivation of TASTE and IMAGINATION, because the faculty of Abstraction is necessary to both. A few hints concerning the necessity of cultivating the power of REFLECTION will conclude the series.



Though I have not seen any necessity for departing from this plan, I do not contend for the absolute fitness of my arrangement. A better might perhaps have been devised; but candour will make allowances for the imperfections of one who makes no pretensions to superior abilities. Placed by Providence in a situation undisturbed by the pressure of life's cares, though by an experience of its sufferings called to serious reflection: blest with leisure, and early inspired with such a taste for inquiry as gives that leisure full employment, I should have deemed myself highly culpable if I had declined a task to which I was in the first instance called by friendship; and to which I am still urged by a hope dear to every generous mind, the hope of being in some degree useful. The arrogance and ambition of a dictator are alike foreign to my heart. But to be an humble instrument in rousing my sex from the lethargy of quiescent indolence, to the exertion of those faculties which the bounty of

a kind Providence has conferred; to be the means of turning the attention to those objects which tend to the progressive improvement of the human race; is a species of glory, to which, I confess, I am not indifferent. If in this way

“To covet honour be a sin,

“I am the most offending soul alive.”

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## LETTER II.

### PERCEPTION.

*Progressive Development of the Faculties.—Perception explained.—Hints towards its Cultivation in early Infancy.—Its Connexion with the benevolent Affections.*

THERE is no subject more curious in its nature, or that can possibly be more universally interesting, than the manner in which Nature operates in the development of the rational faculties of man. The slowness of the progress is apt to excite our impatience, while, in fact, it ought to call forth our highest admiration.

A cursory view of what a child acquires in the first two years of its life, will con-

vince us, that were the faculties to open with a rapidity equal to our wishes, the powers of the mind would counteract each other, in such a manner as effectually to prevent their ever coming to perfection. Happily, nature at that early period presents an insuperable bar to our attempts of improving upon her plan. We may indeed counteract her wise designs, by retarding the operation of those faculties which she has then produced, and on the exercise of which depend the strength and vigour of the future powers; we may frustrate her plan, but we cannot accelerate it. It is not till five or six years of life have elapsed, that we set about this vain attempt; then we sometimes do set about it in good earnest, and insist upon the powers of imagination, judgment, and reflection, coming at our call, like the spirits of Glendower, from the vasty deep:—

“ But do they come, when you do call for them?”

Alas! we trouble not ourselves to observe

whether they do or no. It is sufficient that children learn to prate by rote upon subjects which require the powers of judgment and reflection to comprehend. They repeat the ideas of others, and we are satisfied, without taking any account of their own stock.

It is thus that prodigies are formed, all of which, as far as I have been able to observe, are a species of forced plants, that upon a slight view appear fair and flourishing, but have neither strength nor flavour.

Soon would the navy of England cease to be our pride and boast, if it were built of timber from the hot-house. But although an attempt to force the growth of the sappling would be detrimental to its future strength, pains must be bestowed in removing all obstructions that might check its rise; its roots must have room to shoot, or its branches will never expand in blooming verdure. A similar attention to the mind, in the early period of existence, ap-



pears to me to be essential towards the expansion of the intellectual powers.

I have already observed, that the faculty of perception is the first that opens in the human mind. The observation will be rendered more intelligible to some readers by a change of terms, as the most ignorant nurse must have perceived, that the first appearance of intellect in a child, is the power of *taking notice*. The power of taking notice, is but another term for the faculty of perception. The notice which a child takes of what it hears, or sees, or touches, is an act of the mind; and when this power of noticing becomes vigorous, the capacity of the mind is enlarged, by means of the number of ideas it receives from the objects to which its notice has been directed.

Having thus, as I hope, sufficiently explained my meaning, I shall again take the liberty of employing the word perception, as being better adapted to my purpose, than the word in vulgar use. I go on to

observe, that as the organs of the several senses are the inlets of perception, it must be evident that where these, especially the important ones of hearing and sight, are wanting or imperfect, the impressions made upon the mind will be likewise imperfect. How much this imperfection is obviated, in some instances, by an increased attention to the perceptions acquired by means of the remaining perfect organs of sense, is evident in those who are born deaf or blind. It is not that the organs of sight or hearing are improved by use, but that the mind, by a greater degree of attention to the impressions made upon it by one of the organs, renders its correspondent perceptions so vivid, as in a great measure to supply the want of that organ which nature has denied.

Nor is this all. As the knowledge attained by our senses is the foundation of all our intellectual improvement, we may observe, that the species of attention which has been above described, frequently serves



to open and improve the faculties in such an eminent degree, as to induce a general belief, that those who are born deaf or blind, are persons of uncommon endowments. If a lively attention to the impressions received from the remaining senses can, in some measure, supply the loss of one of the most important organs of perception; and if it further appears, that this extra attention is conducive to the improvement of the intellectual faculties; my idea of the advantages to be derived from an attention to the improvement of the perceptive faculties, from earliest infancy, can neither be deemed chimerical nor absurd.

“They have eyes and see not, ears have they and hear not,” is an emphatic reproach pronounced in the name of the Most High by the lips of an inspired writer. Any person, in the least conversant with the world, may every day have opportunities of applying the truth of this description. Without an habitual attention to

the impressions made upon the senses, the perceptions are evanescent; they are at the moment indistinct, and cannot leave any trace upon the memory, so as to become objects of reflection.—Hence arise innumerable mistakes in the judgment. To this may be traced many of those falsehoods, which we are so apt to attribute to a wilful departure from truth. Indeed the evidence of people, who have never been accustomed to make their perceptions objects of attention, can never be relied upon; for without attention there can be no memory. Whoever has been accustomed to make observations upon the lower orders of society, will agree in the justice of this remark. Were it, however, never applicable to any but those of the lower orders, it might here be passed over in silence; but alas! accurate observation is not always the concomitant of rank. The lie of the day in the upper circles does not always originate in malignity; many are the slanders, many the falsehoods, that originate in

that confusion of ideas, the foundation of which is laid in the habit of inaccurate perception.

Besides its baleful influence on the moral character, there is another evil arising from this habit of inaccuracy, that deserves our most serious attention.

Every science which the human mind can pursue, every study in which it can engage, demands, as a preliminary, an attention to the objects of perception. In proportion as this attention has been rendered habitual to the mind, will the rudiments of science be easy, and the progress delightful. A child who has been accustomed to pay attention to its perceptions, has received, from the various objects of sense, a fund of ideas which are ready to be brought into use; these, by the power of association, assist the mind in forming new conceptions. Children, who, either through the reprehensible neglect of their parents, or from some defect in their original conformation, have never made this

improvement of their perceptive faculties, are, and necessarily must be, slow in comprehending any subject. They want, as it were, the first link of the chain, and have nothing whereon to fasten the new ideas with which you present them.

That this apparent dulness is frequently nothing more than the total disuse of that faculty of attention, without which, though the five senses be possessed in full perfection, there can be no perception, is evident from this circumstance, viz. that when such children have their perceptions quickened by attention, this apparent stupidity gradually clears away, and the intellectual faculties appear often strong and vigorous. If, however, children of this description, whose perceptions are either dull by nature, or blunted through want of exercise, and who have consequently no stock of ideas, have information forced upon them; it is ten to one, that they will conceive such a dislike to learning, as will make them continue dunces for ever.

That it is by means of the senses that ideas are first acquired, is a fact, which I apprehend to be now established beyond the reach of controversy. It has, for more than half a century, been generally admitted by philosophers; but the belief of it has, as far as I know, induced little additional attention towards that period of life, when the knowledge acquired by the senses first begins to be communicated to the mind. The reason of this neglect is obvious. Memory extends not to those years of childhood, when our first ideas were acquired. We can recollect the period when knowledge was first communicated to us by others, but of our previous conceptions we have no remembrance. We therefore look upon those first years as a sort of blank in our existence, and naturally consider them as the same with regard to our children. All our pains, all our attention, with respect to their minds, is therefore reserved for that period, when we think it



proper, that, according to custom, they should begin to receive instruction.

It is no uncommon thing to see a mother, who has never assisted her child in the acquirement of a single idea during infancy, expressing the utmost anxiety for its learning to read. As soon as the age for tasks arrives, tasks must be given, or the child is lost! Thus is an invincible aversion to learning often inspired; while if the tenth part of the pains then bestowed had been given at a more early period, curiosity would have been awakened, and the mind would have been prepared for the reception of farther instruction. The seed that is to bring forth an hundred-fold, must be sown in good, and in *prepared* ground.

Let us now take a view of the manner in which the infant faculties unfold. It is probable, that as soon as a child is capable of fixing its eyes upon an object, it acquires some idea of the object it beholds. These must be for a considerable time very confused; the very notion of distance being



one that is acquired by the mind, and not the natural consequence of sight. To a child, or to a grown person born blind, but who has by an operation been restored to sight, every object appears to press upon the eye at an equal distance;\* nor is it till experience has taught the contrary, that either the child, or the restored person, can be convincèd of it. This acquired perception is very gradually attained, and probably remains imperfect till the child can run about; nor does it then extend to distant objects, few children of five or six years old being capable of making any dis-

\* The same may be observed in all other animals. I remember being once greatly surprised at seeing a young puppy, which I had put upon the table, deliberately put its paw over, and consequently fall with violence upon the floor: I then attributed this to want of sense. But an explanation of the theory of vision convinced me, that the puppy did not perceive the carpet as a distant object. Were man to gain the use of his legs at as early a period of his life as the four-footed animals do, to what innumerable dangers would he be exposed! In this, as in all the ordinances of nature, we see the wisdom and the goodness of the great Creator.

inction betwixt an object that is only half a mile, from those that are four or five miles distant. The same may be observed of people brought up in town: many inhabitants of the city of London, in respect to the perception of the distance of remote objects, remain children during life.

Ideas of the distance of objects can only be obtained by experience; but the means of our childrens' experience are on our hands. When a child of five or six months old fixes its attention upon any object, it ought to be induced to view it at every different degree of distance, to examine it near, and to look at it far off; and thus, by degrees, distinct ideas concerning it will be acquired. By some pains taken to fix these ideas in the mind, during the first two years of life, many fatal accidents might be prevented.

From the want of experience, our own notions of perpendicular distance, as far as they are obtained from the eye, are imperfect. No wonder, then, that children

should be liable to so many fatal mistakes concerning it. When a child's first notions upon this head are obtained by means of a severe fall, it is apt to produce a bad effect upon the mind, by inspiring that terror, the consequences of which I have already explained at large. This passion, as I have formerly shewn, continues to operate upon the mind by means of association, long after the cause that first produced it is forgotten. I have known people who dared not look down a precipice; nay, some who dared not look from a high window, though perfectly conscious of their security. Is it not probable, that these false fears have originated in some strong impression of terror, (the circumstances attending which may be beyond recollection) though probably given by some foolish nurse, in order to deter her charge from running into danger?

As soon as the sight is perfect, it must behold the objects before it. But it is not

till capable of some degree of attention, that a child can have what I call a *perception* of the object. This faculty of attention begins to display itself about the third or fourth month. In thriving, lively children, it is about this period very perceptible. Delightful it is to observe this dawn of intellect in the little innocent. Caught by some lively colour, some gay appearance, the eye fixes in eager though short-lived examination, commonly ending in a crow of delight. The tone of nature ought then to be followed. Let the little creature be danced and tossed about, till both you and it are tired. But when again its grave looks denote a fixed attention, let nonsense, I beseech you, have a truce. Let the eternal bunch of keys be still; nor endeavour, by ill-judged interruption, to break the short reverie; but rather, by submitting, if possible, the object of attention to the touch, give two senses an opportunity of judging, instead of one.



At two months old, a child is evidently capable of distinguishing betwixt a white ball and a black or brown one. But its perceptions must have been further opened, before it can observe any difference betwixt a ball covered with white leather, and one of ivory. Every distinction which the mind can make, you may reckon a new idea acquired. It is in your power to multiply these ideas at a very early period. It is likewise unfortunately in the power of a foolish nurse to retard the natural progress of the mind, by perpetually interrupting its attention. A child that is much danced about, and much talked to, by a very lively nurse, has many more ideas than one that is kept by a silent and indolent person. A nurse should be able to talk nonsense in abundance: but then she should be able to know when to stop.\*

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\* It has been observed to me by a Lady, who to uncommon sense and penetration has united the advantage of much practical experience, that nothing tends more

Good temper and activity are such indispensable qualities, that if either be wanting in its nurse, the child runs the risk of being deficient in animal spirits, or of having its temper spoiled by improper treatment. Whether what are called *Animal Spirits*, be the cause or the consequence of a rapid flow of ideas, it is not at present our business to inquire; it is sufficient for us to observe their inseparable connexion. Wherever the animal spirits have received a fatal check in the period of infancy, the succession of ideas is slow, and the perceptions languid. In such children we may frequently observe a premature display of the powers of reflection; but seldom, very

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effectually to retard the progress of the infant faculties, than a custom prevalent with nurses, of keeping the child in a perpetual trot upon the knee. Does the poor infant fix its attention upon an object? the knee is immediately in motion to prevent the possibility of its acquiring any idea from it. Does it shew symptoms of displacency or distress? the trot goes on with redoubled velocity, till the little creature is stupified into silence.



seldom does the unnatural maturity of this faculty produce any thing great or admirable. The laws of nature are immutable; nor can we ever expect success, if we reverse her wise decrees.

A misfortune opposite to what has been above alluded to, is sometimes the consequence of an unusual flow of animal spirits in infancy. I mean the loss of the capability of attention. This, I believe, always proceeds from improper management in very early life; for the most lively infants make the most early display of the faculty of attention, and would no doubt continue to exert it on the objects of perception, if they were not injudiciously diverted from the attempt.

The more lively the flow of ideas, the more strongly is the mind impelled to increase their number. Hence proceeds that curiosity so remarkable in children; an engine more powerful in the hands of judicious parents than the boasted *fulcrum* of the Syracusan philosopher. To direct this

curiosity into proper channels, should, from the dawn of intellect till its maturity, be the unceasing object of parental care. In early infancy, it must be exclusively directed to the acquirement of clear and distinct notions of the objects of perception.

As soon as children acquire the use of speech, we may observe their number of ideas to increase with astonishing rapidity. As letters, when arranged upon paper, become the signs of words, so are words the signs of ideas; and as, in acquiring the knowledge of letters, we must learn to associate the idea of the sound of each letter with the written character, so in acquiring the use of words, we must associate the sound of each word with the idea it is meant to express. When we give a due degree of consideration to this curious fact, we shall be astonished at the number of words which a child of three years old has acquired.

Let us see how many powers of the mind are necessary to the acquirement of

every word which is the sign of a distinct idea. There must be, in the *first* place, a distinct perception of the object, which could never be obtained but by the exertion of the faculty of attention; *secondly*, it must have been an object of conception; *thirdly*, of memory; *fourthly*, a considerable degree of judgment must have been exerted, in discriminating the particular sound expressive of the idea; and *fifthly*, that sound must have been connected with the idea by the laws of association. Before the child can have pronounced the words mamma, papa, chair, table, &c. with appropriate meaning, all this intellectual process must have been gone through. How absurd is it, then, to imagine that this period of life is worthy of no attention! If the use of speech be, and to me it appears evident that it is, a means of facilitating the acquirement of ideas, some pains ought to be bestowed on the attainment of distinct articulation. It has been observed to me by a judicious friend, that

children are greatly assisted in this process by teaching them, as soon as they acquire the use of speech, distinctly to pronounce the letters of the alphabet. This is seldom thought of, till children are taught their letters; their articulation is consequently seldom distinct till that period; and it may be observed, that the articulation of those who never learn to read, is seldom distinct through life.

The impressions made upon the mind through the medium of sight, are, I believe, the chief source of ideas in the period of infancy. That they are not, however, the only source, is obvious from the attention which children pay to sound: and I am led to believe, that every thing which has been said to prove the possibility of improving the perceptions of children with regard to objects of sight, may likewise be applied to the perceptions of sound. As people who are blest with good sight, must, when they open their eyes, of necessity see, so must all who have the organs



of hearing perfect, of necessity hear every noise that is made beside them. But as an object must be surveyed with some degree of attention, before it can properly be said to be perceived; so must a sound be listened to with some attention, before its degree of intonation can be discriminated. A person who has no ear for music, hears the sound of a violin as well as the most critical connoisseur: the noise made upon the instrument is equally loud in the ears of both. To the one, it is a continued and irksome noise; to the other, when touched by a masterly hand, it emits sounds expressive of all the sentiments that can be felt by the human breast—now elevating the soul with emotions of sublimity, now melting it into tenderness. The sense of hearing is in these two persons equally acute; whence, then, proceeds this amazing difference in their perceptions?

An examination of the faculty of attention may, perhaps, give us some assistance

towards the solution of this difficulty; though the fuller explanation of it must be reserved for the Lettér on Taste. Where the organs of hearing are perfect, I believe it never happens, that a person who has been early accustomed to pay attention to musical notes, is found incapable of discriminating betwixt grave and acute sounds, or of marking the number of notes in a bar, which constitutes what is called Time. This is the work of attention. The pleasure derived from musical composition has another source. It is an emotion of taste; and under that head we shall examine it.

Some children appear to have much quicker perceptions than others. Where this faculty appears weak, great pains ought to be taken to invigorate it. The mind ought to be won to the examination of objects by every engaging art; nor should it be suffered to rest satisfied with such a slight and superficial survey, as may convey a false impression. It is by repeated and attentive examination, that



children learn to perceive the difference betwixt inanimate objects which are put in motion, and sensitive nature. Without some pains bestowed in teaching this distinction, children either learn to attach ideas of animation to mechanical motion, or of insensibility to all living objects, that are inferior to the human size and figure. The first is the cause of a thousand foolish terrors, and the latter leads to many infant acts of cruelty. I have seen a child afraid of the wheels of its little chaise, when it saw them put in motion; and known the work of a great clock, or the striking of a great bell, excite emotions of terror to an advanced period of life. Had the perceptions been in infancy exercised in examining the nature of objects, these false fears could never have been engendered.

On the other hand, if a child has not been accustomed to examine living objects, and made sensible that every thing which lives has sensation, it may amuse itself with torturing the inferior animals, till

habits of cruelty are deeply implanted in the mind.

So nicely interwoven are the moral feelings and the intellectual faculties of man, that it is impossible effectually to improve the one, while the other is neglected or destroyed. In the cultivation of the perceptive faculties, we lay the foundation for that quick discernment, which is equally necessary in acquiring just notions of things, and in discovering the true path of moral rectitude. By the neglect of these faculties, we not only enfeeble the understanding, but lay the foundation of those false associations, which extend their baleful influence to the affections of the heart.

As it is by means of attention only that the perceptions can be improved, I shall proceed to a more minute examination of this important faculty in the following Letter.

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## LETTER III.

### ATTENTION.

*The Power of Attention in improving the Perceptions.*

*—The Velocity of its Operation so great as to render it frequently imperceptible.—The Influence of the Passions upon Attention.—Illustrations by Example.*

TO impress a conviction of the necessity of cultivating the faculty of ATTENTION, nothing more is necessary, than to demonstrate its being essential to the operation of every other faculty.

The senses are the organs of information to the mind; and upon their evidence the learned and the vulgar rely with equal confidence. Yet the clearness, and, in

many instances, the truth of their evidence, depends upon the degrees of attention that has been exerted. Where the exertion of attention has been habitually neglected, the senses lose their vigour, and the perceptions become languid and confused;\* but where, on the contrary, the perceptions have been exercised by attention, they acquire new strength, and are brought to a degree of perfection, which, in some instances, appears quite extraordinary.

The truth of what is here advanced will appear beyond all dispute, when we consider, that people, who, from their peculiar avocations, as hunters, sailors, &c. are habitually intent upon distant objects, become capable of distinctly discerning ob-

\* It may be observed, that the lower order of servants frequently appear dull of hearing; and that without any defect in the organs of vision, they often do not see the objects before them; nor, till considerable pains have been taken, do they perceive minute differences with regard to the size and colour of objects, or whether they be straight or crooked, &c.

jects at such an immense distance, as totally removes them from the sight of such as have never been accustomed to make similar observations; while, on the other hand, those who have from early life been accustomed to examine minute objects near the eye, frequently become purblind. This defect evidently increases with the increase of luxury, which draws people together into cities, where children are brought up in ignorance of all the sublime objects of nature, and have their sense of sight perpetually occupied in a narrow sphere.\*

I am aware of the objection that may be here started, on account of the formation of the eye; from which it appears, that short-sightedness must be the inevitable consequence of a certain degree of convexity. But why is this convexity confined to people in certain situations? Why does it only appear in those whose pursuits

\* *Query.*—May not the small and close type in which school-books are sometimes printed, be in this respect extremely injurious?



and avocations demand minute attention? To a natural defect in the organs of vision, the child of the peasant is as liable as the child of one in higher station; but seldom shall we meet with a short-sighted person, who has been from infancy accustomed to the observation of distant objects in the country. Does not this evince the wonder-working power of attention?

Those who enjoy the blessings of sight and hearing, receive through the medium of these senses so much information, that they pay little attention to the sense of feeling. But when a person is deprived of sight, this sense becomes so necessary towards the acquirement of ideas, that the attention is then turned towards it so effectually, as to make it appear to the vulgar like the acquirement of a new sense. The skin of my hand is as fine, the nerves are as exquisitely susceptible, as any blind person's whatever; yet on feeling the sheet of paper on which I write, with the utmost attention of which I am *now* capable,

I cannot perceive any difference betwixt the part that is written, and the remainder of the page; yet this, I know, would have been instantly distinguished by a blind lady with whom I was formerly acquainted. So exquisite had the sense of feeling in this lady become, that I have seen her thread a fine cambric needle with the utmost ease, the aperture of which could scarcely be discerned by my eye; and so acute was her perception of quantity, that in running her hand along the front wall of a new apartment, she instantly discovered an error in placing the windows, which had totally escaped every other person. From this, and similar circumstances, I am persuaded, that by attention the sense of touch might be made much more useful to us than it generally is.

The sense of taste is originally equal in the peasant and the voluptuary. In the peasant, it remains through life simple and uncultivated; but in the votaries of luxury, it is, perhaps, the only perception that is

brought to any degree of perfection. Of all our senses, this of Taste furnishes the mind with the fewest ideas of reflection; the cultivation of it is therefore least essential to the improvement of our intellectual faculties. Is it not, then, lamentable, to find the attention in early and in later life, so exclusively directed to the cultivation of this sense? The person who cannot distinguish the difference of colours, must necessarily have indistinct conceptions of particular species of beauty. He who cannot extend his observation to distant objects, must have his stock of ideas proportionally limited; but though a man should not be able to distinguish betwixt the different tastes of parsnip and of turtle, the number of his ideas of reflection will suffer little diminution. The same attention that is bestowed in acquiring this delicacy of perception with regard to the palate, would, in an equal degree, increase the perceptions from all the other organs of sensation. And the only reason why the habit

of attention is more easily acquired in the one instance than in the others, is, that attention is in the one case stimulated by appetite, while, in the other, it has no such stimulus.

This naturally leads us to consider the operation of the passions upon the faculty of attention. This operation I conceive to be mutual; the passions rouse attention, and attention increases passion by a sort of re-action.

By attention, the existence of every passion is prolonged in an unnatural degree. Wherever the attention is necessarily divided betwixt the object of passion and other objects, its force soon diminishes. No person, who is under the necessity of earning a subsistence, is in any danger of dying either of grief or love.

Where selfishness predominates, we shall find the attention perpetually alive to every minute circumstance that can in any wise affect the ease, health, or comfort of the person concerned; while that which affects

the ease, health, or comfort of others, is totally overlooked. Where the attention is thus exclusively turned to *self*, it never fails to create a susceptibility of feeling, which deceives the mind into an opinion of its own exquisite sensibility. But what is the sensibility that is not under the influence of benevolence? Let those who pique themselves upon the possession of this amiable quality, try it by the test I have given. Let them observe, if their attention is as much alive to whatever can affect the feelings of others, as to whatever, even remotely, concerns themselves. Let them estimate their feelings by the manner in which they *feel* for the trouble and uneasiness they create to those around them. If attention be turned to lessen this trouble, and to alleviate this uneasiness, with as much ardour as it is engaged in lessening and alleviating what comes home to *self*, it will produce that legitimate sensibility, which is born of benevolence. But where *self* is the great, the



only object of attention, sensibility and selfishness may be considered as synonymous.

By the attention which a delicate state of health demands, a disposition to selfishness is frequently produced;—another proof in favour of my argument, as it shews the power which attention has over the affections of the heart. When directed towards others by pity, love, gratitude, or any of the sympathetic emotions, it increases the disposition to benevolence. When exclusively devoted to the study of selfish gratification, it augments the spirit of selfishness. Hence the necessity of teaching children to pay attention to others.

I have, in the former volume, given some instances of the operation of selfishness in those who are the slaves of terror. Let us now observe the power of this passion in quickening the faculty of attention.

The strongest facts brought forward by the advocates of *natural* antipathy, all go to prove, that persons under the influence of such antipathies have a sort of instinctive knowledge of the presence of the objects of their aversion. As for instance; a person who has a natural antipathy to a cat, will immediately discover when one is in the room, even though it should be effectually hid from his sight. The same species of sagacity I once saw in a lady, who had an antipathy to dead birds. Soon after entering the parlour of a friend's house, where she went on a morning visit, she grew sick, and instantly declared that there must be a dead bird in the room. The bird-cage was immediately examined, and poor Dickey found dead at the bottom of the cage! I at that time became a convert to the doctrine of antipathies, and should probably have remained so ever after, had I not been led to reflect on the power of attention in the seeming improvement of the faculties. On considering this

subject, it appeared to me, that if the sense of feeling can, by the power of habitual attention, convey those nice perceptions of the surfaces of body, which, to people who have not thus exercised their attention, appear astonishing and incomprehensible; why might not attention (stimulated, as it must be in these instances, by the impulse of aversion) produce a like lively perception of smell? That a person who has had his attention frequently thus directed, may be able to perceive a certain effluvia which escapes the observation of others, is no more extraordinary, than that a blind person should be able to distinguish colour by the touch.

I am too well aware of the taste for the wonderful that prevails on vulgar minds, to expect any of that description to enter into this mode of reasoning. To minds of a higher order, therefore, do I now address myself; and sincerely hope I shall one day have the pleasure of seeing the subject entered upon and pursued by those who are

equal to the investigation. To men of science who are intimately acquainted with the human frame, the subject must be particularly interesting. It is they only who can determine, how far this power of attention may explain the apparent effects produced by charms, and all the long *et-cetera* of fooleries, which have in every age abused the credulity of mankind.—Should it appear that the wonderful cures effected by animal magnetism, tractors, and such like inefficient causes, may really be explained by the phenomena of attention, it will tend to raise the importance of our present subject. And I confess, I am the more sanguine on this point, upon considering that the efficacy of all these wonder-working charms seems entirely to depend on the *attention* of the public; and that, like the hysteric fits of fine ladies, they cease to operate, the moment they cease to be observed.

Attention is not only necessary to the improvement of our perceptive, but is es-

essential to the operation of all our intellectual, faculties. How much memory depends upon it, is known to all. By habitual exercise its operation becomes so quick, as to require, in some instances, no inconsiderable degree of reflection, to make us sensible of its having actually been exerted.

Professor Stewart, with that enlightened penetration which characterizes all his observations, has traced the operation of attention in some of those actions, which philosophers had formerly considered as mechanical. He has, I think, most satisfactorily proved, that the most rapid performer in music must necessarily pay attention to every note he plays, though his attention is so evanescent as to leave no consciousness of its exertion.\* I cannot pretend to improve upon his illustrations; but I may be permitted to

\* See Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind.



give an example more familiar to my own sex, than those which he has adduced.

Knitting is a work which we see performed with so much ease, by old people and children, that it must surely be a very simple operation. But let us observe the various objects to which, in the process of learning this simplest of the arts, we must necessarily pay a separate and minute attention. We must first attend to the position of the needles; then to the thread which must be twisted round the ring-finger of the right hand with a proper degree of tightness. Attention is then called to the needle, with which the stitch is to be lifted: then to the act of passing the thread over it by the fore-finger of the right hand; and while the thread is by the right hand needle returned through the loop, or stitch, attention must be paid to the needle on the left, lest in relinquishing the loop others should be dropped. Complicated as this seems in description, habit renders the operation so easy as to be per-

formed mechanically. I, and many others who have been taught to knit in early life, can carry on this work while reading books that seem to require undivided attention: so little reason is there to be afraid of overstraining this power by varying its modes of exercise.

In the modern systems of education, attention is indeed exercised from a very early period; but it is exercised on objects which cripple its powers. Words are forced upon it, while it ought to be attaining strength and quickness, by examining what the senses present to it. I would have much greater hopes of a child, who, at three or four years old, could distinctly tell me the names of all the flowers in the garden, or of all the trees in a hedge-row, than of one who at the same age could repeat a Greek or Latin ode. This latter would nevertheless be regarded as a prodigy, and high and great would be the expectations formed of such an extraordinary genius.

Let us examine the grounds of these expectations.

The faculty of attention, which may be considered as a key to all the faculties, has in the case of the young scholar been forced upon an exercise by which none of the senses, except the sense of hearing, none of the faculties, excepting that of memory, could possibly reap any advantage. It must be granted, that the attention which must necessarily have been given to the sounds of the words, would in future render his perception, with regard to such sounds, more accurate; and this is doubtless gaining something. But it is the sum total of all the benefit received. Nor would the acquirement have been greater, had the ode which he was taught to repeat been given in his native tongue: while the meaning was beyond his comprehension, he could gain nothing more by learning to repeat the sounds of English words, than by repeating the sounds of Greek and Latin ones. The only use of the exercise

in either instance, is to quicken the perception with regard to such sounds, and to form the organs to their utterance; an advantage not to be despised; and which, though the only advantage that can possibly result from teaching children to repeat words without ideas, we are very apt to overlook, in our foolish admiration of the performance.

When we have excited attention to the sound of words, the task of committing them to memory is performed with great facility. This is no indication of uncommon talents. Nor is it by confining attention to such objects, or by compelling it into this direction, that the talents bestowed by nature can be so nourished as to have any chance of coming to perfection. In early infancy, attention ought not to be exclusively given to perceptions of one particular class; it ought to be habitually exercised on all. It is from objects of sight that we derive the greatest number of our ideas; it is therefore by cultivating



attention to these objects, that we shall most effectually expand the germ of intellect, and at the same time strengthen its powers. In calling the attention to the examination of visible objects, we are happily assisted by that curiosity, which even in the dawn of intellect is obvious in the infant mind. When this curiosity calls forth attention, let us not counteract the wise designs of nature; let us rather be assisting in bringing to perfection the plan which she has in a manner sketched. In the examination of sensible objects, let all the senses be duly exercised, that the indistinct ideas received through the medium of one of the senses, may be fully cleared and explained by the others.

Here is a ball of white cotton, there is one covered with white leather, and there another of ivory; not only sight, but feeling, and hearing, must be exercised, before a child can discriminate the properties that constitute their essential differences. In doing this, how many powers of the mind



must be employed, in all of which attention is implied as an essential!

As the sphere of observation enlarges, the objects of attention multiply on every side; upon these the judgment now begins to be frequently exercised, and the rudiments of invention appear. The most effectual aid which we can give to the progress of these powers, is to provide for their proper exercise. The child who is for ever cooped up in a nursery, and who has no other objects whereon to exercise its curiosity and attention, save a few pretty painted toys, will soon have its curiosity checked, and its power of attention weakened. In these circumstances, neither judgment nor invention can be expected to display themselves at an early period. They are both constantly anticipated by provident care of the attendants, in whom it would be a breach of duty to let little master have the trouble of acting or thinking in any instance for himself.

Nor where the circumstances of parents happily forbid the attendance of a train of mercenary mind-perversers, are the children always permitted to reap the advantage of their situation. Too often have I beheld the budding intellect as effectually nipped by the injudicious anticipations of an indulgent mother, as it could have been by the most foolish nursery-maid. Children who are accustomed to this species of constant superintendence and prevention, have no inducement to the acquirement of those habits of attention, which I consider as the basis of all intellectual improvement.

“ You can’t open that pretty box, love;  
 “ come to me, and I will do it for you.  
 “ See! what nice comfits there are in it!”  
 The box is opened, the comfits are eaten, and mamma again screws on the lid.— Pleased with the novelty, little master again desires to have it opened, and again she complies with his request. The request, or rather command, is again repeated; and complied with; till mamma grows tired,

and then she declares that the naughty box will not open any more! The ill-humour which succeeds, is stifled by more comfits from her pocket, or the poor child is coaxed to resume the string by which the painted horse is dragged round the room. All this I have seen, and similar occurrences may be in every one's recollection. Let us see how the same circumstance is managed by a judicious mother.

“ Here is a pretty box, mamma; but it  
“ won't open, all that I can do.”

“ That box, my dear, won't open by  
“ force; the lid is screwed on, and it  
“ must be turned in such a manner as to  
“ take out the screw. Observe. There—  
“ it is opened—now see how the part that  
“ fixes, is cut in the manner of a screw.”

“ O! yes, now I understand it; for I  
“ remember what papa told me one day  
“ about the cork-screw, when I was look-  
“ ing at it: but I thought there was no  
“ use of screws, but to draw corks.”

“ All screws are made upon the same

“ plan, or principle, as it is called ; will you  
 “ remember that word ? ”

“ Yes, mamma ; but what else is there  
 “ besides cork-screws, and screw-lids for  
 “ comfit boxes ? ”

“ Many things, my love, are made upon  
 “ the same principle. A piece of furni-  
 “ ture that is just by you, is made upon  
 “ the principle of the screw ; and if you  
 “ will find it out, I will give you a kiss.”

“ I see ! I see ! it is the stool on which  
 “ my sister sits at the piano-forte. It turns  
 “ and rises just like the lid of this box.”

This scene I have likewise witnessed.  
 Does it require any argument to prove  
 which of these children would be most  
 likely to pay attention to the objects of  
 perception ? Can we be at any loss to de-  
 termine, which would be best prepared for  
 receiving instruction at that period, when,  
 in the minds of unthinking people, instruc-  
 tion commences ?

Would we permit ourselves to be in-  
 structed by experience, we would not ex-

pect that where the perceptions have been suffered to become dull and faint for want of exercise, the mind can make great or sudden progress in learning. When a poor child, who has never had a distinct idea of any object, not even of those with which it has been from infancy familiar, is all at once compelled to pay attention to the form and sounds of the words that compose a lesson, it cannot fail to be disgusted with its task. But this disgust may be conquered. An artful teacher may, by a proper application of the incentives of emulation, pride, hope of reward, or fear of punishment, produce such habits of attention as may sufficiently answer his purpose; and the child may appear, to undiscerning eyes, an admirable scholar. The mind may nevertheless remain all this while weak and inefficient. In all that it has acquired, it has no natural property; nor can it convert the acquirements it has made to any use. We are surprised that persons possessed of loads of knowledge



should speak and act so foolishly as they sometimes do. We might as well wonder that the Jack-daw who stole a half-crown piece, did not lay it out in purchasing bread or barley! It is not merely being in possession of a certain sum of knowledge, that will give judgment, or discernment. These are inherent qualities, knowledge may improve, but it cannot create them; nay, I am verily persuaded that in our ill-judged anxiety to fill the mind with what we call knowledge, we often weaken or destroy those faculties, without the aid of which it can make no use of the knowledge it acquires. By assiduously cultivating the faculty of attention in early infancy, we do more towards laying the foundation of a wise and useful character, than if we were to cram all we know into its little brains. The children of a sensible mother have all their faculties so judiciously exercised, that their minds are ever in a state of preparation for the reception of new ideas. Every field-flower which they gather

in their walks, every pebble which they pick up in their road, will be rendered a source of new ideas to their tender minds. Curiosity will be thus awakened, it will be gradually turned to higher objects, and so judiciously gratified as to lay the foundation of a love of knowledge, the first step to all improvement. Reading will then be taught with ease, and considered by the children as a privilege rather than as a task. The command of attention having been already attained, it will be ready to obey the call; and having been habitually exercised on all the objects of perception, will without difficulty apply to those new objects, from which new ideas are now to be acquired.

But, it may perhaps be said, as all are not equally endowed by nature, the faculty of attention may not in every instance be capable of cultivation.

Far from considering all to be born with the same degree of intellectual capacity, I believe that there is as great a difference

in the conformation of different persons, with regard to the strength and vigour of the mental faculties, as with regard to the strength and vigour of the corporeal frame.

But as a stout and well formed infant may be rendered puny, rickety, and unhealthy, by improper treatment, so may the mental faculties be, by bad management, deprived of all their native energy, and rendered sickly and diseased through life.

When the mental distortion thus produced, is extremely obvious and disgusting, even those who are least accustomed to reflection, are apt to suspect that there must have been something wrong in the education. Were we to carry on our inquiries with greater accuracy of observation, I am persuaded we should, in many instances, perceive that the imbecility, which we at first view are apt to consider as a natural defect, has in reality had the same source; and that the faculties which now appear in a state of decrepitude, have

been reduced to that state, either from want of early nourishment, or other species of mismanagement. But where will the folly, which has been the consequence of this mismanagement, be arrested? Nature has provided for the preservation of a certain degree of strength, beauty, and proportion, in the species, by ordaining that where these are greatly deficient, the race shall soon become extinct; but the race of fools may, alas! be multiplied without end.

The utmost care that can be bestowed on the improvement of the perishable fabric, can add but little to its strength; whereas the mind—the immortal, the imperishable part—is happily so formed, as to be susceptible of progressive improvement through the ages of eternity. The management and care of these glorious faculties, in the important period of their development, is consigned to mothers. By the direction which the mother thinks fit to give to the faculty of attention in the



first years of life, the future character will in a great measure be decided. She has it in her power to impair the faculties by neglect, or to strengthen and invigorate them by proper exercise. If she is rich and vain, she may effectually counteract nature, and after having permitted all the faculties to lie dormant, may call on the reasoning powers, and pay for their answering by substitute; for where the preparatory faculties have been neglected, reason will never bring them to maturity. If she is truly wise, she will be content to follow the progress of nature, and to cultivate all the faculties in the order in which nature brings them forth. It is in not attending to her wise regulations, that all our errors in education originate. Let us study her laws, and in them admire the blessed provision which the Divine Source of all perfection has made for the happiness and improvement of his rational offspring!



Before I take leave of this important branch of our subject, I wish to propose to your consideration a few observations upon the nature of those trains of thought, which, from the first glimmerings of sense to the latest period of existence, flow through the mind in a never-ceasing current. Every article that composes this perennial stream, has been an object of previous attention; and from its prevailing materials, every person may, upon self-examination, learn to what class of objects the attention has been chiefly directed. Joy and grief, complacency and resentment, each introduce trains of ideas of correspondent complexion. While the mind is agitated by any of these emotions, the attention cannot be turned to indifferent objects without a violent effort; and if these emotions frequently are introduced in early life, we need not expect that the effort ever will be made. Hence the importance of preserving the tender mind from the dominion of passion; hence the

necessity of exerting our utmost endeavours, to conquer in infancy those unruly desires arising from the gratification of self-will, which give a direction to attention unfavourable to the culture of all the mental faculties.

If the trains of thought, which in our waking hours incessantly flow through the mind, depend upon the nature of the objects to which we chiefly direct our attention, it appears of the utmost consequence to our success in education, to turn the attention to such objects as may introduce trains of thought unconnected with any violent emotion. This is the great advantage of the pursuit of science: where it fortunately happens, that the attention is thus directed in early life, the unruly passions will not gain a premature admission into the youthful bosom.

Where the attention has been early engaged in fiction, it will not, without great difficulty, be turned to realities. It is the business of fiction to excite emotion; the

mind delights in this excitement; and where it is frequently produced, whatever is destitute of it will appear insipid. If, then, we would have the attention engaged in the service of the intellectual faculties, and the faculties employed in the search of truth, we must carefully abstain from introducing emotions unfavourable to our design. From the direction which is given to the power of attention, the trains of thought will derive their colouring; and the character will ultimately partake of their complexion.

On the truth of what has been here advanced, every person who reflects on the operations of his own mind, is competent to decide. No one who has been accustomed to this reflection, can be insensible of the power which the attention has over the mind, in introducing trains of ideas corresponding to the objects upon which it has been engaged. The more philosophical the mind, the closer the chain of association by which these trains of thought

are linked together; but the lively and the serious, the philosophical and the unthinking, are alike liable to receive impressions from the present objects of employment. He to whom this secret of the human heart was open; He who formed the mind, and intimately knew its various propensities; foresaw the consequence of permitting the chain of ideas, naturally introduced by the business, the pleasures, and the pursuits of life, to remain unbroken. He foresaw, that by this means the heart must soon be alienated from its MAKER. His wisdom provided the remedy. “*Remember the seventh day to keep it holy,*” was one of the first injunctions given to the human race: and a little reflection will convince us, how admirably this decree was suited to that law of our nature, which I have above endeavoured to explain.

If our present occupation necessarily engages our attention, and our attention introduces trains of ideas allied to its object, it necessarily follows, that, in order



to recal the attention to a contemplation of whatever is remote from the general objects of pursuit, a total change of employment is the most effectual means that could possibly be devised. With the *rest* that by the Divine appointment took place on the seventh day, the ideas of infinite wisdom, power, and goodness, manifested in the creation of the world, were inevitably associated. A sense of the Divine presence was thus kept alive in the mind of man; and as long as this salutary institution was duly observed, the trains of thought which it excited, failed not to produce obedience to the Divine commands. To this truth the history of the Old Testament gives ample evidence. We there see, that at whatever period the observation of the sabbath fell into disuse, the knowledge of the one true God, and obedience to his moral laws, were equally forgotten. Nor where it was observed most punctually, was the observance of any use, when the associations that were at first connected



with it, were changed into a gloomy and illiberal superstition. Such was the case at the time of our Saviour's appearance; but far from being abrogated by him, "who came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil," this institution, founded on the nature of the human mind, and coeval with its creation, must continue obligatory till the nature of the human mind is changed. From the period of our Saviour's death, it presents associations still more interesting to the heart than the ideas of creating power. It is to us a perpetual memorial of an entrance into a state of eternal happiness; a returning festival of gratitude and joy!

Addressing myself to professed Christians, I should not have thought it necessary to say so much upon this subject, if I had not observed the erroneous ideas concerning it which now prevail. What harm is there in doing this? What sin is there in that? is the common answer to every objection against pursuing the pleasures or the business of life on Sunday. From the

scope of my argument it will appear, that the *harm* and the *sin* arises from perpetuating trains of thought, foreign to all that is of real importance to our eternal welfare. Such a total change of employment on every seventh day, as will serve to break these associations which tie our hearts to the world, and to introduce trains of thought favourable to devotional sentiment, to self-examination, to humility, and benevolence, cannot be deemed a matter of small importance; and most earnestly would I recommend it to parents to accustom their children from infancy to this change. The change of employment ought, indeed, to be so managed as to produce delight; which it will never do, if Sunday be made a day of wearisome idleness, or of gloomy restraint. Let it be a day of love, of cheerfulness, of familiar intercourse with your children. Let their little hearts be led to rejoice in Him who made them. Turn their attention to observe his goodness in the works of creation and providence.

Make them sensible of the benignity which decreed a day of rest to those inferior animals, which are so useful to man: and by every means in your power, endeavour to introduce upon the day set apart for the service of GOD, those trains of thought, which are connected with the emotions of delight and gratitude.

It has been already observed, how far our associations are influenced by time and place. By this law of the human mind, the advantages attending public worship will be sufficiently explained. Every prayer to GOD for Divine grace to assist us in conquering the evil dispositions to which we are, alas! too prone, introduces associations favourable to virtue; and if any particular hour of the day is habitually thus employed, the return of that hour will introduce these associations to the mind. Hence the advantages of devoting the morning to religious exercises. The train of thoughts introduced by these is the best preservative against temptation.

I leave you to pursue the subject in your own reflections; and be assured, that it is worthy of far more serious investigation than has now been bestowed upon it.

## LETTER IV.

*Of the Faculty of Conception.—Its Nature and Use shewn to be different from Memory,—from Imagination.—Its operation necessary towards the Acquirement of clear and accurate Ideas.—How to be improved in early Life in Children of opposite Tempers.—Observations.*

I NOW proceed to shew the necessity of bestowing some pains in the cultivation of that faculty of the mind, which enables us not only to retain distinct notions of the objects we have seen, heard, &c. but likewise enables us, by combining these ideas, to form notions of objects we have never seen: for instance, the ball (or clue) of white cotton that is now before me on the table, to me is an object of perception.



You, perhaps, have no such object in view; but no sooner do I mention it, than you have a conception of its appearance. Neither of us, perhaps, ever saw a ball of gold thread of equal size; but both of us can conceive it; and could conceive it, had we never seen such a thing as gold thread in our lives. By our perceptions we have obtained an idea of gold; by these, likewise, we have learned the nature of ductility and tenacity. We are told, that gold is sufficiently ductile and tenacious to be drawn out into the finest threads; and this we can conceive, although we never saw it done. Of ductility and tenacity we may have a just notion from experience, though we may be unacquainted with the terms by which these properties are expressed; but if we have no such notion, it is not an acquaintance with the terms that will lead us to a conception of the possibility of converting a piece of hard and heavy metal into flexible wire or thread.

Hence appears the importance of acquiring habits of accurate perception; since upon the distinctness of our perceptions, the clearness of our apprehension evidently depends. Attention is equally indispensable to both faculties. From an habitual want of attention in examining the objects of our external senses, arise erroneous conceptions; hence false associations are formed, tending to mislead the judgment and pervert the reason.

That mind which can most justly and accurately reflect the images of its former perceptions, is best prepared for the exercise of all its higher faculties.

What I have here said of conception, you will perhaps think is, in some respects, equally applicable to memory. You will, however, please to observe, that there is this difference betwixt them—memory is employed upon the past; while conception includes no idea of time whatever.

Where there is no accuracy of conception, the power of memory is of very little

use. We daily see instances of people who remember things as if it were by halves, and in their repetition of the observations, or of the occurrences that have been related by others, they go on floundering from error to error, and without any intention to deceive, are perpetually guilty of the most flagrant misrepresentation. Hence arise many, if not all, of those petty strifes, jealousies, and resentments, which are most inimical to the happiness of social life.

As without just and accurate conceptions the true meaning of an author can never be discovered; to persons who labour under this confusion of ideas, reading, instead of being a source of improvement, is the very reverse. Unhappy the author, whose writings are subjected to the criticism of readers of this class! From the confusion of their own ideas, they are for ever mistaking or perverting the meaning of others; and totally unconscious of their own want of discernment, they scruple not to decide

and to pronounce with confidence upon what they do not understand.

The mind whose conceptions are in general clear and accurate, will not be forward in pronouncing a decisive opinion, upon a slight and partial investigation of any subject whatever: it is misconception that, in many instances, gives rise to prejudice and to injustice.

As accurate conception is alike necessary to the acquirement of knowledge, and to the practice of candour and humility, I shall make no apology for dwelling upon the subject at some length; pointing out the causes from which, as I apprehend, a deficiency in this faculty generally proceeds; and giving such hints as may be useful to its improvement in early life.

This faculty in a particular manner partakes of the dispositions of the mind. It accords with the tone of the passions; and as these incline to the cheerful or the melancholy, the conceptions will generally be found to be lively or languid. What



gives strength to this conclusion is, that upon subjects which correspond to the tone of the affections, the apprehension of the dullest person is sufficiently acute.

A selfish person, whose ideas upon every other subject are languid and confused, will have a clear and distinct discernment of all that relates to self-interest. I have known those who could not by any means be made to comprehend the simplest proposition upon any subject of science; whose ideas of the affairs, the feelings, and the interests of others were so faint and languid as to be with difficulty recalled; who nevertheless, had such clear and accurate conceptions upon whatever promised to gratify their own avarice or ambition, that they could, in these points, enter with ease into the most elaborate disquisition, pursue the most intricate chain of reasoning, or follow the longest series of calculations. It is evident from hence, that the dulness of conceptions upon other subjects, was not the defect of nature, but originated in



the predominance of selfishness; a proof that complete selfishness, wherever it prevails, engrosses the powers of attention.

And here let it be remarked, that in all the selfish and dissocial passions, such as envy, jealousy, rancour, &c. the flow of the ideas is dull and languid; and that wherever these passions predominate, the conceptions are never strong and lively. How great, then, is the folly of parents, who, while they wish their children to be possessed of wisdom and knowledge, pay no attention to the birth of those passions, which present the most insuperable bar to the accomplishment of their wishes!

Pride is a passion not particularly attached to any peculiar tone of disposition. It attacks the lively and the serious, the selfish and benevolent; but its operation upon the powers of conception, in these opposite characters, is essentially different. In strong and vigorous minds, pride sometimes stimulates to the desire of knowledge. In this case, it adds strength to the power

of conception; attention is then exerted, and exerted with effect. By means of this passion operating on an ardent mind, the task of instruction may doubtless be rendered easy to the tutor. By him, therefore, whose sole object is to give his pupil knowledge, pride must be considered in the light of an useful auxiliary. To those who consider the perfection of the moral character, as an object of still greater importance than the attainment of any, or even of all, the intellectual accomplishments, pride will appear in other colours; nor will they wish their children to pluck of the tree of knowledge, like our first parents, at the suggestion of a fiend!

Where pride unites itself to the timid and low-spirited, the apprehensions will never be found lively or vigorous, excepting on such subjects as correspond with the tone of the accordant passions. While upon such minds the recital of great and noble actions, instances of the most exalted generosity, and of the most disinterested

benevolence, make little or no impression, the conceptions are lively, with regard to the slightest indication of contempt; they are vigorous in the representation of injury or injustice; and wherever pride or self-love are concerned, they are uncommonly vivid.

Where a tendency to envy or malignity pervades the mind, the conception will be languid with regard to all that is sublime or beautiful, either in moral actions or sentiment; whilst with eagle eye it will discern every blemish. This, as has been already hinted, is the inevitable consequence of the direction given to attention; for in that direction alone will the conceptions be vigorous.

Far then from applauding, as a proof of genius, an extreme quickness of discernment with regard to what is faulty or absurd, we may fairly consider it as a habit no less injurious to the expansion of the mental powers, than to the delicacy of the moral feeling.

Wisely it has been ordered by nature, that the power of conception should appear in the mind at so early a period, as to admit of its being cultivated to some degree of perfection, before the dissocial passions have any abiding influence in the heart. The more this faculty is exercised upon material objects in early life, the less chance will these passions have of gaining an ascendancy. The works of nature and of art present an inexhaustible source of ideas to those who are taught to examine them with attention; and where the attention is thus directed, the trains of thought introduced into the mind will be of an opposite nature from those which produce turbulent emotion.

The manner in which children describe what they have seen or learned, affords the best criterion that I know of, whereby to estimate the strength and vigour of conception. By requiring clear and accurate descriptions, we do much more to invigorate this faculty, than by all the set lessons



in the world. Children, who have never been exercised in this way, are at first at a great loss for expression; and it is no small advantage to the mind to be thus set to work for words to express the new ideas it has acquired. A little assistance may at first be not only useful, but necessary. But of assistance in this way the parent ought never to be lavish; as it is one of the greatest drawbacks upon the improvement of the infant faculties, that teachers, to save themselves trouble, tell all, and leave the children to tell nothing.

I have formerly noticed, that the quickness or the slowness of the course of our ideas, depends much upon the disposition of the mind to melancholy or cheerfulness. Childhood is naturally cheerful, and the flow of ideas at that period of life is consequently rapid. Nature has wisely ordained that it should be so. For while the will has not yet attained the power of singling out any particular class of ideas



as objects of attention, a frequent repetition of the same idea becomes absolutely necessary, in order to its making such an impression on the mind, as can alone answer the purposes of education. Here, likewise, we may observe a wise provision made by nature for the cultivation of the first faculties that appear, and on the cultivation of which the strength of the other faculties ultimately depends. Incapable of long and fixed attention to any object, a repetition of the same ideas is absolutely necessary to the due operation of these powers. This circumstance I believe to be very little attended to. We judge too much of the minds of children by our own; our ideas, except when under the influence of some of the exhilarating passions, flow in slow succession. The frequent repetition of the same idea is to us unnatural, and consequently irksome; hence we rashly conclude that it must be the same with children. We therefore injudiciously press new ideas upon them before the mind is prepared for

their reception ; and by doing so, we often render inaccurate conception habitual.

Viewing the subject in this light, I consider the multitude of little books that are now given to children at an early age, as so many destroyers of their faculties. If the conceptions have not acquired vigour by being exercised on material objects, before they are employed on those emotions which it is the business of fiction to describe, I greatly apprehend that they will never be cultivated to perfection. The only books that are fit for children, are such as convey clear, just, and accurate ideas upon subjects to which the attention at that period ought chiefly to be directed. Nor will the books that are best calculated for aiding the infant mind in the acquirement of just ideas, be of any use, unless the ideas they give be permitted to make a due impression, which they never can do at a superficial glance.

The *half* conceptions which a child at first forms from the best book that can be

put into its hands, may prove equally injurious to its mind, as the erroneous ones conveyed by works that are less judicious. It is by frequent and repeated perusals, and by these alone, that a child can attain a clear and distinct comprehension of the meaning of even the most trifling story; nor will this re-perusal appear to a child, as it would do to us, tiresome and insipid, unless its appetite for novelty has been excited by too frequent gratification.

Observe with what delight an infant listens to the same tale that has been a hundred times repeated by his nurse, and a hundred times is heard with ever-new delight. In the limited number of the child's ideas, and in the velocity with which they pass through the mind, we may see the cause of this unsatiated pleasure received from the repetition of the same foolish tale. To these oral communications books succeed; and it would be well if both tales and books were always calculated to assist the opening faculties, to

awaken the benevolent affections, to give a proper direction to curiosity, and to inspire an early love of knowledge and virtue. In the "*Evenings at Home, or Juvenile Budget,*" all this appears to me to be effected in its utmost extent; and I am well convinced, that the child, who, from the time of its being able to read for itself with pleasure, till its eighth or ninth year, is restricted to these books alone for its literary amusement, will, at the end of that period, be found possessed of a greater number of clear and distinct ideas, and of a greater vigour of conception, than one that has run over all the instructive and entertaining stories that were ever written for children of that age.

In speaking of the books that are *read* by children, you will please to observe, that I restrict my meaning to those which they peruse of their own accord for their own amusement. The books which they read as lessons, I consider as distinct from these. The child, who never opens a book

but as a task, must have been the victim of neglect or mismanagement. Nature so strongly impels the young mind to seek the acquirement of new ideas, that if the curiosity she has implanted be entirely quenched, we may be assured that this has not been effected without some pains on our part. But curiosity, though not easily effaced, may be easily directed to low and grovelling objects; and it is not without some pains that it can be turned into those channels, where its activity will be truly useful. I have seen a little girl, whose burning curiosity no drawer that contained a piece of finery could escape, who would risk disgrace and punishment to gratify herself by peeping into the trunk or closet, which was prohibited to her approach; and who would yet evince such manifest indifference towards information of every other kind, that it was impossible to rouse in her a wish for instruction. Such is the consequence of the early direction given to curiosity.



The first step to clear and accurate conception, is the careful examination of material objects. Without this, the conceptions obtained from description must be languid and confused. Where the perceptive faculty has been sufficiently exercised, the conceptions obtained by the description of absent objects, or of the feelings and sensations of others, will be sufficiently lively, provided the language in which they are conveyed be intelligible. So many meanings are, through the poverty of language, attached to the same word, as to be the means of occasioning much confusion in the ideas of those of riper years: and I believe it often happens, that where a false association has been attached in infancy to a word not in common use, it remains indelible to the latest period of life. I was told by a gentleman of no common endowments, that in reading to his mother when a child something concerning the Patriarchs, he blundered on the word

*partridges*. His mother set him right, but without any explanation of the meaning of the term patriarch: so that when it next occurred, instead of venturing to pronounce it, he called out, "here, mamma, "are these *queer fowl* again!" Again she taught him to pronounce the word, but as she did not by clear explanation destroy the false association which had previously been formed, it continued so far to operate, that whenever he afterwards heard the word patriarch, the idea of partridges presented itself to his imagination.

Most words that are not in such common use as to be familiar at an early period, are capable of definition: and much pains ought to be bestowed in defining them as they occur, if we would have the conceptions clear and accurate. What is said upon this subject in "Practical Education," merits serious attention.

Before I conclude the present letter, I must beg leave again to revert to the case

of persons of weak and languid spirits, in whom the powers of observation frequently appear defective.

This melancholy temperament is sometimes hereditary, and sometimes occasioned by disease, but it is also sometimes born of mismanagement. From whatever cause it originates, it is a misfortune of such magnitude, as calls for our utmost exertion to prevent its progress, and, if possible, to effect its cure.

Mothers, I apprehend, are seldom aware of the important consequences which result from their conduct to beings of this description. There is something so amiable and endearing in the gentleness which commonly attends this langour of spirits, that it naturally inspires tenderness. This tenderness is increased by that helplessness which clings to the maternal bosom for support. But if this tenderness be not enlightened and guided by reason, it will prepare a never-ending fund of misery for its unhappy object.

The inevitable effect of indulgence in generating selfishness, I have explained at large in the former volume: and as selfishness is the never-failing concomitant of the disposition above described, it follows, that it is the particular duty of the parent to guard against nurturing and increasing this natural tendency.

From the languid flow of ideas in the low-spirited, proceeds an indolence of mind which terminates in torpid apathy. Selfishness is then the sole spring of action: benevolence may dwell upon the tongue; but no feelings, no affections, but such as are connected with self-love, ever touch the heart. Such an one finds friendship necessary to his support, to his comfort, nay to his very existence. He therefore clings to his friends with fondness; but what consolation, what comfort, what support, does he afford them in return? Does he enter with the same interest into the feelings of others, with which he expects others to enter into his? No. But this

deficiency of feeling does not proceed from a want of benevolence or of attachment. It proceeds from a want of conception with regard to every thing that does not concern self. How would many of our acquaintances start at the picture that is here drawn, if applied to themselves! Let us make a more useful application of it to those who are yet at a period of life, when the evils I have here pourtrayed admit of remedy.

In the education of children who indicate a tendency to this disposition, whether such tendency be hereditary or acquired, particular pains should be taken to lead the mind to attend to the feelings of others. Whatever services, whatever attentions they exact from others, they should be obliged in their turn to pay. If they are once permitted to imagine, that from the softness and delicacy of their dispositions, they have any right of exemption from the rule of "doing to others as they would have others do by them," they are inevi-



tably ruined. It is essential in such cases to use every means to increase the flow of ideas. Lively and exhilarating images ought incessantly to be presented to the mind, and instead of encouraging that disposition to study, which frequently appears prematurely in such persons, the mind ought to be roused to active and vigorous exertion. Whatever knowledge it acquires, it ought to be made freely to communicate; for, unless this be done, reading will be, to such a mind, only another mode of indulging indolence. To conquer the indolence that invariably adheres to such dispositions, every effort ought to be made. These efforts ought to be unceasing, and their efficacy will be much increased by frequently changing the attention from object to object. The variety and beauty of the material world will here be powerfully assistant to the tutor's views. While the perceptive faculties are thus exercised, the mind cannot sink into apathy, or indulge in the luxury

of indolent reverie. It will by these means, likewise, acquire that command of attention which is in all cases so eminently useful.

The person who has been so happy as to have attained the power of submitting the attention to the control of will, is in possession of an infallible remedy against many of the cares, and all the minor miseries of life. He who can turn his attention to the griefs or the joys of others, will never become the prey of selfish sorrow. Even in the langour of sickness, and under the pressure of severe pain, we have known people, who were capable of directing their attentions to subjects remote from self. This power over the attention is particularly difficult of attainment to the naturally timid and low-spirited. It is, however, to them peculiarly necessary; and no pains ought to be spared to put them in possession of it.

The devout affections, besides being of the utmost moment to such characters, as

offering them a source of continual support and consolation, will, if cheerful ideas be associated with them, prove essentially instrumental to fortitude. Before the devout and the benevolent affections, the disposition to selfishness vanishes, as the clouds of morning before the radiant sun. Let the susceptibility of the mind be cultivated under these auspices, and its conceptions of the sublime and beautiful will become so lively and vigorous, as to render it alive to the emotions of sublimity and beauty, whenever objects by which they ought to be excited are presented. By these means you will cultivate taste, invigorate the intellect, give new animation to the spirits, and render a character, which would by injudicious management and soothing indulgence have sunk into insignificance, happy in itself and useful to society.

Another and a powerful motive to the diligent improvement of the faculty now under consideration, will be found in the

assistance to be derived from it in inculcating a firm adherence to truth. Falsehood is the vice of weak and timid minds. To those whose conceptions are languid and confused, it is impossible that misrepresentation can ever appear in a very atrocious light. In these misrepresentations they are utterly unconscious how far they depart from the truth, because of the truth they have no distinct idea; and it is impossible, in consequence, to convince them of the turpitude of falsifying. By obtaining clear conceptions, and by being accustomed to give an accurate account of the conceptions it acquires, the mind becomes habituated to truth, at the same time that the distance betwixt truth and falsehood becomes in such minds actually enlarged, and the difficulty of departing from one to the other is consequently increased.

The confused and inaccurate conceptions of the vulgar, arising from a total neglect of this faculty in their early education, renders them for ever liable to the vice of

lying. Cunning takes its rise from the same source: and though many a departure from truth may be laid to the charge of *vanity*, I believe we shall generally find, that where the conceptions are clear, distinct, and vigorous, the character will be upright and sincere.



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## LETTER V.

### SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

*The Faculty of Conception possessed in different Degrees of Vigour.—How it may best be cultivated in those of slow Capacity,—Exemplified in a Variety of Instances.—Difference betwixt a Memory of Perception, and the Recollection of Ideas.—The Advantage of cultivating the latter.—Illustrations.*

THE greatest difference that exists with respect to intellect, betwixt individuals whose organs of perception are equally perfect, will be found to consist in the vigour or the weakness of the faculty of Conception. That this faculty is imparted by nature in very different proportions to the human race, will probably be acknow-

ledged by all who argue less from theory than experience. Like all the other intellectual faculties, it is, however, capable of so much improvement, that where it is possessed but in a very moderate degree, it may, by careful cultivation, be so strengthened and improved, as to conquer the deficiency; while, by contrary management, the conceptions which were naturally lively and vigorous, may, for want of use, become faint and languid.

To point out the most likely method of succeeding in the cultivation of this faculty, where it appears in a weak and imperfect state, shall be the subject of this letter; and as the hints I shall offer, are all the fruits of real observation, I feel some degree of confidence in proposing them.

The source of many errors upon this point is the vanity and partiality of parents, which will not permit them to see, or to acknowledge, even to themselves, that their children can possibly be deficient

in any faculty. Willing to be deceived, they permit prattling vivacity to impose upon them as proofs of quickness of apprehension; and ape-like imitation to pass upon them for acute judgment.

When these lively prattlers advance in years, people are surprised that what they looked upon as the promise of genius, should end in dulness and stupidity. Instead of this blind and ever misjudging partiality, would it not be better for parents accurately to examine and to appreciate the faculties of their children; that so, by an attentive cultivation, the barren soil, whose gaudy weeds pleased the eye and amused the fancy, might be rendered really productive, and enabled to bring its fruits to maturity?

Children of slow capacity require so much attention, such unwearied patience, such unremitting assiduity, that maternal affection is alone equal to the task. But richly must the mother be compensated, who, by her judicious labours, rescues the

child of her affections from the degrading state of ignorance and imbecility. When she reflects, that instead of the rational companion, the steady friend, the prudent adviser, whom she now finds in her child, the same child would, by a conduct less judicious on her part, have been doomed to grope through life in a state of helpless ignorance; enviable must be her feelings!

The mother, who, by attending to the early education of her children, gives herself a real title to the maternal character, has, in the cultivation of their faculties, a great and manifest advantage over every other preceptor.

“ She knows each chord, its various tone—

“ Each spring, its various bias.”

She is intimately acquainted with the progress, nay, with the very number of their ideas, and thus possesses the master-key of their minds. Shame on her who carelessly throws it aside, and indolently permits the

only gate that opens to improvement, to be shut for ever!

Great pains ought to be taken with children of slow capacity, to invigorate their perceptions. Without great pains, they will not receive the same number of ideas from external objects, with children of more lively parts: and as these ideas are the foundation of all intellectual improvement, it follows of course, that where they are imperfect or few in number, the disadvantage can never be remedied. To call the attention to the examination of external objects, and to aid the mind in forming conceptions concerning them, is therefore of infinitely more importance in the case under consideration, than is generally imagined. The parent who is much with her child, has this branch of education always in her power. Materials for it are ever at hand. The world of nature, and the works of art, are equally subservient to her purpose. Let us give an instance.



*Mother.* “ My dear, you are looking at the carpet, I see. Well, now, try if you can tell me of what it is made.”

*Child.* “ I don’t know, mamma.”

*Mother.* “ Examine it better. Feel it. Is it hard, like the floor?”

*Child.* “ No. It is soft, and it is prettier than the floor.”

*Mother.* “ Its colours have nothing to do with the question; the carpet would be as good a carpet, though not so pretty a one, if it had never been dyed at all. Look at it again, and try if you can find out what it is made of.”

*Child.* “ I now see threads in it. I believe it is made of big threads!”

*Mother.* “ You are partly right; but are these threads made of the same materials as the thread with which I am now sewing? Come, and look at it.”

*Child.* “ No, I see there is a difference; and the threads that make the carpet, are red, blue, and green.”

*Mother.* “The colours are of no consequence, let us not think of them at all. Let us examine a thread of the carpet, without minding the colour: and see, here is one; compare it with mine, and tell me where you perceive a difference.”

*Child.* “It is bigger and softer.”

*Mother.* “The softness may lead you to guess of what it is made.”

*Child.* “I believe it is made of wool.”

*Mother.* “And what is wool? Where, or how, does it grow?”

*Child.* “I cannot tell.”

*Mother.* “Wool grows upon the backs of sheep. It is clipped off every year with large scissars; and after being washed and carded, is spun into yarn, which you call threads.”

*Child.* “Well, mamma, tell me more.”

*Mother.* “It is then sent to the dyer, who dyes one part yellow, another green, and so on. It then goes to the weaver, and he weaves it by a pattern, as you see. And now you understand that the colour

is mere matter of choice or fancy; but that it is not absolutely necessary, like the wool, or the spinning, or the weaving."

*Child.* "Yes. I could tell it all now."

*Mother.* "No, not now, but I should like to hear it again to-morrow; and then we shall go and look at the sheep, and their pretty lambs; and you shall learn all about them."

All this may possibly appear highly nonsensical to those who think it is by books and tasks that every thing is to be learned. We may, however, venture to assert, that all the above conversation might be read as a lesson by a child of slow capacity, without its having the smallest conception of its meaning, or acquiring a single idea upon the subject; while given as I have described it, distinct and accurate notions are acquired by means of the perceptive faculties. It is by these, and these alone, that the conceptions of dull children are to be invigorated; and this not without

much pains and trouble on the part of the preceptor.

The difficulty which a stupid child finds in attending to the letters, the words, the stops, and the sentences, renders it altogether impossible that it should derive any new ideas from this source. While this difficulty subsists, all the little attention which it can command, will be absorbed in attempts at reading with propriety. The exertion of this attention is so disgusting to a torpid mind, as to create weariness and aversion. Nor can we wonder at this, when we consider that the perception of every letter is a distinct operation of the mind; that its sound is another, and must be associated with the figure of the letter; and that words are clusters of these associations, as sentences are of words. Where the power of conception is weak, the power of association must be proportionally defective; is it not, then, unreasonable to expect the operation of this faculty, before we have been at any pains to secure the

assistance of its forerunner? And should we, by dint of perseverance, of allurements, or of coercion, succeed in making the child a reader before the faculty of conception is so far opened as to enable it to receive any ideas from what it reads, what do we gain by it? *We* may, indeed, gain the pleasure of *thinking*, that the child makes some progress in learning; but, in reality, *it* gains nothing; of progress, it makes none.

While the learning to read is thus oppressive, I should think it better not to attempt it; nor deem it any loss, if the child should remain ignorant of its letters even for two or three years beyond the period, when children of a more ready apprehension may be taught to read with fluency and precision.

If, indeed, in the interim, it learns nothing; if the mother indolently acquiesces in the slow growth of its faculties, and instead of being actively assistant in their development, amuses herself in the prattle of words without meaning, the child will



be little the better for procrastinating the period of books and tasks. But if, instead of forcing the backward plant, she zealously endeavours to enrich the soil, her pains will be amply repaid. By a careful cultivation of the perceptions, by rousing indolence, and stimulating curiosity, the mind will be gradually expanded for the reception of new ideas. The easier branches of natural philosophy, and the simple principles of mechanics, will be found excellent assistants in opening the mind; and you may take it for granted, that a child of slow parts will be much more advantageously employed in learning the nature and properties of the objects around, from the lips of a sensible and affectionate parent, than in ineffectual attempts at learning the *signs of words*.

Children are all, in some degree, imitative animals; but as the intellectual powers develope, as the number of ideas increases, as the attention is awakened to an examination of the works of art and

nature, and as judgment begins to be called into action, the principle of imitation is diminished, or appears to be so, as it comes under the direction of judgment. The child of slow parts, to the improvement of whose faculties no proper attention has been paid, will remain a merely imitative creature during life. By imitation it will learn the use of words, and, if it is much in company with grown-up people, of words that are not usually found in the vocabulary of children. One cannot but smile to observe, how easily parents are deceived by this quality of imitation in their children. While the sententious observations of the little prater strike an intelligent observer with pity and disgust, they listen to the infant oracle with complacency and delight! Affectation is the never-failing consequence of this; affectation, which not all the graces and accomplishments can render tolerable, is thus united with folly and ignorance! The poor child remains unconscious of this union; it

is destitute of conceptions whereby it can apprehend the incongruity; and where the conceptions are very dull, the nice feelings of propriety cannot exist.

It is by a lively sense of the impressions which our words and actions make upon others, that our manners are chiefly formed. Those who have not a lively perception of what those feelings are, must be for ever erring against propriety.

Every one must have observed, that the feelings of propriety are much stronger in some minds than in others. Let us single out the mind in which the sense of propriety seems to be exquisitely delicate. We shall perceive, that it only differs from the mind in which it appears most obtuse, by that quickness of perception which is acquired by the exercise of attention.

The person who never errs against propriety in words, conduct, or behaviour, must not only have acquired just notions of right and wrong, but must have directed his attention towards a thousand

minute circumstances, which escape the observation of common or vulgar minds. A sense of propriety, with regard to etiquette, which forms what is often thought the most important part in the education of persons of rank, seldom fails of being early and effectually cultivated; for in this instance, pride aids the tutor's views in quickening attention. But the ease with which attention is in this instance made to operate, deserves our notice. If a child can so soon be made sensible of what is due to a certain rank, as to detect the least infringement of those trifling etiquettes to which it has been taught to pay minute attention, we may from thence learn at what an early period we may begin to inspire children with notions of propriety founded on a wider and a nobler basis; and that even from earliest infancy we may direct their attention to observe the feelings of others.

Instead of trusting to lessons for implanting the sense of propriety, we ought

to direct the attention to what is proper and improper in speech and manners, by associating the idea of approbation with the former, and of disgrace with the latter. This is sometimes done in so injudicious a manner, as to be a source of great torment to the child and to the spectators. It is not bows and curtsies, and complimentary phrases, that ought to constitute a child's notions of propriety. These a child learns as a monkey or parrot would; but a child may learn what neither monkey nor parrot can, for it may learn to pay attention to what others feel from its behaviour, and to avoid doing or saying what gives trouble or uneasiness. When a child has never learned thus to direct its attention, it may be tutored into proper behaviour in after life; but we have no reason to expect that its feelings of propriety will ever be very delicate. It is, therefore, highly incumbent upon those who have the guardianship of children of slow capacity, to use every means of awakening their attention



to the feelings, rather than to the manners of others. To discourage gross and palpable imitation, to inspire modesty, and to promote that simplicity of manners which is its inseparable companion.

We may endeavour to do this by lessons; but the attempt will be vain, the labour fruitless. We may lecture upon propriety for ever; but where the conceptions are so dull as to impart no intuitive feeling of the conceptions of others, affectation and formality will be the result of all our pains. The behaviour of children who have been thus lectured into good-breeding, is always stiff and formal; and the difficulty of changing habits that are thus formed is so great, that the ridicule of companions is, perhaps, the only means by which a change can be ever afterwards effected.

It is not by lectures, that the manners of such children as we now speak of, (or indeed of any children) ought to be formed. Children that are quick of apprehension will imperceptibly form their own; but

those of a contrary character ought to be made sensible of every impropriety at the moment of committing it. If this is done from a very early age, habits of propriety will be early formed; so that they will neither offend by rudeness, nor disgust by formality and affectation. No habits will, however, be of any avail in regulating their conduct according to the laws of prudence and decorum in after-life, but in proportion as the faculty of conception has been opened and improved. Upon this the taste, the judgment, and all the intellectual powers, alike depend.

A young person will naturally seek the society of those whose conversation it has faculties to comprehend. When it is the tattle of the vulgar and the illiterate that alone comes within this description, the vulgar and illiterate will be the chosen companions of the hours of relaxation. Hence low cunning, disguise, hypocrisy, and all the little meannesses which render a character detestable and odious. And all this may be the

result of that blind partiality and self-indulging indolence, which either will not see the deficiency of a child in intellectual endowments, or seeing, will not take the trouble to apply the remedy!

By timely attention in very early life, every thing short of idiocy may be improved. Gentleness, patience, and assiduity, are indeed all essential to the due performance of the important task; but by gentleness, patience, and assiduity, I have seen wonders performed upon minds which were apparently in a state of the most hopeless imbecility.

It is absolutely necessary in this case for the tutor to subdue all quickness of temper, all irritability of feeling; for by these the stupidity of the pupil will inevitably be increased. It is easy to conceive what a wretched tutor such a character as Rousseau must have made to a lad of slow parts; we accordingly find, by his own accounts, that he left his pupils more stupid than he found them.

It, at first view, appears extraordinary, that where the power of conception is very dull, the memory should, with respect to some things, be tenacious; while, with respect to others, it is altogether deficient. A very slow child will often be found to get lessons by heart as soon as, nay sometimes sooner, than one who is ten times as intelligent. But let such time elapse, as that the *words* of the lesson are forgotten by both, and then examine them upon the subject; you will then find that the child whose memory appeared at first to be the best of the two, in fact remembers nothing; and that it is he alone who had some notion of the subject, who now recollects any thing concerning it. In recollecting the sense, the child is assisted by the ideas with which it was connected. The other is destitute of such assistance; for in his mind the sound of one word was merely connected with the sound of another; and when the sounds are forgotten, all must be forgotten. Does not this clearly prove,



that the memory of the first was entirely confined to its perceptions ; while the second, who had exercised upon the subject of its lesson some degree of conception and judgment, could recal the ideas conveyed by those, when the particular sounds of the words had escaped the memory?

From the foregoing and similar instances, I think it evidently appears, that memory is so entirely dependant on the power of attention, as to be unable to operate farther than attention has previously operated.

Mr Locke says of memory as follows:  
 “ Memory, in an intellectual creature, is  
 “ necessary in the next degree to percep-  
 “ tion. It is of so great moment, that  
 “ where it is wanting, all the rest of our  
 “ faculties are in a great measure useless;  
 “ and we, in our thoughts, reasonings, and  
 “ knowledge, could not proceed beyond  
 “ present objects, were it not for the assis-  
 “ tance of our memories, wherein there  
 “ may be *two defects*. *First*, that it loses  
 “ the idea quite; and so far it produces



“ perfect ignorance. *Secondly*, that it moves  
 “ slowly, and retrieves not the ideas that  
 “ it has, and are laid up in store, quick  
 “ enough to serve the mind upon occasions.  
 “ This, if it be in a great degree, is *stupi-*  
 “ *dity*; and he who, through this default  
 “ in his memory, has not the ideas that are  
 “ really preserved there, ready at hand  
 “ when need and occasion calls for them,  
 “ were almost as good be without them  
 “ quite, since they serve him to very little  
 “ purpose. The dull man, who loses the  
 “ opportunity whilst he is seeking in his  
 “ mind for those ideas that should serve  
 “ his turn, is not much more happy in his  
 “ knowledge than one that is perfectly  
 “ ignorant.”

Again. “ This faculty of laying up and  
 “ retaining the ideas that are brought into  
 “ the mind, several *other animals* seem to  
 “ have to a great degree as well as man.  
 “ For, to pass by other instances, birds  
 “ learning of tunes, and the endeavours  
 “ one may observe in them to hit the notes

“right; put it past doubt with me, they  
 “have perception, and retain ideas in their  
 “memories, and use them for patterns.  
 “For it seems to me impossible, that they  
 “should endeavour to conform their voices  
 “to notes, (as ’tis plain they do) if they  
 “had no ideas.”

It appears to me, that the peculiar defects of memory, so ably described in the former of the above passages, apply exclusively to the memory of our conceptions; and that in every instance in which the power of recalling our ideas is either entirely wanting, or so defective as to be exercised with difficulty, the evil will be found to have originated, in an habitual want of attention to that class of objects on which the conceptions were supposed to have been exercised. Let a description of a birth-day ball be at the same time read to a ball-going lady and a professor of mathematics, and, after the lapse of a week, require of each an account of the dresses, dances, &c.—which of these two

do we imagine will find most difficulty in recollecting the particulars?

The observations made by the illustrious author, from whom I lately quoted with regard to the memory of animals, apply, I think, exclusively to the memory of things which have been the objects of perception. Between this species of memory, and the memory of our former conceptions, there is I apprehend a specific difference. Idiots and brutes remember the impressions made upon their senses as well as the person of enlightened intellect.\* With these impressions, the ideas of time and place are powerfully associated. The horse never fails to remember the spot, where he beheld the object which startled him; nor does the little turnspit-dog forget the hour which calls him to duty: yet neither the dog nor horse have clear conceptions of the objects which they thus appear so perfectly to recollect.

\* See note at the end of the volume.

With all the attention paid to the cultivation of memory in modern education, I am afraid that, upon strict examination, we should sometimes find, that it is the memory of perception alone which our endeavours tend to improve. Useful, without doubt, this branch of memory is; and as it comes to maturity with the first of the faculties which the human mind displays, it may be effectually employed, before the conceptions are sufficiently vigorous to give exercise to the other. But let us not expect more from the memory of perception than it is calculated to produce. Let us not continue to bestow our sole attention upon its cultivation, after the period that the higher branch of memory has power to operate. As it may be of importance to point out the consequences of this error, I shall beg your attention to the following remarks.

That words are a medium by which ideas or conceptions are communicated to the mind, must be admitted on all hands. Every

word is certainly either significant of some idea in itself, as are nouns and adjectives; or serves to connect ideas, as we see done by prepositions and participles. But we all know the sound of a word to be one thing, and its meaning to be another. With very little trouble, a person of clear perceptions may learn the Greek alphabet, and acquire the proper pronunciation of Greek words; but if he knows not the ideas of which these words are the signs, I cannot see that he is one whit the wiser.

I may read one of Sir Isaac Newton's profoundest problems, as well and as distinctly as the mathematical professor at either University; but while destitute of all corresponding ideas, while without a link whereon to fasten the chain of reasoning, I can neither form nor retain an idea upon the subject. Do I strive to recollect the subject, I find nothing but a confused heap of ideas, which are the faint images of the appropriate meaning of the words, as I have heretofore been accustomed to



apply them; but nothing wherewith to associate them, so as to make sense upon the subject. I may; nevertheless, commit the problem to memory, for memory will retain the ideas of perception; and I may either do this by means of attentively looking at the words, or by repeating them aloud till the perception is sufficiently strong to become an object of memory. In either case, I shall be equally assisted in my task by the arrangement of the words; as the way in which the words stand with regard to each other, associates the idea of each word with that which follows it, whether this association be made by means of the eye or the ear. Well, after all this trouble, how much do I know of Newton's problem? Have I one more idea upon the subject, than I had before I began to learn it? Surely no. Go, then, and ask your little boys and girls, when they come from school, what ideas they have upon geography, history, arithmetic, &c.; for exactly in the same way as I have here des-

cribed, are these sciences frequently taught to children, while their powers of conception are not yet sufficiently opened to receive ideas upon subjects far less abstruse.

Let us now proceed with my illustration, and suppose, that after having got the problem by heart, such a length of time should have elapsed, as effaced all remembrance of the words and their relative position. Once lost, the memory of them must be lost for ever. For there is this difference betwixt the forgetfulness of a thing that has once been distinctly conceived, and the forgetfulness of what we have merely learned by eye or ear, that though the former may not be ready at our call, it is nevertheless in the mind, (though in a dormant state) and will be found to be so on accurate research; while the latter is not only faded, but totally obliterated. Hence it would never be in my power, to the end of my days, to recal the problem I had so learned. But let us suppose,

(and I sincerely wish the supposition could be realized) that I had regularly learned the elements of mathematics, and been enabled to go on, step by step, from problem to problem, having all along the most accurate and clear conceptions of the whole; the new ideas which I should in that case have received from the problem in question, would then have been but an addition to the foregoing chain, and would have added no less to its solidity than extension. The terms in which these ideas were communicated might fade from my remembrance; but the ideas themselves would remain engraven on the tablet of memory for ever.

Ideas which the mind has thus received, arrange themselves in order (figuratively speaking) with ideas of the same class: with these they become associated, and it is by means of this association that they are recalled at pleasure. Frequently, indeed, may they be recalled, when the

source from which they were derived is lost to our remembrance.

People who are not aware of these laws of arrangement and association, are frequently disheartened, on finding how little, even of that which they have read with the utmost attention, is accurately retained by the memory. But let not such people be discouraged: since they may certainly be assured, that if their conceptions of the subject have been clear and distinct, and that they have given them that degree of attention which is essential to memory, the ideas they have received will never be totally lost. They will be mingled with other ideas; and with them be recalled, as occasion offers.

While the faculty of conception remains uncultivated, the memory, even of the objects of perception, must be in many instances defective.

The obvious assistance which the memory receives from the associations of ideas, has induced some philosophers to explain



the phenomena of memory entirely upon that principle.\* Be that as it may, we are all sensible of its present operation; and we must likewise be sensible, that the greater the number of our ideas, the more materials will the laws of association have to operate upon in our minds. These ideas are like so many pegs on which to hang the new ideas we receive. Where the pegs are weak, or few in number, little will be hung up, all will fall down into the abyss of forgetfulness. Now those whose memory is chiefly employed on objects of perception, are exactly in this predicament; there are no pegs in the mind of such, whereon to hang their new ideas, but two, viz. time and place; these are the only associations which assist the memory of the vulgar. Events which produce in enlightened minds a series of useful reflections, serve with them no other purpose, but to recal some former period, when something similar occurred.

\* See Hartley.



“ Yes,” says the steward, “ I remember when I was  
 “ at my Lady Shrewsbury’s,  
 “ Such a thing as this happened, *just about the time*  
 “ *of gooseberries.*”\*

Shakespeare gives many admirable instances of this species of association in vulgar characters, and to these I refer the reader,

If the remarks which I have ventured to make, are admitted to be founded in truth, it evidently follows, that the cultivation of that branch of memory which belongs to perception, will have no influence in expanding the powers of the mind. That it is only by cultivating and improving the faculty of conception that this can be accomplished; and that while this is unattended to, the whole Encyclopædia may be got by heart, without giving any more ideas to the pupil, than if he had been all the time employed in repeating the letters of the alphabet.

Is then the cultivation of the memory of perception a matter of no importance?

\* Swift.

Ought memory never to be exercised, but upon subjects which children can fully comprehend? To these queries I shall take a future opportunity of giving a satisfactory answer; and shall leave you for the present to reflect upon what has been already advanced.

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 LETTER VI.

## CONCEPTION.

*Lively Tempers particularly liable to Inaccuracy.—How this Fault is to be obviated.—The proper Exercise of Memory in early Life considered.—Illustrations.*

BEFORE I proceed to make any further observations upon the subject of memory, I shall take notice of the third cause assigned to Mr Locke for that imperfect discernment (or conception) which renders the mind incapable of discriminating ideas one from another; namely, *the hastiness and precipitancy natural to some tempers.*

I have formerly had occasion to observe, that the rapid course of ideas in the minds

of the lively and vivacious, is inimical to attention; and that without attention there can be no accurate perception, no memory, and consequently no discernment. It is, therefore, to dispositions of this cast, of the utmost importance to acquire the habit of commanding attention in early life. In proportion to the vivacity of the disposition will be the difficulty of acquiring this habit; and in proportion to the difficulty is the necessity of making the attainment.

This subject will rise into importance, when we consider, that it is entirely owing to a want of proper attention to it during the early part of life, that genius is so often rendered not only an useless, but a baneful gift. Minds which eagerly catch at new ideas, without accuracy, without discrimination, will be for ever liable to misconception: they will be ardent in error; and, alike precipitate in conduct as in judgment, they will act, as they assert, with rashness and presumption. They may acquire knowledge, but wisdom will not be

be the result of the acquirement. They may be brilliant, but they will never be useful.

The first misfortune to which children who have this natural quickness of parts are commonly exposed, is vanity: and no sooner is vanity engendered, than a fresh stimulus is given to that rapid succession of ideas, which is ever inimical to sober and fixed attention. Vanity is, in minds of this cast, easily called forth: it is congenial to the disposition, and requires but the transient breath of praise to blow it into a flame. Let us beware, then, lest in the warmth of our admiration at the quickness of the capacity, we render it incapable of strength and vigour. The eye that can discern objects clearly and accurately, is of much more value than that which takes in a number at a rapid glance, without any distinct discernment of their various distances and proportions. While the former power remained defective, it would be of little consequence that the latter was, by



the use of stimulants, so far increased as to enable the eye to see at once a still greater number of indistinct and imperfect images. To give perfection to the sense of sight, we must be able to perceive objects clearly and distinctly, as well as quickly. And just so it is with the mind; which, if destitute of the capability of discrimination, will reap no advantage from the number of imperfect ideas with which it is stored.

Instead of stimulating these quick and forward dispositions to the acquirement of new ideas, we ought to bestow the utmost pains in checking the rapidity of their thoughts; and in discouraging the hastiness of their conclusions. While the slow ought to be led with gentleness, these ought to be made keenly sensible of every error; especially when these errors have their source in the rashness of confidence, and the presumption of self-conceit. They ought to be made to see and to feel the advantages of attention, and every oppor-

tunity should be seized for bringing the disadvantages arising from a want of attention home to their feelings. A seemingly quick apprehension of what they learn, ought never to be accepted. They must be made to view every subject in every light of which it is capable, and to examine it in all its parts, so as to acquire not only lively, but distinct and true notions concerning it.

Habits of accuracy and arrangement are of such importance to these volatile spirits, that they ought to be carried into every part of their business ; and on no pretext to be dispensed with. Their employments, their amusements, their hours of meals, of dressing, and of relaxation, in short, the whole of their time, ought to be under the strict invariable rule of discipline. There is an eccentricity attending these characters, which, without constant attention, will be perpetually flying off into some extravagance : and if this be much indul-

ged, we may bid a long adieu to all improvement.

Attention and arrangement are what these minds peculiarly stand in need of; and every thing that can contribute to the acquirement of these necessary habits, is to them of the utmost consequence. We may be certain, that the desultory will come to perfection in nothing. Every rule with regard to the employment of time, which is strictly adhered to, is one step towards acquiring those habits of arrangement in our ideas, of which I have already explained the necessity and use. It is here, and only here, that schools have, in general, an advantage over private tuition, especially with regard to females. The mother who, for want of proper arrangement of her own plans, permits the household economy, and the reception of visitors, to be for ever interrupting the course of her instructions, need not expect that much benefit from them will ever result to her children. It is of little consequence how these chasms

are filled up: by the indolent they will probably be spent in sauntering idleness, and in frolicksome mischief by the vivacious; but they will prove alike injurious to both.

The cultivation of every faculty is attended with a considerable degree of effort; and effort does not cease to be painful until it is relieved by habit. Where the effort is subject to irregular interruptions, it will continue to be for ever painful, and will consequently be avoided as much as possible. It ought to be the peculiar care of the preceptor to render these efforts easy, by confirming them into habits; which cannot be done but by perseverance.

Every difficulty will be smoothed by the habit of attention; but the habit of attention must be the effect of many painful efforts in the quick and lively, as well as in the slow and dull. Very different, however, are the means to be used, in exciting these opposite characters to the effort of attention. In the languid, we must awaken

the dormant spirit of curiosity; we must endeavour to animate the spirits, to enliven the vivacity, and to increase the flow of ideas, by all that is cheerful and exhilarating. When the mind is in this train, the attention may, with ease, be turned to the examination of objects from which new and useful ideas are to be received. But let not the attention be worn out. Let it not, in such subjects, be ever stretched to the point of weariness; or the mind will again sink into torpidity.

To fix the attention of the volatile and precipitate, a very different course must be pursued. We must begin at a very early period, to demand accuracy in the examination of objects. We must bring the spirits under the subjection of authority, by enforcing a ready and implicit obedience. Instead of seeking, as in the other case, to exhilarate the spirits, by presenting a variety of cheerful images to the mind, we must use our utmost endeavour to allay their effervescence, without injur-



ing the temper, or repressing cheerfulness and vivacity. We must accustom them, as soon as possible, to a moderate degree of restraint; and, above all other things, we must endeavour to subdue the pride that is congenial to such tempers, and in its place to plant the grace of genuine humility. If we succeed in this, we shall have rendered the effort of attention not only possible, but easy; and then it will be our business to direct it to the acquirement of just, clear, and accurate conceptions.

The faculty of conception in these two opposite characters, and the different methods to be observed in improving it, may be compared to the process of crystallization in some chemical experiments. In these it sometimes happens, that in one instance the solution must be stirred and agitated before a single crystal will appear; while in mixtures of an opposite nature, the fermentation must be made to subside,

and all must be rendered calm and still, or the particles will never coalesce.

The very opposite methods that are here described as absolutely necessary towards remedying the opposite causes of imperfection, in the faculty of conception, can evidently never be attempted but in domestic education. Wherever numbers are to be educated together, one rule, one system, must serve for all. There the half-formed conceptions of the quick, and the non-conceptions of the slow, pass equally current. The same task is got by both: the same routine of lessons, the same exercises of memory upon words without ideas, falls to the lot of all. The consequence is, that the hasty and precipitate become prejudiced and superficial, and that the slow and languid remain indolent and ignorant.

To children of keen and lively perceptions, it is of the greatest consequence that the preceptor should be quick and penetrating; and to all who are engaged in the

education of youth, it is absolutely essential, that they should be able instantly to discern the degree and accuracy of the conception formed in the mind of the child, on whatever subject it may be engaged.

Indolence and partiality are insuperable obstacles to this discernment. These will always accept of a "yes," or "I understand it," from the pupil, as sufficient proofs of clear and accurate conception; while to a less partial or more discerning spectator, the countenance will betray the absence or the vacancy of the mind within.

A good lady I once knew, who devoted much of her time to the instruction of the ignorant. It happened, that I was by one morning when one of her little *protegees* was reading to her in the Bible. The subject was the taking of Jericho. At every time that Joshua marched round the walls, a pause was made, and a lecture given by the good lady on the wonder-working power of Providence; of which I evidently saw her little auditor understood not one

word. At length the trumpets sounded, and “now, Betty, now you will see how “the walls of this wicked place will fall “at the prophet’s voice!”

I here begged leave to speak, “Pray, “Betty, what was Jericho? was it a man, “or a woman, or a place, or what?”

“I believe it was a woman, Ma’am,” returned Betty, with great *sang-froid*.

I make no doubt that instances may at this moment occur to your recollection, when, upon such *mal-apropos* examinations, answers would have been returned, as little satisfactory to the preceptress as that I have above related. Nay, it is more than probable, that if you have ever chanced to be present when a book beyond a common novel has been read aloud to a company of ladies; or, above all, if you have ever attended a philosophical lecture; you may possibly have had occasion to remark the formation of conceptions no less erroneous and incongruous.

This most essential difference may ever be observed betwixt those who have early been accustomed to clear and distinct ideas, and those who have been in the habit of receiving inaccurate and superficial ones; that on a subject equally new to both, the former will examine and inquire, and be thoroughly informed, before they profess belief; whereas the latter catches at the first idea, right or wrong, and confidently asserts belief, before there has been time or proof to afford conviction.

It is in early life only, that this rashness will admit of cure. In early life, therefore, its cure ought to be assiduously endeavoured; and few more effectual remedies will be found than frequent mortification. This mortification is, so severe a punishment to an ardent mind, that to avoid it, it will willingly submit to the painful effort of attention. Mortification must, however, be administered with a cautious and judicious hand; else it will harden the mind, instead of humbling it.



It must be made to result from a sense of its own precipitancy, and led to perceive, of its own accord, where that precipitancy plunged it into error; and by tracing back its steps, it will lose much of that self-confidence, which is the great bane of youth in modern times.

That much of the self-sufficiency and arrogance, which is so often, and alas! so justly, complained of by the observing moralists of our age, may be traced to the source of a superficial education, I, for my share, have no doubt. By learning a little of many things, without acquiring just and accurate ideas upon any, they in fact learn nothing but conceit and presumption. Having never been made to feel the necessity of acquiring clear and distinct conceptions upon whatever subject engaged their attention, they are unconscious of their deficiency. They conceive not the confusion that reigns in their minds; but conscious of having some ideas upon subjects with which those they esteem the vulgar

and the ignorant are altogether unacquainted, they pique themselves upon this fancied superiority, and imagine, poor things! that they know all things; when, in fact, they know nothing.

When a mind of quickness and vivacity has been thus accustomed to the reception of half formed images, it will never submit to the control of judgment, nor cultivate the faculty of reflection. These higher powers of the mind will lie for ever dormant; and the sole guidance of conduct will be submitted to the impulse of feeling. The consequences of this I need not portray; they are, alas! too glaring, and occur too frequently, to stand in need of animadversion.

Hence we may infer the great importance of cultivating a faculty, on the strength of which we entirely depend for the clearness and accuracy of our ideas; and must perceive that the consequences resulting from a due attention to

this material point, will be infinitely more beneficial to our pupils, than any that could arise from multiplying the objects of study at an early age. A child should, in fact, have no more to learn than it can learn well. All rules for beginning this or that branch of science are nugatory and absurd. The object which ought to be for ever in the parent's eye, and to which all endeavours ought to be directed, is the perfecting all the powers of the mind in such a manner, as that when the period of maturity arrives, they may all be employed in promoting the happiness (the temporal and eternal happiness) of the individual and of society. The education that tends not to this end, is worse than labour lost. It perverts the intentions of Providence, by preventing the expansion of the intellectual faculties; it buries the most precious gifts of heaven; and, by sowing the seeds of pride and presumption, it scatters vice and folly throughout the world!

I may be thought very bold in attempting to overturn the established laws of fashion; those laws by which the generality of parents are guided in the system of education. But however submissive to her decrees in matters of slight importance, I cannot help thinking, that with regard to the culture to be given to the intellectual and moral faculties, it is reason, not fashion, that ought to be consulted.

When little miss, or little master, come home from school, we are stunned by the recital of their accomplishments. They are all skilled in languages, and expert in science; all equally favoured by the Muses and the Graces. Nothing can equal the delight which a benevolent mind experiences in the contemplation of such perfection! "How rapidly," it is inclined to think, "must knowledge and virtue be diffused throughout the world, when these tender blossoms of wisdom shall have ripened to maturity! See the blest effects of strewing the path of learning

“ with flowers! What formerly cost years  
 “ of attention and perseverance, is now  
 “ accomplished in less than as many months.  
 “ Surely, surely, we have very much im-  
 “ proved upon the method of our forefa-  
 “ thers; and of these improvements the  
 “ next generation will taste the happy  
 “ fruits.”

Yes, we have improved upon the wisdom of our ancestors, pretty much in the same manner, as he who should exchange an oak wood for a grove of Lombardy poplars; and if we lay aside all idea of durability, strength, and utility, the young poplar will, I acknowledge, claim the preference. But when we come to apply the one and the other to useful purposes, we shall have no reason to think ourselves gainers by the exchange.

In our vain attempts to overturn the order of nature, by presenting objects and pursuits to the mind, which demand the exertion of faculties of which it is not yet in possession, we are guilty of a double



species of imposition. We impose upon our pupils, by making them conceive that they get ideas of things, on which they have, in reality, no ideas; and we impose upon ourselves by their seeming progress—an imposition which is greatly aided by the facility with which the sound of words is committed to memory in early life. Thus, without paying any attention to the cultivation of the first and fundamental faculties, we flatter ourselves that we have abridged the path to wisdom and knowledge; while, in reality, we have been leading them from it, in the direct road to conceit and ignorance.

When we consider that the exercise of attention is absolutely necessary towards distinct perception and accurate discernment; and reflect how difficult it is to rouse attention in the slow, and to check the rapid succession of ideas in the quick, so as to give attention leave to operate; we shall perceive, that a multiplicity of things to be learned at once, must inevitably tend

to retard the progress of the faculties. Those who have experienced how difficult it is to give just, and clear, and distinct notions to a child, upon any subject which is not the immediate object of its external senses, must be sensible of the utter impossibility of its learning many things well at the same time. Where the attention is turned from object to object, the consequence will be, that it will fix on none; not, at least, for such a length of time as to acquire clear and distinct conceptions. It is the perceptions only that will in this case be exercised; the words will be seen, they will be heard, and they will be repeated. These perceptions will be committed to memory; but in all this process there is neither knowledge, judgment, nor discernment; and the more completely the time is filled by such employment, the more will the development of these faculties be retarded.

This leads to the queries with which my last letter concluded. Is it proper to

restrict the exercise of memory in childhood to subjects whereon it has acquired just and accurate notions? Is it never to be exercised upon words, of whose meaning it has no distinct ideas? I should be sorry to be so understood. I think the memory may be exercised with great advantage in childhood, upon words which can, at that period, convey no distinct ideas to the mind; but these are words which are afterwards to be made use of; they are the tools with which the mind is, at a future period, to work. Such are the rules of grammar; the terms made use of in the sciences, which are to form a part of the future studies; and, in short, all those general classifications, which tie, as it were, the objects of knowledge into separate parcels, and thus abridge the labour of research and arrangement.

Every one, who at an advanced period of life has attempted to instruct himself in any branch of science, must be sensible how much the difficulty is increased, by

the loss of the aptitude, which memory has in early life, for retaining mere perceptions. What is clearly conceived upon the subject, the memory faithfully retains; but it is not without great and repeated efforts that the necessary *terms* come to be familiarly recollected. I have known several persons, who have been by this difficulty deterred from the pursuit of botany, chemistry, and other sciences, for the acquirement of which they felt the most ardent inclination. Had the technical terms belonging to those sciences been committed to memory, at that period of life when words (that is to say, perceptions) are remembered with facility, the sciences I have mentioned would have been attained without the smallest difficulty.

The grammatical rules of every language come exactly under the same description. Persons to whom these rules have been familiar from the period of infancy, easily acquire the habit of arranging their words



with propriety; while those who have not at an early period made this acquirement, though by the study of philosophical grammar, they may attain a perfect knowledge of its principles, yet will they in practice be frequently at a loss, and often liable to error. I candidly confess, that I speak this from my own experience; and am sensible that a more perfect acquaintance with the rules of grammar, acquired even by rote in early life, would have saved me many a painful hour of future study.

Here, then, have I presented you with a wide field for the exercise of the memory of perceptions. But deceive not yourself; deceive not your child into an opinion that it has obtained any *knowledge* from these exercises. Let them be looked upon as they really are—mere materials, which are to be made use of at the proper period. Of real use they will certainly be found; they will be as well-tempered mortar in the construction of the solid edifice. But you must not so far mistake, as to consider



this mortar as the building; if you do, the intellectual fabric will never be reared.

It is, I believe, a very generally received notion, that a taste for poetry is inspired by the recitation of verses. Let us examine in what this taste consists.

Poetry addresses itself particularly to the imagination and to the feelings. "In poetry," says Mr Stewart, "the effect is inconsiderable, *unless upon a mind which possesses some degree of the author's genius; a mind amply furnished, by its previous habits, with the means of interpreting the language which he employs; and able, by its own imagination, to co-operate with the effects of the art.*" And is it by a senseless repetition of the poet's words, that all these indispensable requisites are to be acquired? I grant, that by the repetition of smooth verses, the ear may become sensible of harmonious measure; and this, I believe, often enough passes for poetical taste. But where the mind is incapable of keeping pace with the rapid associations

of the poet; where the finest allusions are lost for want of conceptions to apprehend their meaning; where the finest imagery presents no object to the mind; the emotions that are excited have surely no affinity to the sublime or beautiful. Even in descriptive poetry, unless the objects have been familiar to the perceptions, it is impossible that the most just and beautiful description can convey any ideas to the mind.

. Where the perceptive powers have been sufficiently exercised upon natural objects, so as to render the greater part of a poetical description intelligible, great advantage may indeed arise from the perusal; because, in that case, the pleasure which the mind receives from seeing the images with which it has been familiar, set in a new, and more elegant, and elevated point of view, will serve to enliven the powers of curiosity and observation, and prove a stimulus to the acquirement of new ideas.

I well remember how eagerly I caught the information, that bells were worn by the leaders of the flock, in most parts of England. The custom was unknown in the part of the country where I passed my childhood, and consequently the first lines of a poetical description which I ardently admired, were to me unintelligible.\* The remaining lines presented objects with which I had long been familiar. The simple superstitions of the peasantry were known to me; I had frequently heard their origin explained, and their folly pointed out; but the colours thrown over them

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\* *The following are the lines alluded to:*

- “ When Blouselind expir’d, the wether’s bell
- “ Before the drooping flock pour’d forth her knell;
- “ The solemn death-watch click’d the hour she dy’d,
- “ And shrilling crickets in the chimney cry’d;
- “ The boding raven on her cottage sat,
- “ And with hoarse croaking, warn’d us of her fate;
- “ The lambkin, which her wonted prudence bred,
- “ Dropp’d on the plains that fatal instant dead;
- “ Swarm’d on a rotten stick, the bees I spy’d,
- “ Which erst I saw when Goody Dobson dy’d.”

by the charm of poetry presented them to my view in a new and interesting light.

And now, let me refer it to your judgment, (setting all adherence to custom, to theory, and to prejudice, entirely aside) whether a relish for the beauties of poetical description will not be much more likely to result from a lively attention to all the images which are employed by the poet, as they become objects of perception, than by the repetition of words without ideas? A familiar and intimate acquaintance with the objects of nature will not, it is true, be always sufficient to inspire poetical taste; but without an intimate acquaintance with natural objects, the conceptions of the poet can never be understood; for it is from the material world that all the finest imagery of the poet is derived. From the same source we have all our ideas of the sublime and beautiful. The descriptions of the poet, by calling our attention to these objects, increases the emotions which they have a natural



tendency to excite; and thus a taste for poetry enhances the pleasure we derive from contemplating the beauties of nature, while an accurate knowledge of natural objects gives to poetry a peculiar zest.

It is, then, from a cultivation of the perceptive faculties, that we only can attain those powers of conception which are essential to taste; and without this cultivation, all the beauties of all the poets who have ever written, committed to memory, would do no more towards inspiring poetical taste, than the smell of a rose would do towards giving an idea of its colour to one who had been born blind.

From the tenor of these observations, the advantages of a country education in the early part of life will appear sufficiently evident. Those who have it not in their power to give this advantage to their children; those whose situation precludes their pupils from the benefit of an extensive and familiar acquaintance with natural objects, ought to be particularly solicitous



to make them amends for this misfortune, by seizing every opportunity of directing their attention to the natural objects within their reach. If the vegetable world is shut to their perusal, the book of animated nature is open before them. If "the various landscape bursts *not* on the sight," the sun, moon, and stars, may still be seen. Nor ought an attentive examination of the works of art to be neglected. In most of these, some principles of science are involved. From the most simple piece of mechanism ideas may be derived; and no source that can furnish the mind with ideas which are just and accurate, should be overlooked.

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## LETTER VII.

### JUDGMENT

*First begins to operate upon the Objects of Perception.—Necessity of exercising it upon sensible Objects.—Illustrations.—How it may at first be exercised on Moral Propositions.—Party Prejudice inimical to its Cultivation.—Observations on this Head.—The Use of History.*

AS all the errors, and many of the vices of mankind, originate in a deficiency or perversion of the faculty of Judgment, we are called upon for a very particular attention to its cultivation and improvement. By tracing the progress of its gradual development in the human mind, we shall perhaps be enabled to exert our own judgment to advantage, in determining on the

steps most proper to be taken for the cultivation of this important faculty; while, by observing the obstacles frequently opposed to its improvement, we shall perceive the reason of its seldom attaining maturity.

It evidently appears, that judgment begins first to operate on the perceptive faculties; and that till the commencement of this operation, the mind is incapable of improvement from the objects of sense. The knowledge that is obtained of the relative distances of visible objects, is an operation of judgment: even in the belief of the existence of such objects, judgment is concerned. And this consideration ought to make us particularly careful of misleading the tender minds of infants into erroneous judgments, concerning the powers and properties of the objects with which they are most conversant.

“If you touch that stick, it will be angry, and beat you,” says the foolish nurse. “The stick is taller than you are,”

says the more sensible mother, “and if  
“you bring it upon you, it will hurt you.”

It is by means of judgment, that a child is gradually made sensible that the presence of objects does not depend upon his perception of them. To the infant, the object is no longer present than it is visible to his eyes. The powers of conception and judgment must both have exerted their influence, before he believes the contrary: and by what slow degrees their influence is exerted, is obvious; as we see children of two or three years of age, who, when they cover their eyes, imagine they are securely screened from observation.

If we attempt to force the progress of judgment at a very early age, we shall only weaken its powers; if we are always ready in every little instance to interpose our own, so as to forestal the judgments of the child, we shall teach it to rest upon authority, and the faculty of judgment will probably be little exerted through life.

It ought, therefore, to be our business to lead and assist the judgment, so as to render it strong and vigorous, rather than to impose upon it the dictates of authority. By pointing out to children the erroneous judgments which they form upon the trifles within their sphere, we shall not only improve their powers of judging, but make them sensible of the advantage of implicit obedience to those who are capable of so much more discernment.

A child considers its painted toy as a *whole*; it has no notion of its parts, properties or attributes. It is told, that by wetting it it will be destroyed. Unmindful of your warning, it drags it through water; the paint comes off, the glue dissolves, and the whole fabric is demolished.

“ Did I not tell you, you little mischievous monkey, that it would be destroyed! “ The little coach knew that you were “ naughty in disobeying me, and it went “ to pieces.”



Charming lesson to the judgment this! much is it likely to improve under such management!

“Come to me, my little fellow, and I will let you see my reason for warning you against wetting this toy. You see, in the first place, that it was made up of separate pieces of wood, which, being cut into the proper shape, were joined together by means of a little glue; now this glue or cement dissolves in water, so that you see the reason of its coming asunder as soon as it was wet. Let the pieces be dried, and you shall have a little cement to fix them together again yourself. You know that the wood was at first white, like the colour of the boards of the floor; but when the coach was made, the toyman put a little paint upon it, which being ill made up, and slightly laid on, was easily washed off. And now you see, my dear, how I came to foretell the consequences of putting your toy in water.”

Not a day, scarcely an hour, passes, in which a judicious and attentive mother may not find opportunities of improving the faculties of judgment and conception in her children. The great point to be attended to is the co-operation of these faculties in every point which she explains. If she goes beyond their reach, they will never be exerted. If she does not discriminate, she will, in her attempts at instructing the infant mind, be only giving a confused and indistinct knowledge of facts, instead of cultivating those faculties by which alone real and useful knowledge can ever be acquired.

“Some are born to greatness, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them,” says Falstaff; and so it is with learning. It is too often *thrust* upon children; and where it is so, we may venture to assert that greatness will never be achieved. A truly great and comprehensive mind was never yet formed by artificial means. In order to

effect the complete and perfect development of the intellectual blossom, we must defend the bud from canker; we must expose it to the genial influence of the sun of reason; we must nourish it by truth, and promote its expansion by fertilizing the soil; but if we forcibly tear it open, we may bid adieu to all expectation of fruit.

Of all the faculties, that of judgment is most essentially injured by the injudicious speed of our career in modern education. The judgment, indeed, has no time to operate, no opportunity for exertion. Every thing is presented *ready-made*, if I may use the expression, and the pupil has nothing to do but to clothe its memory with the garments provided for it; and where these are deficient, it must put up with the deficiency, for it has no materials wherewith to weave any for itself.

The propositions upon which it is the province of judgment to exercise its power, are all in their natures either true or false;

and whether they be true or false, it is the business of judgment to ascertain. By having been frequently exercised upon those in which its conceptions were assisted by the senses, it comes by degrees to be prepared for deciding upon those which are formed from ideas in the mind, the patterns of which are no longer present to the sight.

Thus, a child whose conceptions have been exercised upon numbers, so as to have acquired clear and distinct ideas of what is meant by one, two, three, &c. will more easily perceive the truth of the proposition, that three times three make nine, than a younger child, whose conceptions have not been thus exercised, will perceive the truth of the proposition, that one and one make two. To enable it to form a judgment upon this, it must have clear and distinct conceptions of the meaning of the words; and added to that, the judgment must be assisted by the perceptions; for without visible or tangible objects, no



knowledge of numbers, or judgments upon them, could be acquired.

In learning the power of numbers, the judgment is much improved, provided that the judgment be permitted to be duly exercised. But if we only aim at hurrying the pupil on as fast as possible through the rules of arithmetic, that we may be able to boast of its astonishing progress in having got to the *Rule of Three*, while others of the same age have not proceeded beyond simple Addition; the memory will probably have been the only faculty exercised throughout the whole process. Throughout the whole course of education, children are great sufferers from our having forgotten the process by which we ourselves acquired the knowledge we now possess. The intermediate ideas which served as links in the chain of our original conceptions, have fled from our recollection; we, therefore, never think of presenting them to the minds of our children: and yet, without these connecting ideas, it



is impossible that we should ever succeed in communicating instruction.

For the slow, the steps of the ladder should be shortened; and we ought to ascertain their having firm footing upon one, before we urge their progress to another. For the quick, fewer steps will serve; but these ought to be examined with accuracy, so as that they may be retraced with certainty and precision; otherwise the pupil will be in danger of hurrying with precipitancy to the top, and then flying off to some other object; and will in vain endeavour to find again the way over the same ground.

Every judgment which the mind forms, is a distinct step in the path of knowledge; and the absurd attempts which are made to lift children at once into the regions of science, are no less ridiculous, than would be our endeavours to make children walk with ease and gracefulness, by always carrying them in our arms. The use of the mental faculties, as well as of the limbs,

must be acquired by exercise. Such is the law of nature, and we never gain by opposing her authority.

I have known children, who, from the time they could speak, had masters upon masters to instruct them; and what was the consequence? Mere prate; many words and few ideas. Let us suppose one of these children learning arithmetic; which, as I have before observed, may be made an useful means of strengthening the faculty of judgment. It is taught to repeat after the master, "five and two make seven; "seven and seven are fourteen," and so on; till, by frequent repetition, the words which denote the relative power of numbers are fixed in the memory; and thus it is able to get through addition tolerably well. Next comes the multiplication table, which it learns by rote, and applies in the same way, as often as it is wanted. And so on through all the rules, the master assisting all the time whenever the pupil is at any loss, but never attempting to unfold

a principle, or to give a single idea upon the subject. I speak from experience, as it is the way in which I myself was taught, and as I believe many others are.

Let us now suppose a child, whose conceptions have been gradually improved by the unceasing, though almost imperceptible, efforts of a judicious and attentive parent. She marks the time when ideas upon the subject of numbers may be given with effect. She seizes the most proper period for beginning her instructions, or rather for leading the mind to instruct itself. By frequently recurring opportunities, she exercises the conceptions and the judgment upon units. She renders all the different combinations that can produce numbers under ten, familiar to these faculties; and then proceeds to add ten to ten, till the conceptions can embrace hundreds. Tables of numbers are then given to be summed up, and at every step the judgment is taught to decide on its truth and certainty. Multiplication is explained

as a shorter method of addition, and its principles unfolded in plain and easy terms. By frequent exercise, the mind becomes so familiar to the subject, that its knowledge appears intuitive; its ideas are all clear and accurate; and although the rules may not be gone through with a tenth part of the speed, with which they were galloped over in the former instance; we cannot doubt, that when both pupils come to put their knowledge into practice, the latter will have a great and manifest advantage.

How, indeed, in the former case could the poor child possibly acquire clear ideas upon any subject, when it probably had twenty things to learn at the same time, all opposite in their natures, calling up different trains of ideas, and requiring different tones of mind? It is likewise probable, that in the high encomiums it has heard bestowed on those ornamental accomplishments which are deemed so necessary to a person of rank, it has learned to associate ideas of vulgarity, and conse-



quently of contempt, to a science, which is peculiarly necessary to people in business. By these false associations the judgment is perverted at a very early period: and of these false associations the parent must divest herself, who would have her child possessed of a sound mind and vigorous understanding.

The conduct of life requires no less accuracy of calculation than the conduct of business; and the science of numbers, from first to last, being that which furnishes us with the most distinct ideas,\* is of the utmost importance, not merely to the merchant and accomptant, but to every rational being. It ought besides to be considered, that the mind makes use of num-

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\* *The simple modes of number are, of all others, the most distinct; even the least variation, which is an unit, making each combination as clearly different from that which approacheth nearest to it, as the most remote: two being as distinct from one, as two hundred: and the ideas of two being as distinct from the ideas of three, as the magnitude of the whole earth is from that of a mite.*



ber, in all its ideas of duration and extension. Our ideas of infinity, with regard either to time or space, are nothing but the infinity of number. Those whose ideas concerning the powers of number are faint and confused, will be found to have very confused and inaccurate ideas upon many other subjects.

In the education of boys this is, perhaps, sufficiently attended to; but why our own sex should be so utterly precluded, as they generally are, from this most useful branch of knowledge, can only be accounted for from the prevalence of that false association, which renders every thing that wears the appearance of real usefulness disgraceful to us. Hence it comes,

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This is not the case in other simple modes, in which it is not so easy, nor perhaps possible for us, to distinguish betwixt two approaching ideas; for who will undertake to find a difference (in his conceptions) between the white of this paper and that of the next degree to it? or can form distinct ideas of every, the least excess in extension.—See *Locke on the Human Understanding*.

that whatever has a tendency to strengthen the judgment, is either totally omitted, or so superficially run over, in female education, that it appears as if judgment were a faculty which females never, in any situation of life, could have occasion for. A little reflection upon this subject would surely convince us of the contrary. A little reflection would teach us, that in every situation in which a female can be placed; whether she be free or subordinate; whether she moves in an exalted sphere, or be reduced to the duties of an inferior one; in public and in private; abroad or at home; judgment is ever necessary, ever essential;—and that whatever be her rank and situation in society, if judgment do not form her opinions, and direct her conduct, she will become an object of contempt.

Beautiful imbecility will be admired, it is true; but let us apply to numerical rules, and calculate the period of this admiration. What proportion does it bear to the length of human life? What is the sum total of

the advantages to be derived from it, when compared with those which would be experienced in the capability of fulfilling, with honour and propriety, the duties of a wife, a mother, the mistress of a family, the prudent adviser, and the faithful friend? Is it acting with wisdom and consistency, in the first place, to do all in our power to deprive beings of the use of this faculty, and then to plunge them into situations where its exertion is absolutely necessary? This is the argument, (and an unanswerable one it is) which can alone be used with propriety by the advocates of the frail fair ones, when pleading in extenuation of their foul offences in our courts of justice. Were this argument to be adorned, as it might, by the eloquence of an Erskine or a Garrow, it would do more towards opening the eyes of the public to the consequences of an education merely ornamental, than all that can be written upon the subject by the divine or moralist.

Let it be represented to the juries, who are called (alas, so often!) to pronounce upon the heinous conduct of shameless matrons, that the creatures, whose crimes are thus exposed to public scorn, can scarcely be deemed accountable agents; since, in our ideas of accountableness, rationality is always included. Now ample proof can be brought, that from the cradle upwards every possible pains have been taken to destroy the rational faculty. Without judgment, there can be no knowledge of first principles; without first principles, there can be no rule of conduct or of duty. How, then, can creatures be said to transgress against principles which they never had it in their power to comprehend? They were taught, that the sole duty, of woman was *to be amiable*. That in order to be amiable, they must be accomplished and genteel; that is to say, that they must learn to dance, and dress, and “nickname “God’s creatures;” to talk sentiment, to affect sensibility, and to follow fashion into



whatever follies she may lead. Have they not done all this? And now mark the inconsistency of man! They are accused of sinning against the laws of GOD and of their country; when they can call GOD, their country, and their parents, to witness, that their judgment was never sufficiently cultivated to pronounce upon the truth and propriety of a single precept, moral or divine! They were taught to look on personal admiration as the chief good; when they found it was no longer to be expected from the husband, were they to blame for seeking it in the admirer? Of all that they were taught to believe amiable, they are still possessed; for no one estimable quality of the heart and understanding was in the catalogue! Sensibility or sentiment comprised their only notions of virtue; and by giving way to sensibility and sentiment they became adulteresses; or, to speak in the more delicate terms of modern refinement, *amiable unfortunates*.



To the effects of a pernicious education, and not to the frailty of the sex, ought the natural consequences of a want of principle to be assigned. Such a change in the mode of education, as would expand the powers of intellect, enable the mind to embrace truth, to perceive the utility and advantage of moral rectitude, and to regulate the passions and affections of the heart by the laws of piety and wisdom, would do more towards putting a stop to the career of vice, in every rank and station in society, than all the laws and punishments the legislature can devise. But leaving the *amiable* and *accomplished* frail ones to reap the fruit of the erroneous ideas they have imbibed, let us turn to the consideration of the judging faculty, by the due cultivation of which these fatal errors in conduct may happily be avoided.

Having first exercised the judgment by means of the perceptive faculties, it gradually becomes ripe for perceiving the truth of propositions, the subjects of which are

not immediate objects of sense. The connexion between cause and effect, though the foundation of our reasoning in many sciences, as well as in morals, is first made clear to the understanding by means of the senses. To render the conceptions upon this, and similar propositions, clear, distinct, and accurate, is, I believe, of much more importance, than is generally imagined. By words this will never be effected; we must therefore in our endeavours to cultivate the judgment, bring the judgment into exercise. Shew a child that when he strikes his ball against the wall with force, it will always rebound with proportional activity; and that when he throws it gently, the re-action will be proportionably weaker; he will soon understand your meaning. You may make him sensible, by a thousand familiar examples, that the same law extends throughout all matter, and that wherever there appears any variation in the effect, from causes apparently similar, we may be assured, that

the similarity is only apparent, but that, in reality, the cause is different. Such instructions tend to awaken and keep alive attention, while they preserve the mind from vulgar prejudices and superstitions; which all originate in confined views, and want of accurate observation. The effect they have in strengthening the judgment, is evident from the conduct of those whose judging faculties have never been thus cultivated. Propositions, which appear intuitive to others, seem absurd to those whose conceptions are habitually dull and languid for want of cultivation; while the judgment that has never been exercised on the objects of perception, takes every thing for granted without examination. Hence that credulity, with regard to the marvellous, which is a disgrace to the enlightened age in which we live.

When a child has had the connexion betwixt cause and effect sufficiently impressed upon the mind by means of exterior objects, it will more easily compre-

hend the application of the same principle to morals.

That a want of veracity produces loss of confidence as its inevitable consequence, is a truth of which the judgment may be made sensible at an early period; and indeed, while this faculty is uncorrupted by selfishness, it will seldom fail to decide with precision on every point of justice. Easily may the judgment be led to perceive that good-nature and affectionate dispositions produce, as their effect, complacency and affection in the breasts of others; that esteem is the natural consequence of integrity, wisdom and benevolence; and that all the malevolent and dissocial passions beget displeasure and hatred. But in order to fix these associations in the mind, it is absolutely necessary that the conduct of the parent should give invariable testimony to their truth. If the same conduct in the child be at one time found fault with, and at another gets leave to pass unnoticed; if praise or blame are bestowed, not

according to desert, but according to present humour, these principles will never gain a firm establishment in the heart. Following your example, your child will learn to like and dislike from motives of caprice; and false expectations of gaining love and favour, without being at any pains to merit esteem, will lay the foundation of many bitter disappointments.

You will, perhaps, object, that happiness and the world's esteem are not always the inevitable result of virtuous conduct; and that by teaching children to expect them as certain effects, we should lead them into error, and expose them to mortification.

To this I answer, that though envy and malignity are apt to detract from merit, this very detraction shews a consciousness that esteem and approbation are the natural consequences of virtuous conduct; and that it is in hopes of obstructing this natural effect, that malevolence exerts its influence. Should it unfortunately succeed,



it can only succeed with regard to our fellow-mortals. A powerful argument for endeavouring to approve ourselves to a higher power! A convincing proof of the inefficacy of all moral systems, that rest not on a more solid foundation than the applause of those who are frail and liable to error!

Seldom, however, even from our fellow men, is the pure and upright conduct of the humble and the worthy denied the meed of approbation and esteem. It is when we solicit the praise of the many, and not when we wish for the esteem of the good, that we are liable to disappointment. This observation receives ample support from the records of history and the annals of private life. Never, in all our researches, shall we find an instance, where unostentatious benevolence, justice, wisdom, and piety, were refused the esteem and approbation of mankind, unless where *party hatred*, by its deadly poison, blinded the eyes, and envenomed the heart. By

this was the furious multitude influenced against the Saviour of the world! By this have many who *call themselves* his disciples, been enflamed to cruelty and vengeance against their more deserving brethren.

-Nothing can be more inimical to the cultivation of judgment, than an early initiation into party prejudices. By these the conceptions are misled, and the judgments concerning right and wrong must consequently be often erroneous. To approve or disapprove according to the dictates of affection, rather than of principle, is at any time of life fatal to the integrity of the moral character. The habit of doing so is to the young particularly injurious: it not only warps the judgment, but depraves the heart.

Did the cultivation of judgment once become an object in female education, the zeal of fair politicians might, perhaps, suffer some abatement; an evil that would not probably be productive of any very fatal consequences to society. Unbiassed

judgment will perceive, that wisdom dwells with moderation, and that firmness of conduct is seldom united with outrageous violence of sentiment. Cultivated judgment will not produce indifference to the interest and happiness of the community at large; nor will it lead the mind to be contented with profound ignorance concerning the nature and origin of points which are the objects of political dispute; but it will restrain wrath, and keep the individual in the path of duty. Happily for our sex, this leads not to the theatre of public strife. Were the judgment to be exercised in finding out this path in the eventful period of political disunion, blessed would be the consequences that must inevitably ensue! To heal the wounds of contention; to cool the raging fury of party animosity; to soften the rugged spirit of resentment; to allay the fervour of ambition; and to check the cruelty of revenge; would, to enlightened judgment, appear as the peculiar duty of those, who, not being called

on to take an active part, are, by this neutral situation, marked out as the mediators and peace-makers of society!

Let us ourselves acquire, and let us endeavour to give our children, such clear conceptions upon the subject, as may leave them at no loss to pronounce on the consequences of a conduct marked by benevolence, wisdom, and moderation; in opposition to the effects produced by violent prejudice, blind zeal, and cruel intolerance.

History presents us with an instructive portrait of the human passions; but it is of the passions principally as they are actuated by ambition. Without previous care to strengthen the judgment, history, therefore, by the interest which it excites in the fate of heroes and conquerors, may be instrumental in awakening ambition, and kindling the flame of false glory in an ardent mind. The historian who does not catch a portion of his hero's spirit, and enter with warmth into his interests, will be cold and inanimate. He who does,

will be apt to throw false colours over actions that are in their natures base and vile; to extenuate what is reprehensible; and sometimes to extol what is undeserving of sober approbation. Thus are the moral notions of youth in danger of being corrupted, from the very sources which we had assigned for their nourishment and improvement. This, I believe, to be often the case with boys; and is the inevitable consequence of permitting the imagination to get the start of judgment. Were the judgment to be exercised in tracing *cause* and *effect*, as they are delineated in the historic page; the ardent youth, instead of being dazzled by the false lustre of splendid achievements, would pursue their consequences to the human race, and see widespread ruin, pain, misery; and devastation, the awful price of short-lived glory.

The various advantages accruing from the study of history, are too numerous and too important to admit of being fully described in such an imperfect sketch: suffice



it to say, that under the direction of a judicious preceptor, it cannot fail to enlarge the conceptions, to increase the number of ideas, to improve the judgment, and to strengthen moral and religious principle in the heart. The mere knowledge of dates and epochs, of the names of sovereigns, and the length of their successive reigns, and even of the principal features that marked the character of every prince, and of the most remarkable events that took place in every age, will go a very little way towards intellectual improvement. This is the knowledge and the sole knowledge that can be obtained from abridgments. From these, therefore, none of the moral uses of history can possibly be derived. The associations they give, are merely those of time and place, which, as we have already seen, are the only associations familiar to the vulgar. Abridgments of history are merely to be considered as exercises of the memory; and whoever expects by their means the improvement

of any other faculty, will be miserably disappointed.

Are, then, abridgments of no use? To the young, I certainly think, they are of none, and worse than of none; for I deem it much safer for the mind to be destitute of all ideas upon any subject, than to have those which are confused and indistinct. But to such as have in youth laid in an ample fund of information, when that information begins to fade on the memory, abridgments may be found of great service. They give the outlines which the mind is in possession of materials to fill up. Every event which they record, awakens a chain of associations, and revives ideas which had become in a manner extinct. To the learned, therefore, ought the use of abridgments to be confined; while to the minds that are on their progress to improvement, full, clear, distinct, and accurate ideas ought to be given upon every subject proposed to their consideration.

Here, again, we may observe the consequence of that impatience and precipitancy which in so many instances defeats the great purposes of education. By our impatience to make our children perfect in knowledge, we in reality present an insuperable bar to its acquirement. We cramp the powers of the soul, and lessen its capabilities. We teach it to skim the surface of science, and indolently to acquiesce in superficial attainments. Thus we produce a race of praters who know nothing; of talkers who never think; of light, trifling, and fantastic beings, alike destitute of intellectual vigour and of solid principle. Persons who live in blest retirement, see little of this. Let those who are conversant with what is called *the world*, pronounce upon its truth!

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**LETTER VIII.****SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.**

BY what I have already advanced in considering the advantages to be derived from committing to memory, words and terms, which are to be of future use, it will be perceived that my objection to abridgments does not extend to those little catalogues of kings and queens which are to be found in every nursery. An intimate acquaintance with such epitomes can never be mistaken for a knowledge of history, as even a superficial acquaintance with the contents of larger abridgments very frequently is.

I spoke of history, as affording striking examples of the truth of the proposition

concerning cause and effect, upon which I supposed the judgment to have been for some time exercised. From the whole scope and tenor of my argument, it will appear sufficiently obvious, that I adopt, as a fundamental principle, the impossibility of any exercise of judgment, where there are not clear and distinct conceptions. But there may be very clear and distinct conceptions of the causes and consequences of particular events, and the mind may be capable of forming very just and accurate ideas concerning particular instances of human conduct, long before it is capable of embracing a series of complicated and successive events. Long before it has strength to wield the massy chain, it may be capable of examining an individual link.

Hence it appears to me, that the judgment will be exercised to more advantage, by a minute investigation of a detached period of history, judiciously chosen, than by the perusal of the abridged history of ages. Fully apprised of the narrow limits



of its information, the mind will be in no danger of that shallow conceit which constantly attends the superficial. It will be prompted to acquire further knowledge for itself; and by having been put upon the method of exercising judgment upon every subject it investigates, its enquiries will never fail to be attended with advantage.

Against the morality of the tales of instruction now in general use, I make no objection; because, whether these fictitious representations of events be moral or otherwise, they are alike inimical to our design of cultivating the faculties according to the order in which they are developed by the hand of nature.

When, indeed, the judgment has been previously exercised upon first principles, so as to have clear and distinct notions of cause and effect, it will be competent to decide on the probability or improbability of supposed events; and from the impulse of the moral sense, the mind will take pleasure in contemplating the laws of po-

etical justice. But where the vain attempt is made to impress first principles upon the mind by means of fictions addressed to the imagination, the judgment will take no part in the decision. By a succession of these interesting tales, the minds of the quick and ardent will be filled with wild and incoherent images, false associations, romantic ideas—and imprudent conduct will be the certain result. Nor will the consequence be less fatal to the slow and indolent: conscious of the languid flow of their ideas, they have much gratification in whatever, without exertion on their parts, accelerates their course. To children of this description, therefore, books of amusement are thought particularly useful. But would we give ourselves the trouble to examine a little farther than the surface, we should be convinced, that the great object, with respect to such minds, is to rouse them to an active exertion of their faculties; whereas, by merely following the tale of fancy, they indulge the inclination to indolence.

While I thus express my disapprobation of those fictions which stimulate the imagination, while they retard the operation of judgment; it may be necessary to say something of those which are addressed to the judgment, and manifestly aim at its improvement. Fictions of this nature are nothing more than examples tending to elucidate propositions submitted to the judgment, by placing them in a conspicuous point of view. They ought, of necessity, to be simple, clear, and perspicuous. Such were the parables by which our Blessed LORD vouchsafed to instruct his unenlightened auditors; every one of which will, upon examination, be found to be exclusively addressed to the judgment. Let the learned reader compare with these the wild fictions of the Koran, which are all addressed to the imagination; and while he sees in the former the manifestations of Divine wisdom, let him be careful not to follow the method of instruction of which the latter is a model.

To educate youth by means of pretty stories, though a system which has been but lately introduced into this country, has been for ages practised by all the oriental nations. Let us look to its effects on the inhabitants of Asia. What vigour of intellect, what strength of genius, has it there produced? Let us behold its operations in the imbecility and indolence that marks the eastern character: and with such glaring proofs of its fatal consequences before our eyes, let us beware of enfeebling the minds of the rising generation by a similar procedure.

The swarm of heterogeneous absurdities that daily issue from the press, under the appellation of novels, would (if we had sufficient command of patience for investigating their contents) afford the most convincing proof of the effects produced upon the mind by calling forth the imagination, while the powers of judgment are suffered to lie dormant! In these writers, we behold the powers of fancy employed in

making the most absurd combinations from the few confused and inaccurate ideas they happen to possess. We see invention on the stretch to produce effects to which the causes assigned are totally inadequate; the laws of nature violated; the course of the passions misrepresented; the principles of morality set at defiance; and the whole mixed up with a jargon of sentiment, which is incomprehensible to plain common sense. Yet so voracious is the appetite for novelty in those who have never been taught the exercise of judgment, that such books are read, *aye, and none but such*, by numbers of young women, who hope in due time to become the mothers of hopeful families!

The train of ideas introduced into the mind by the hyperbolical language of fiction, is found so agreeable to the young, so favourable to the indulgence of that luxurious indolence, to which most have some propensity; that it is no wonder that minds, to which such trains of ideas have



become habitual, should find it difficult, if not impossible, to turn the current of thought into other channels. Now nothing can be more evident, than that every process of reasoning, whether on the nature of material objects, or upon subjects of speculation, requires a series of distinct and clear ideas; and I leave it for you to decide, whether it is by accustoming the mind to the train of thought produced by fiction, that it can be best prepared for this exercise of the intellectual powers. Is there not rather some reason to apprehend, that minds, which, instead of having had the perceptions exercised on sensible objects, and the powers of conception and judgment gradually unfolded by the same means, have been taught all they know through the medium of the imagination, will never through life exercise any other faculty? All the ideas of right and wrong, just and unjust, probable and improbable, will be tinged with the false colouring imperceptibly received from the train of incongru-

ous and fictitious images perpetually passing through the mind. But where the reasoning powers have been habitually exercised on adequate objects, the train of ideas, which occupy the fancy, will no longer be of the nature of unprofitable or pernicious visions; they will be the parents of genius, of invention, of exalted purposes, of good resolutions, and of meritorious conduct.

The cultivation of judgment, so far from presenting any obstacle to the enjoyment of the pleasures of imagination, is absolutely necessary towards their being enjoyed in any superior degree. Who would compare the pleasure enjoyed by a cultivated mind in perusing the exquisite compositions of a Homer, a Shakespeare, or a Milton, to that which a novel-reading Miss receives from the eventful tale that beguiles her of her midnight slumber? Nay, laying these higher works of genius out of the question, let us suppose two young people employed in reading one of Miss Burney's

admirable pictures of life, (which, for want of an appropriate term, likewise go under the denomination of novels), and that one of these young persons has had her mind furnished with ideas, her conceptions vigorous and acute, her judgment strengthened by exercise, and her affections governed by the well-examined principles of moral rectitude;—while the other, instructed by means of fiction, has had her sensibilities exercised, while judgment was suffered to lie dormant, her conceptions weak, her ideas few and confused, and her moral principles mere feelings directed by prejudice. The love of novelty is equally strong in both; both pursue the thread of the story with equal ardour. But in the course of the perusal, how many sources of pleasure are open to the one, which, to the other, are totally unknown. With admiration the one contemplates the genius displayed in the conduct of the fable; she marks each trait of character, enters into the train of associations by which it is pro-

duced, observes how naturally they spring from the situation of the person described; and perceives how justly the author has pourtrayed the inevitable consequences of the conduct to which they lead. Every sentiment, every moral reflection, attracts her notice, and calls forth the powers of judgment. Her vigorous conceptions embrace every idea of the author, and her cultivated mind feels all the exquisite emotions of taste.—A thousand images which have called forth these emotions in her soul, have passed unnoticed by her companion. To the fate of the lovers her interest is solely confined, and every thing that protracts the knowledge of their destiny, to her appears tedious and impertinent. She receives not from the work one idea in addition to her slender stock; and when once her curiosity has been gratified by the *denouement*, her mind is completely vacated, or only filled with some fleeting images of visionary bliss.

Where the attention has been habitually employed in following trains of ideas sketched by the imagination, it is to the contemplation of those visions alone that it will be spontaneously directed. To present objects it will not in that case be able to turn without considerable effort. Absence of mind is not a failing peculiar to those who are deeply engaged in abstract studies and pursuits; it is common to all who have not had the faculty of attention early and properly cultivated. Where it has thus been cultivated, every common occurrence of life, every topic of conversation, every new object which presents itself to the eye, every sound which strikes the ear, is distinctly discriminated, and becomes the source of new ideas; but wherever, by the early exercise of imagination, the mind has acquired the habit of indulging in visionary reveries, it neither sees, hears, understands, marks, nor inwardly digests, what passes around it. Of this absence of mind we must have observed



innumerable instances; and may, at little expence of reflection, be made fully sensible, that it must present a fatal obstacle to all intellectual improvement. Where the conceptions and the judgment have been early exercised on the objects of perception, I believe this absence of mind will rarely be met with. Where they have not been thus exercised, I believe it to be inevitable.

Supposing that the faculty of judgment has been exercised in your pupil so as to have attained to some degree of strength, it will still be subject to perversion from many causes, internal and external, which it is the particular business of the preceptor to guard against. Of these corruptors of the judgment, it will be sufficient for our present purpose to mention those which are most likely to assault it in the early stage of which we now treat; recommending it to the reader who wishes for fuller information upon this important subject, to consult Dr Isaac Watts, who, in his

Essay on Logic, or the Right Use of Reason, has given a very satisfactory view of the several causes by which the judgment is liable to be perverted.

I have all along insisted upon the necessity of cultivating the faculties of conception and judgment, by means of a strict attention to sensible objects. But if care be not taken to point out the fallacy of the senses, or, to speak more properly, to shew the extent of their power, our pupils may be led into many errors, by putting too much confidence in their perceptions.

By trusting to the evidence of sense, mankind, in the infancy of science, judged the world to be an extensive plain; the sun to be a small luminous body, which rose from behind a high mountain, or from the bosom of the ocean, and performed its daily journey through the heavens; and the moon and the stars to be of the same insignificant magnitude as they appeared to the naked eye. And though more enlightened notions concerning the heavenly

bodies are now made familiar to children, even in the nursery, than was formerly known to sages; still, by trusting to the evidence of their senses, children are liable to errors of judgment, which, if not attended to, may lay the foundation of future prejudices. These a truly liberal education will doubtless destroy. But if once these prejudices have taken root in the mind, it is not by going through the common routine of *accomplishments* that they will ever be extirpated.

The credulity natural to youth is another fruitful source of erroneous judgment. It will act with particular force upon minds that have never been accustomed to the actual examination of sensible objects. It is only the imbecility of ignorance, or the vanity of scepticism, that supposes any thing to exist without a cause. A sensible child will soon be convinced that it is impossible; and the mind cannot be better exercised in early life, than in discovering the causes of appearances with which it is familiar, but

for which it knows not how to account. A boy observes that his top spins as long as it is kept in motion; tell him, when he asks you why it does so, "that it is the nature of all tops," and you lay the foundation for indifference or credulity. But if, instead of giving these foolish answers, you explain the real cause, and teach him to look out for similar examples of the operation of the laws of gravitation, you will probably be doing the faculty of judgment a greater service than it could have received from the longest and most laborious task.

It may be objected to this, that many mothers have not the degree of information requisite to enable them to communicate such sort of knowledge to their children. And is it because they are mothers, that it is too late to obtain it? What motive to the acquirement of knowledge half so powerful, as that which operates upon a mother's heart? This motive, strong as it ought to be in all cases, will become

still more weighty, when we consider that another very ample source of erroneous judgment, is found to proceed from that arrogant confidence which frequently attends the consciousness of quickness of parts. All mothers wish their children to be distinguished by a quick capacity; but dearly do they sometimes pay for the accomplishment of this wish! Soon does the child perceive the mother's incapability of affording it information. She seeks to engage its affections by indulgence—by indulgence it learns to despise her authority. She is solicitous for the improvement of the genius in which she glories; every step which the child advances in the path of knowledge, is a degradation to the mother in its esteem. Her admonitions are without weight, her injunctions without authority. If it be a son whom she thus sees exalted to a superior, she may, perhaps, be proud to acknowledge the superiority, and though she feels herself neglected and despised, rejoice in the world's acknowledging



her son for a man of genius; but if it be a daughter, whom she has thus taught to look down upon her, deep and many will be the wounds of her heart!

A mother, to be truly respectable in the eyes of her children, must not only be to them as a tender protector, a perpetual solace, and the source of every joy—but as a guide and oracle; one to whom they are to apply in every perplexity, from whom they are at all times certain of receiving light. The mother, who is capable of fulfilling the former part of the parental character only, will soon find, that not all the tenderness and affection she can shew, will procure for her that filial respect and veneration which is the precious reward of maternal sufferings and anxieties. To be truly respectable in the eyes of her offspring, a mother must be capable of instructing them. But is it by the common mode of boarding-school education that she is to attain this capability? Alas! no. She may have been the glory of the

school, have learned to play, and sing, and dance to admiration, and at the same time have had her judgment so little exercised as to be incapable of giving her children that degree of information, which the mother, who would be respected by her children, ought always to have it in her power to bestow. It is likely that neither her observation nor judgment have been so far cultivated. But is it too late for her to set about the cultivation? The belief that it is so, is a fatal delusion. Do we not see frequent instances of men who have passed their youth in idleness, but who, at a period of life when many women are mothers of families, begin to make up for lost time by serious application to those studies which they had formerly neglected? Do we not see such men succeed in their attempts? Do we not sometimes see those who were at twenty idle, ignorant, and uninformed, become, in a few years after, men of science and information? Why, then, should a women of twenty, or of any

age, think that because she is married, all improvement is impossible? Impossible I grant it is, if she intends to lead a life of modern dissipation. If her mornings are to be spent in the street, and her evenings at the card-table, improvement is out of the question. But it is not to such mothers that I address myself. There are those of a different description; amiable, well-intentioned, domestic characters, who have an earnest wish to fulfil every duty, but who, from a fatal prejudice, do not consider an accession of knowledge as any of the duties belonging to the matron state. Let such seriously reflect in what light they would wish to be viewed by their children, and as they would desire to be respected, let them pursue the course that can alone render them respectable.

Happy the woman, who, in her endeavours to improve and cultivate her understanding, finds an auxiliary in her husband! Happy she, who is thus encouraged to the

delightful and important task ! Her success is infallible, her reward is certain.

But if her husband be *one of the multitude* ; if fate has bound her to a man who despises female intellect ; whose idea of matrimonial felicity includes not the companion and the friend ; who merely wishes in his wife to find the qualities of the housekeeper, and the virtues of the spaniel ; even then the wife is without excuse, who does not endeavour to qualify herself for fulfilling the duties of the mother. Let her consider, that in the respect and esteem of her children she will find a solace for the want of that purest species of happiness which flows from congenial sentiment, mutual confidence, and mutual esteem. Her husband may not be willing to allow her superiority of wisdom, (and if she be truly wise, she will never contend for it) but her children will rise and call her blessed !

Let us now return to the consideration of that arrogant confidence in self-opinion,

which is so frequently the result of a child's finding itself in some instances wiser than its mother. This generally produces a degree of dogmatism very unfavourable to the improvement of judgment. "By what means soever," says the respectable Watts, "the dogmatist comes by his opinions, whether by his senses or his fancy, his education or his own reading, yet he believes them all with the same assurance that he does a mathematical truth; he has scarce any *probabilities* that belong to him; every thing with him is *certain* and infallible. Persons of this temper are seldom to be convinced of any mistake; a full assurance of their own notions makes all the difficulties on their own side vanish so entirely, that they think every point of their belief is written as with sun-beams, and wonder any one should find a difficulty in it."

The more the judgment is exercised in early life, the less liable will it be to this proud confidence in its own authority,



which is never connected with true wisdom, though it is a frequent attendant upon quick parts, superficially cultivated; as is likewise its opposite—SCEPTICISM.

“The dogmatist is sure of every thing—  
 “the sceptic believes nothing. Perhaps  
 “he has found himself often mistaken in  
 “matters of which he thought himself  
 “well assured in his younger days, and  
 “therefore he is afraid to give assent to  
 “any thing again.”

“Both these prejudices,” continues our author, “though they are so opposite to  
 “each other, yet they arise from the same  
 “spring, and that is, *impatience of study,*  
 “*and want of diligent attention in the search*  
 “*of truth.* The dogmatist is in haste to  
 “believe something; he cannot keep him-  
 “self long enough in suspence, till some  
 “bright and convincing evidence appears  
 “on one side; but throws himself casually  
 “into the sentiments of one party or ano-  
 “ther, and then he will hear no argument  
 “to the contrary. The sceptic will not

“ take pains to search things to the bot-  
 “ tom, but when he sees difficulties on  
 “ both sides, resolves to believe neither of  
 “ them.”

It sometimes happens, that these dispositions are united. Who more dogmatical and peremptory than the sceptic in his system of unbelief?

Doctor Watts assures us, that “ the only  
 “ cure for both these follies is *humility of*  
 “ *soul, patience in study, diligence in inquiry,*  
 “ *with an honest zeal for truth.*”

What he mentions as a cure, I would recommend to parents to teach their children as a prevention. All the disorders of the mind are much more easily prevented than remedied. Where pride and self-will have been permitted to take deep root, it will be a difficult task to inculcate true humility. Where the faculty of attention has never been sufficiently exercised, we cannot expect either patience in study, or diligence in inquiry. And where the mind has not been accustomed to find pleasure

in the discovery of truth, we need not expect that it will ever exert much zeal in its pursuit.

Another source of error, concerning which it behoves us to be upon our guard, is that disposition to rest upon authority, which, if we do not take care to prevent it, may spring from that confidence in our superior wisdom and knowledge, which it is essential that the pupil should possess.

It requires, I confess, great delicacy of conduct to impress the pupil with perfect confidence in our judgment, and at the same time to lead him to exert his own, as if he had no such authority to rely upon. The only method by which it appears to me that this can possibly be effected, is, early to lead the mind to those investigations, of which we certainly know the result. The child will then perceive the steps by which we were led to the knowledge we possess. He will perceive that our advantage over him is the effect of diligent inquiry and actual research, not of

intuition. We may then, without any apprehension of being lessened in his opinion, candidly confess our ignorance upon subjects which have lain out of our line of pursuit, and use our very ignorance of these as an argument for his exerting himself to obtain a superior degree of information. The boy, who has been accustomed to receive daily proofs of his mother's wisdom and knowledge upon important points, will be in no danger of losing his respect for her attainments or understanding, because he finds her ignorant of Latin or of Mathematics. But if, instead of being led to exercise his own judgment, he has been taught every thing as dogmas of our superior wisdom, he will acquiesce in our judgment as infallible; and the disposition implicitly to rely upon authority, will render him the slave of prejudice for ever.

This reliance upon authority is represented by some writers as the very essence of female virtue.

“ God is thy law—thou mine ; to know no more,  
 “ Is woman’s happiest knowledge, and her praise.”

So said Milton : but so said not an higher authority than Milton, when in emphatic language he commended the “ better part” taken by Mary, who, not contented with hearing the words of truth and wisdom at second hand, gave her whole soul to the attentive consideration of the Divine doctrines it was her happiness to hear delivered. According to the common prejudices of society, the praise was Martha’s due. Her attention was solely directed to the objects within her *proper sphere*. Enough for her to hear the heads of her Divine Master’s discourse related by her brother, on whose better judgment she might implicitly rely for explanation of all that it was necessary for her to believe or practise. And so certain was she of acting with propriety, that, confident of her own superior merit, she did not scruple to appeal to our LORD upon what she thought the faulty conduct of her sister. The rebuke she received establishes



it not only as a privilege, but as a duty, in the sex, to hear, to inquire, and to judge for themselves. The contrary is evidently anti-christian doctrine; and, like all others of the same stamp, is found by experience to be repugnant to the principles of common sense.

To the being who is taught to receive all opinions from authority, judgment is an useless gift. In such beings, therefore, judgment will lie for ever dormant; and without judgment, how is she to choose the authorities that are to be her guide? If her early associations of good and evil have been erroneous, they must remain erroneous for ever: for it is by these associations that her choice of authorities will be directed. If the clearest, the most momentous truth, be delivered from a quarter against which she has been prejudiced, the truth is contemned as falsehood. If the most flagrant and fatal error has been embraced by the authority she esteems, she receives it "as truth of holy writ."

While by the habits of society women were confined to the narrow circle of domestic life, they received an education, which, if it did not tend to cultivate the judgment in any great degree, introduced those associations which made their resting upon authority innocent at least, if not salutary. To the character of a notable housewife, an extraordinary needle-woman, and a careful mother, they attached ideas of respectability and praise. Their theological, their political, and even their moral opinions, they received from their natural or ghostly fathers, "nothing doubting;" and as their attention was solely occupied in the narrow sphere of their perceptive faculties, it is not to be supposed that they troubled themselves with much inquiry. If the higher powers of the mind were not called forth, the first and most essential faculties were so cultivated as to produce that equality which is always favourable to the production of common sense; and in the early cultivation of these first facul-

ties, a foundation was laid for the perfection of all the higher powers of the mind, wherever a superior degree of mental culture was bestowed. Of this we have a decisive proof in the many illustrious instances of female learning and genius, which adorned the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

As a means of cultivating attention, needle-work deserves a higher place in our estimation than it at present holds; and the species of needle-work at that period in vogue was well calculated to answer this important end. That the taste would be improved by contemplating the absurd and grotesque figures which were then copied, I do not pretend to affirm; but, as taste is the offspring of judgment and imagination, faculties which do not unfold themselves till after conception has attained strength and vigour, their improvement is the business of an after-period; whereas *attention*, being absolutely necessary towards the exercise of the first and most essential powers

of the mind, cannot be too soon or too assiduously cultivated. And how can the power of attention be more effectually called forth, than in copying minute objects, where every thread must be counted with the most scrupulous exactness, where every colour must be matched with the most critical skill.

When we examine the nature of those associations which the mode of education in former times tended to produce, we shall have a juster notion of the advantages derived from it. The worker of a piece of tapestry gloried in leaving behind her such a proof of industry and skill; and though vanity might doubtless mingle with this idea, it was not merely the love of praise, but of praise-worthiness, by which she was incited to the task. When ideas of glory are connected with ideas of approbation and esteem, the character cannot fail to be respectable. With every idea of glory and honour, an attention to domestic duties was formerly associated. This association

no attainment in the walks of literature could dissolve; it maintained its ascendancy in the minds of the learned, and was a lamp to the path of the illiterate.

Another great advantage these ladies enjoyed, in the very limited number of books they had it in their power to read. This circumstance produced such frequent and attentive perusal of the few good authors they possessed, that they became mistresses of every subject on which they treated. Instead of confused and imperfect notions of the author's meaning, their conceptions were clear and accurate; and where there are clear and accurate conceptions, the judgment will be sound and vigorous.

In the acquirement of the learned languages these ladies had many advantages; the very process gone through in attaining them is favourable to arrangement of ideas, and highly instrumental in giving that clear conception of the meaning of words, which is so essential to every spe-



cies of intellectual improvement. By their intimate acquaintance with the poets, the philosophers, and the orators of antiquity, we find the use they made of the key of those treasures of ancient learning, to which the moderns have been so much indebted for their most brilliant thoughts. But while possessed of all this knowledge, we find that the study of the important doctrines and precepts of Christianity occupied the first place in their attention. The human mind had then been but lately emancipated from those chains by which the Romish church had so long held her votaries in subjection: upon the points in dispute it was then the fashion to exercise the judgment; and the many great and vigorous minds which were then produced, plainly shew that the judgment is never exercised in vain.

A minute investigation into the manner in which these ladies performed the relative and domestic duties of life, would serve to convince us, that it is not by a careful

cultivation of all the faculties, by extensive knowledge, or classical learning, that women are in danger of being led from the duties of their proper sphere. No. It is by the silly vanity which is a consequence of the partial cultivation of the intellectual powers; by false associations which annex ideas of importance to what is frivolous and insignificant, and which connect ideas of glory with the silly admiration of fools and coxcombs, that the mind is effectually perverted. And whence are those false associations derived? By seriously reflecting on the tenor of the ideas which modern education is calculated to produce, the question may be easily resolved!

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## LETTER IX.

### JUDGMENT.

*Farther Illustrations.—Schools.—Education of the lower Orders.—Religious Instruction of the Poor —and of the Rich.*

AS the inestimable blessing of a sound judgment is evidently not the lot of all who have enjoyed the advantage of what is termed a complete education, I shall, I hope, be pardoned for dwelling some time longer upon a subject of such importance. A young gentleman is said to be completely educated, when he has gone through the usual course of study at school and college; but if he learned at these seminaries no more than is taught by lessons and lectures, his judgment will make little pro-

gress. In fact, the most essential benefit derived to the faculties from a school education, depends not so much on what boys learn from the master, as from what they learn from each other. The best school being that in which the best discipline is preserved. Discipline is absolutely necessary to prevent the introduction of all that has a tendency to inflame the passions, and vitiate the imagination; but if properly managed, it will not prevent boys from reaping the advantages they must of course derive from incessantly exercising their faculties; an exercise to which they are in a manner compelled by their companions. A boy who has never had his observation called forth, will not, on the strength of prattle, be deemed clever by his associates. They will soon discover, and perhaps remedy the deficiency. But would it not have been better for the child, that his mother had taken care so far to cultivate his faculties as to prevent the

defect? The deficiency may perhaps be irremediable. His conceptions will then be slow, and his ideas obscure and inaccurate. His companions will pronounce him stupid, and the world, even in face of all the universities with whose degrees he may be honoured, will confirm the sentence. A blockhead, spite of learning, will be still a blockhead.

How much the power of judgment depends on the accuracy of the perceptions, and on the distinctness of notions which the mind forms of objects, may easily be rendered obvious.

Tell a child, that "he who runs swiftest, will soonest reach the goal:"—To understand this, the child must have a distinct conception of running; he must also have been able to make comparisons between different degrees of swiftness, and to conceive a lesser and greater degree of it, before he can acquiesce in your conclusion; which acquiescence is the work of judg-



ment. If any of the former ideas are indistinct, the judgment will rest upon your authority; the child may learn to repeat it as a judgment of his own, but it is in reality not his, but yours: whereas, if he has accurate and distinct conceptions on the first part of the proposition, the judgment included in the second is inevitable, and may be termed intuitive.

Where children are taught every thing by lessons, where their perceptive powers are never exercised, and their conceptions never cultivated, all their judgments are received from authority. People who are thus educated are, accordingly, as little in the habit of forming opinions for themselves, as of fabricating the clothes they wear. And as without the assistance of the mechanic, the artisan, and the dress-maker, they must, of necessity, go unclothed; so without the assistance of public opinion, would their minds be naked, and destitute of principle or sentiment.

It is upon the preservation of a just balance betwixt the faculties of conception and judgment, that the soundness of the intellect principally depends. This equality in the cultivation of their mental powers compensates, in a great measure, to the vulgar for the want of that education, to which neither their avocations nor circumstances will permit them to aspire. With them, attention is confined to a narrow sphere. Their perceptive powers are cultivated but to a certain extent; and this cultivation is entirely under the direction of the imperious mistress, *necessity*.

The conceptions are exercised in the same manner upon few objects; but where the attention is fully given to these, they are, as far as they extend, perfect and distinct. So it is with the judgment: its sphere of operation is narrow; but while it moves in that sphere, it is never erroneous. Hence we find much good sense in the observations of the peasantry, while these observations are confined to subjects

upon which they have had access to such information, as could give them clear and distinct ideas.

If the above observations are well founded, it follows, that if the education we bestow upon the labouring classes, be of a nature calculated to derange the just proportion of the faculties; to give a partial cultivation to those which are never to be called forth by the business, or the duties, which the individual is destined to fulfil, while those which are in daily and hourly requisition are utterly neglected, we, in reality, do more harm than good.

Am I, then, of the number of those who deem the blessing of education improper for the vulgar? Am I one of those children of pride, who wish to see the darkness of ignorance bespread the regions of poverty, while I sit with my compeers elate in Goshen, and enjoy the light? Heaven forbid!

I honour and applaud the noble efforts that have been made, and that are still

making, by many generous minds, to give instruction to the children of the poor. Far from wishing to restrain the zeal of charity, I would do all in my power to increase its fervour; but I would wish to direct it into such channels as would most effectually enrich the soil it is the intention of benevolence to cultivate. All the turbulent and dissocial passions are inimical to happiness. The partial cultivation of any one of the intellectual faculties is, from the same cause, injurious. The affections that flow from religious principle, as hope, confidence, love, reverence, gratitude, and joy, are all not only favourable to happiness, but so essential to it, that I do not scruple to affirm, that where they are wanting, happiness will never be found.

If these observations upon the nature of happiness appear just, we ought, in our endeavours to promote the happiness and well-being of the lower classes, to keep them in view.



I have already endeavoured to shew the early progress of the passions. In this respect, the children of the poor and of the rich are pretty much upon a level; they are in truth equally neglected. In early life the children of the villager are as much ruined by foolish indulgence as the children of his lord. The associations which beget a tendency to the selfish and malevolent passions, are with equal facility acquired by both, and are effectually counteracted in neither. The first step, therefore, towards the education of the lower orders is, to instruct the parents in the duties they owe to their children in early life. Books to this effect ought to be distributed; exhortations to be frequently given by the clergy; and rewards bestowed, by the contributors to schools, to those parents whose children appear to have reaped most benefit from home instruction and example.

To undertake the education of a poor man's family is, no doubt, a very good and charitable action; but to put the poor



man in a way of educating his family himself, is doing infinitely more service to society.

The education of the heart is the work of domestic life, and where this preliminary is neglected, all the endeavours of the schoolmaster will be fruitless. In the religious education of the lower orders, there is seldom, I fear, any appeal made to the heart and the affections. The religion of the vulgar is therefore, in general, gloomy, superstitious, and I had almost said, ferocious. While all the other intellectual faculties are permitted to remain dormant for want of cultivation, the imagination is roused and filled with the darkest images. The tendency of this temper is to produce distrust, suspicion, envy, and malevolence; and when spiritual pride is added, it brings forth arrogance and presumption. This is not the religion of JESUS CHRIST. Far other are its fruits; widely opposite is its tendency upon the heart!

The first view to be given of the DEITY to the poor, as well as to the rich, is as the Giver of all Good. The universality of his providence and of his protecting care ought to be carefully instilled. By representing the SUPREME to children as a malignant spy and an avenging tyrant, no affections consonant to the spirit of the Gospel can possibly be produced.

Another error in the religious instruction of the poor, is addressing ourselves to the judgment, where the conceptions have never been so far opened as to be adequate to the comprehension of the simplest proposition, upon any subject that is not an object of perception. By doing so, we may give religious bigotry, but we shall never impart religious knowledge. The conceptions of the vulgar, or of the high-born, will be clear and accurate, exactly in proportion to the pains which have been bestowed on their cultivation. By one medium only can they, in either case, be

cultivated; and this is, by attention to the objects of perception.

Where the parents are foolish, idle, or profligate, the faculty of attention will never be called forth, or never at least exercised on proper objects. To rescue the children of such parents from the dominion of ignorance and vice, is truly laudable. But where such beings are the objects of our charity, it ought to be our primary endeavour to make up to them for the neglect they have experienced; which must inevitably have rendered those faculties defective, upon which every species of intellectual improvement ultimately depends.

If we proceed upon other principles, and, without bestowing any pains in cultivating the powers that are essential to judgment, vainly imagine, that by teaching these poor children to repeat words, we shall strengthen the judgment and improve the heart, we cannot fail to meet with disappointment. In the process of

learning to read, the three first faculties are no doubt exercised; but if this is the only exercise that is given to them, they will reap but little advantage from it: much more would they derive from being made acquainted with the nature and use of all the objects within the sphere of their observation. The simple mechanism employed in the manufactures with which they are most familiar, ought to be explained to them in terms level to their capacity. The attention ought to be turned to the minute examination of every object with which they are conversant. The leather binding of their books, the paper which forms the leaves, the thread on which these leaves are strung, and the characters that are printed on them, may be made instrumental in invigorating the conceptions; and I am persuaded, that habits of attention thus acquired, would be found of greater use in developing the faculties, than any lessons which the poor ignorant children could be made to read,



or get by heart. They ought soon to be made sensible, that all the comforts of human life are the effects of industry, that every article of food or clothing is the product of the labour of many individuals. The co-operation of Divine Providence, without which the labour of man would in many cases be obviously ineffectual, ought to be displayed in the clearest light. To this end, such examinations as the following would be highly salutary:—

“What are you going to eat for your  
 “breakfast?” “Bread.” “Who gives  
 “you this bread? Your father; but how  
 “does your father come by the money  
 “which buys it?” “He earns it by la-  
 “bour.” “But if he were sick, could he  
 “thus earn it? By whom is his health  
 “preserved? Who makes the bread?  
 “What is it made from? Can the farmer  
 “cause the wheat to grow? Were the  
 “farmer to be idle, and not to sow his  
 “land, would God Almighty exert his  
 “power to raise him a crop? You then



“ see that the bread you eat, is the blessing of Providence upon industry.”

We have already seen, that clear and distinct conceptions are necessary towards even the lowest degree of judgment; but there may be conceptions without judgment, as there are conceptions without belief. I may conceive the figure of a horse with wings, though I do not believe that such a creature ever existed. These are not the conceptions on which the minds of children ought to be exercised. They should be taught to form clear and distinct notions of what is presented to their senses: and on these notions their judgment should be exercised before it is made to pronounce on the truth or falsehood of abstract propositions, concerning which, it cannot possibly have any idea whatever.

Habits of attention to the objects of perception, are so essentially necessary to those who by their situation are destined to be constantly employed upon sensible

objects, that we may assure ourselves, when by the education we give to the poor, we incapacitate them for this attention, we do an injury where we intended to confer a favour.

This point deserves attentive consideration. I could adduce many proofs in support of my opinion concerning it; and make no doubt that many ladies, as well as myself, have experienced disappointment, in the hopes they had formed of making excellent servants by means of an education above the vulgar.

After having inspired a taste for reading, and excited the powers of the imagination, while attention to the cultivation of the objects of perception has been totally omitted, we are surprised to find that the proper business of the servant is neglected. After the most careful cultivation of the reasoning faculties, we are vexed by instances of deficiency in common judgment; and after the most serious pains to impress religious truths and moral senti-

ments upon the mind, by means of lessons and lectures, we are sometimes pained, by discovering proofs of irreligion and immorality.

The cause of this disappointment we may, in many instances, trace to that partial cultivation of the faculties, which, while it ripened those least useful to the possessor, left the first and most essential powers of the mind in a manner dormant. Happier consequences would, I am persuaded, ensue, if, in the education of persons to whom habits of active industry are essential, we made it our endeavour to guard against affording *stimuli* to the imagination.\* It is thus only that we can hope to produce that *common sense*, which is sterling in every region; the current

\* We may observe, that where habits of strict cleanliness prevail among the lower orders, girls appear vastly more acute and intelligent, than they do where they are accustomed to live from infancy in nastiness: a proof, that by the attention and observation essential to cleanliness, the mind is beneficially exercised.

coin that is equally useful to the high and to the low, to the learned and to the unlearned. It is ever in requisition, ever necessary; nor can all the stores of wit and knowledge compensate for its absence. As it is in a peculiar manner essential to those who are employed in conducting the common concerns of life, the education by which it can be most effectually cultivated, is surely the best which can be given to such as are doomed to move in a narrow sphere; and where the education we bestow has not this tendency, it cannot fail to be injurious.

By teaching the poor to read, we put into their hands the most powerful instrument of improvement to all the intellectual faculties; but if these faculties have received no previous culture, we need not expect that they will ever learn to employ this power to any useful purpose. The question put by the Apostle to the Ethiopian, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" if put to the children of our



charities, might well be answered by them in the words of Candace's prime minister, "How can I, except some man should "guide me?" Is it by teaching children to repeat strings of judgments upon abstract propositions, which they have no faculties to apprehend, that we expect to give them that understanding of the Scriptures which shall make them wise unto salvation? These judgments may be repeated as distinctly as possible, but it is impossible they should be believed; because *where there is no conception, there can be no belief.*

How conclusive is the reasoning of St Paul upon this subject. With what truth and spirit does he represent the absurdity of attempting to inculcate the momentous truths of religion by words, to which no distinct ideas could be attached by the hearers! He admits, that ideas may be attached to other sounds besides those of language; but shews, that even in these instances, an accurate conception of the meaning intended to be conveyed is neces-



sary—as in musical instruments, “ whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sound, how,” says he, “ shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle? So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? For ye will speak unto the air.”

It is, I grant, extremely mortifying to be convinced of the inutility of our labours, especially when they have been exerted with cordial zeal; but it is of importance to the objects of that zeal, that we should not delude ourselves by vain expectations of having rendered them a service which we have not rendered them. We wish to inspire them with a true and lively faith, let us then endeavour to open the heart and understanding for its reception.

The poetry of the Hebrews is a continual hymn of praise to the Great Creator. The Supreme Being is there represented

as the animating soul of nature. All his works praise Him; sun, moon, and stars, shew forth his glory. His superintending Providence is traced throughout all events from generation to generation; and his superintending care is represented as extending to the wild beasts of the forest, and to the fowls of the heavens!

At most schools for the poor, the children are taught to read in the Old Testament. But are they taught there to read the important lessons I have above described? Alas! no. Their conceptions are never so far opened as to permit these descriptions to excite any emotions in the heart. These emotions are the less likely to be excited, from not being in unison with the only conceptions of the DEITY which have been obtained. These have been awful and terrific, little calculated to excite the feelings of admiration and gratitude; nor does the way in which they read the Bible tend to give any ideas upon the subject to the mind.

When the Bible is read as a school-book, it will, like any other school-book, be a means of exercising attention; but it is to the formation and sound of the words, and not to the ideas they convey, that the attention of the scholar will be directed; and unless his attention be directed to the meaning, the meaning will never attract his notice. Now, it unfortunately happens, that the teacher seldom considers it his business thus to direct the attention. If the words are properly pronounced, his concern is ended. When the scholars have made such proficiency as to be able to pronounce them glibly at sight, their education is considered as complete. And so ready are we to believe what is pleasing to us, that he who would endeavour to convince us of our error, would have a thankless office.

Since the publication of the first edition of these letters, I have had many opportunities of examining this matter fully; and the result is a complete conviction, that

the advantages derived to the poor, from what we term education, is in many instances reduced almost to nothing, from our want of attention to the previous cultivation of those faculties which it ought to be our first object to improve. I am likewise thoroughly convinced, that much of what we are at pains to teach as the foundation of religious principle, is as useless in that point of view, as if it were taught in the Greek or Hebrew tongue: and that much that appears to us very plain and simple, is so far beyond the comprehension of ignorant minds, as to require familiar explanation, before they can receive from it one distinct idea.

I have much pleasure in observing that explanations of the catechisms, creeds, &c. are now in very general use. But even these explanations will sometimes be found to require explanation. Nor will they be understood, unless where some pains has been bestowed in exercising the power of attention, in the meaning of what is said



or repeated. To these familiar explanations, our Divine Master did not think it beneath him to descend. It was mentioned by him as a proof of his divine mission, that *to the poor the gospel was preached*; and *by the poor* it was in the wisdom of Providence ordained, that the glad tidings of salvation should be sounded throughout the world.

Before our religion, the distinctions formed by human pride vanish: in its presence, worldly pomp and worldly honours are annihilated. Stript of his adventitious greatness, man appears as he is; whatever be his station, the frail child of dust!—however humble his lot, the heir of immortality!

The opinions I have advanced upon the cultivation of the faculties, receive no slight support from the consideration, that the knowledge of the Scriptures, I mean a true practical knowledge of them, requires not those higher powers of the mind, which must be brought to some degree of



perfection before a knowledge of the abstract sciences can be attained. The conceptions must, indeed, have been so far exercised, as to give clear and just ideas; but the ideas need not be numerous: and in reading the Old Testament, assistance is given to the mind in forming them, by a perpetual reference to the objects of perception. The history of the creation, and of all the events antecedent to the dispensation of the Mosaic law, are recorded in terms of such beautiful simplicity, that they are calculated to make a strong impression upon the minds of children. To make this impression useful, it is not sufficient that the facts are known, nor that the firmest belief in the reality be established in the mind. It is the providence of GOD which animates the scene. Confidence or faith in this Providence is represented as forming the virtue of the Patriarchs; it is this by which they are distinguished from the savages of other ages, and of other nations. The knowledge of

the true God was the inheritance of the Hebrews; it breathes in every line of their sacred writings; elevating the conceptions to a pitch of sublimity beyond what mere learning or genius has ever yet attained. The idea of the Supreme, as the Father and Preserver, not only of the human race, but of the brute creation, is calculated to inspire feelings of compassion, mingled with devotional sentiment; and ought particularly to be dwelt upon to those, who, from their situation in life, have it in their power to exercise humanity, or the contrary, upon the inferior animals. The cruelty that we see daily exercised upon brutes is shocking to every feeling heart; and were lessons upon this subject enforced, as they may be, by the authority of Scripture, to be given at our charity-schools, it would be of service to humanity.

When the affections have been thus awakened, and the powers of conception and judgment in some degree opened, the history of the Jewish nation will not only

gratify curiosity, but excite surprize, wonder, and, it may be, some degree of indignation and discontent. Why was this people, weak and wicked as they are by their own prophet described to be, the chosen people of GOD? Children, who by a more liberal education have had the sphere of their knowledge enlarged, are still more apt to indulge in these anxious doubts, which, if silenced by the voice of authority, may end in total scepticism. The vulgar, taking every thing literally, are apt to fall into an error no less fatal; and to conceive, that vices which were committed by the *people of GOD*, cannot be considered as unpardonable offences.

It is, therefore, of great importance to make it plain to young people, as soon as we perceive these doubts to have a place in their minds, that the descendants of Abraham were not chosen by GOD, to set forth to the world an example of pure and heroic virtue. They were separated from the rest of mankind by peculiar laws and

ceremonies, in order to preserve the knowledge of the *one only* and *true* GOD; and divided into tribes, who each preserved an accurate account of its genealogy from him in whom it was promised, “that in his seed “should all the nations of the earth be “blessed,” in order to prove the accomplishment of that promise in the birth of the Messiah. The immoral conduct of the people thus highly favoured with superior light, shewed, in the strongest colours, the necessity of a revelation yet more perfect than had been granted to the fathers. To faith in the directing and protecting providence of GOD, was to be added a faith still more powerful and efficacious.

Thus may children be led by degrees to a knowledge of the New Testament dispensation.

While the Scriptures are thus opened to them, they will, like the disciples on their journey to Emmaus, find their hearts burn within them. The history of their Redeemer’s life and sufferings, of his merito-

rious death, and glorious ascension, will awaken each amiable affection, each interesting feeling of the heart. They will see, that as protecting Providence was the boon promised to the believers in the first revelation, Divine Grace is the peculiar promise of the second. They will perceive, that by iniquity and impenitence both may be forfeited; and thus the necessity of a strict adherence to the moral duties will be made clear and evident, and piety and morality be so strongly associated in their minds, as to prevent a tendency to superstition on the one hand, and to enthusiasm on the other.\* For this profitable knowledge of the Scriptures, neither genius, nor learning, nor abstract reasoning, are necessary. Cultivated imagination is here of no use; and in reading

\* For a further view of the sentiments of the author on the subject of Religious Instruction—See “Letters to the Daughter of a Nobleman, on the formation of moral and religious principle.” And “Exercises in Religious Knowledge.” The latter, a small book, intended for the use of a charity-school.



the Scriptures, sincerity and simplicity of heart are more essential requisites than all the critic's lore.

Among those who have studied the Scriptures as critics, I have found many who are declared enemies to affording scriptural instruction to the poor; many who think that the Bible ought by no means to be put into the hands of youth; but never did I meet with one who had been taught to apply its precepts and its doctrines *to the heart*, that harboured any apprehension of the consequences of giving scriptural knowledge to the otherwise illiterate. It is this application of the sacred writings which it ought to be the instructor's aim to teach. If, instead of this salutary application of the Divine commandments, we go about to establish our own righteousness, by interpreting the judgments denounced against sin in the condemnation of those who differ from us in opinion, we shall, indeed, reap little advantage from Scripture knowledge. Comments of this nature are,

I am afraid, but too common: and as they are the natural result of a partial application of particular passages, they can only be prevented, by leading the mind to seek for the *general meaning* in the *general spirit* of the Gospel writers; which, if done with sincerity, will always bring some salutary truth home to the bosom. Striking are the lessons that are given upon this head by our blessed LORD. Let us labour to impress them in such a manner as to render the reading of the Scriptures “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

It is in order to effect this application of the doctrines and precepts of the Gospel to the heart, that I would gradually prepare the heart for their reception. I have, as I am informed, given umbrage to some pious minds by what I advanced upon this subject in the former volume. This information has induced me scrupulously to re-examine all the arguments upon which my opinion was formed; with a firm reso-

lution of freely acknowledging error, wherever I found it. No arguments, indeed, were offered by those who differed from me, to assist me in this research. By these I might, perhaps, have been more effectually enlightened; but I confess, that after having given all the attention to the subject of which I am capable, I still remain of opinion, that to force articles of belief upon the mind, before the conceptions have been so far opened as to afford the possible exercise of judgment, (the faculty by which we alone determine on the truth or falsehood of propositions) can have no other consequence, than to produce either a blind and bigotted adherence to unexamined principles, a total indifference to all principle, or the extremes of scepticism and infidelity.

Greatly have they mistaken me, who imagine that it is from a light estimation of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity; that I am led to disapprove of the means which are sometimes taken to enforce them upon

the infant mind. It is my respect for these doctrines, my opinion of their importance, and my conviction of their being found consonant to truth and reason, which leads me to recommend, with earnestness, that they may be so enforced as that the heart and the understanding may be equally impressed with their truth. In this all ranks of society are alike concerned; and it is therefore my opinion, that the religious education of the poor and of the rich ought to be conducted upon the same principles. By cultivating the affections of the infant heart, and inspiring towards the Great Creator feelings of gratitude, reverence, hope, confidence, and love, the conceptions will be opened towards the perception of moral truth; the judgment will thus be exercised, and when it is sufficiently matured to perceive the importance of the doctrines of the Gospel, then, and then only, will they be received and cherished so as to yield the fruits of faith and righteousness.

Superstition and enthusiasm are the Scylla and Charybdis of sound and rational piety. In order to avoid the former, care must be taken to watch over those early associations which connect ideas of good and evil with circumstances which are trivial or indifferent; and to preserve from the latter, imagination must be put under the regulation of judgment.



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## LETTER X.

### IMAGINATION AND TASTE.

*Imagination defined.—Necessity of its Operations being guided by Judgment.—Illustrations.—Definition of Taste.—Mistakes concerning the Cultivation of this Faculty.—Union of Conception and Judgment essential to its Cultivation.—Illustrations.*

THE necessity I feel myself under of compressing into the limits of a single letter, the observations that occur to me on the subjects of Imagination and Taste, will compel me to be concise; I shall, however, endeavour to be as little obscure as possible.

The word imagination has great latitude in its application. It is sometimes employed to denote simple apprehension; it

being very usual in common conversation, to say, that we cannot imagine how such a thing could happen, when we mean, that we cannot conceive it. In this sense, I have carefully avoided employing it. It is sometimes, likewise, applied in a general way, to express the operation of the mind in thinking; and in this incorrect way of speaking, we frequently observe, that a thing occupies the imagination, when in reality it is the subject of reflection.

Again; the term imagination is sometimes made use of in describing the intellectual pleasures and pursuits, in contradistinction to those of sense. In this way it is applied by Doctor Akenside, whose poem on the Pleasures of the Imagination describes the employment of all the intellectual faculties.

By imagination, in the sense to which I have confined myself, is understood that power of the mind, which is exerted in forming new combinations of ideas. The power of calling up at pleasure any parti-

cular class of ideas, is properly denominated fancy. A creative imagination implies not only the power of fancy, but judgment, abstraction, and taste. Where these are wanting, the flights of imagination are little better than the ravings of a lunatic.

From the nature of this faculty, it is obvious, that it can be exercised but in a very slight degree in childhood, the ideas being at that period too few in number to afford materials for new combinations; or, should the attempt at forming them be made, they must, from the want of taste and judgment, be weak and imperfect. But long before the mind can combine for itself, the conceptions are sufficiently vigorous to enter with avidity into the combinations made by others. If these are so artfully contrived as to interest the passions, or to excite the emotions of terror, hope, indignation, or sympathy, they become the most pleasing exercises of the juvenile mind; but if this exercise be frequently repeated,

it will infallibly produce trains of thought highly unfavourable to the cultivation of those important faculties, without whose aid the creative power of imagination can never be exerted to any useful purpose.

While the mind is occupied in making observations on the nature and properties of the objects of sense, its train of thought is merely a series of simple conceptions; from the objects which have been presented to its notice, it forms notions of similar objects; and on these notions judgment begins its operations. By these exercises it is strengthened and improved. But, until the faculty of judgment has been so matured, as to enable it to guide and correct the combinations which imagination presents, these combinations will be wild and incoherent. However incoherent they may be, they have such a tendency to increase the flow of ideas, and, of consequence, to augment vivacity, that such children appear to much greater advantage, than those whose faculties are culti-

vated in the natural order. But when both arrive at maturity, they who have laid in the greatest fund of clear, distinct, and accurate ideas, must possess a manifest advantage.

Were imagination (as is unfortunately too often supposed) a simple faculty, which could be exercised to advantage without the assistance of the other faculties, the methods usually taken to cultivate it would be judicious and effectual. But if it be in fact a compound of several other faculties, it necessarily follows, that its excellence depends on the degree of perfection, to which the faculties connected with it have arrived. The Iliad of Homer is a work of imagination; it exhibits a series of combinations, perhaps more astonishing in their variety, harmony, and consistency, than any that human genius has ever produced; but does it not in every line give a proof of clear and vigorous conceptions, of strong judgment, and profound reflection? When



our own Shakespeare, whose elevated genius

“ Exhausted worlds, and then imagin’d new,”

pourtrayed the character of Caliban, (who is certainly a creature of the poet’s imagination) did not judgment evidently guide the pencil, and lay on the colours? From the incomparable productions of these extraordinary men, we may justly infer, that all the faculties of the mind were by them possessed in an uncommon degree of vigour, and therefore conclude them to have been cultivated according to the order assigned by nature.

To produce a work of genius, the power of imagination must be possessed in a very eminent degree; but unless a certain portion of the same imagination be possessed by the reader, the works of genius will never be perused with delight. Nothing can be relished but in proportion as it is understood; and thoroughly to understand an author, we must be able, with the rapi-

dity of thought, to enter into all his associations. This can never be done by those who possess a very limited stock of ideas. The beautiful allusions which at once illustrate and adorn the works of the learned, are lost upon those who are unacquainted with classical literature; and we may be assured, that many of the beauties of the ancient orators and poets are in like manner lost upon the learned of our days, from their ignorance of the associations which produced them. A small number of ideas will, indeed, suffice to pursue a simple narrative; and accordingly we find that narrative, either of real or fictitious events, is the only sort of reading which is relished by the uncultivated mind. Do we wish to inspire a taste for studies of a higher order? Then let us lay a solid foundation for such a taste, in the cultivation of all those faculties which are necessary to the proper exercise of imagination. Let us, by the exercise of the reasoning powers, as well as of the conception and the judgment, produce

that arrangement in the ideas, which is alike favourable to invention and to action. In such minds the trains of associated ideas are, if I may so express myself, harmonized by truth. The ideas being numerous, distinct, and just, are called up in proper order; and as arrangement in our associations is the true key of memory, every idea that is wanted obeys the call of will. It is then that the power of imagination comes forth to irradiate the mind, and to give a new zest to the charm of existence.

“ What employment can he have worthy of a man, whose imagination is occupied only about things *low* and *base*, and grovels in a narrow field of mean, inanimating, and uninteresting objects?” and such must ever be the case with him whose ideas are few, confused, and inaccurate; and who, while incapable of expanding his mind to embrace the forms of general and abstract truth, has habitually employed his imagination on the chimeras of untutored

fancy; such a person must be “insensible  
 “to those finer and more delicate senti-  
 “ments, and blind to those more enlarged  
 “and nobler views, which elevate the soul,  
 “and make it conscious of its dignity.

“How different from him, whose imagi-  
 “nation, like an eagle in her flight, takes  
 “a wide prospect, *and observes whatever*  
 “*it presents*, that is new or beautiful, grand  
 “or important; whose rapid wing varies  
 “the scene every moment, carrying him  
 “through the fairy regions of wit or fancy,  
 “sometimes through the more regular and  
 “sober walks of science and philosophy.

“The various objects which he surveys,  
 “according to their different degrees of  
 “beauty and dignity, raise in him the lively  
 “and agreeable emotions of taste. Illus-  
 “trious human characters as they pass in  
 “review, clothed with their moral quali-  
 “ties, touch his heart still more deeply.  
 “They not only awaken the sense of  
 “beauty, but excite the sentiment of ap-  
 “probation, and kindle the glow of virtue.



“ While he views what is truly great and  
 “ glorious in human conduct, his soul  
 “ catches the divine flame, and burns with  
 “ desire to emulate what it admires.”\*

The reveries of such a mind are not only delightfully amusing, but salutary and useful. On the gay pictures delineated by fancy, judgment, reason, and the moral sense, exert their powers of criticism; and thus the casual combinations of imagination are made a means of improvement to the heart.

I have known a young person, prone to indulge in the reveries presented by a rich and lively imagination, who acknowledged that it was by reflecting on these spontaneous effusions of fancy, that she became acquainted with the propensities and imperfections of her own temper and disposition. In her dreams of future felicity, she found that the gratification of vanity was always included, or indeed formed the ground-work of the piece; she accordingly

\* Reid.



set herself to root out a propensity which she thus discovered to be predominant. When mortified by the pride of others, she found fancy immediately busied in forming scenes whereon she was to act the superior part, and to retort the mortification on those by whom her feelings had been wounded. Conscience took the alarm, and taught her to apply to the Throne of Grace for the Christian spirit of true humility. Thus was imagination rendered subservient to religion, judgment, and reason; and while it acts under such control, we may safely pronounce it the first of human blessings!

Where the imagination has been injudiciously stimulated at an early period, it has little chance of ever coming under this species of regulation. The attention having been habitually engaged in pursuing the dreams of fiction, loses a thousand opportunities of information and improvement, and the number of ideas must consequently be extremely circumscribed. The

judgment having never been exercised on realities, can only compare ideas that are equally imperfect, and consequently be forever liable to error. An expectation that happiness or misery will be produced in real life, as they are produced in fiction, is one of the dangerous errors into which their minds will ever be apt to fall; and which may be attended with most fatal consequences: the real events of life succeeding each other in a very different train from that in which they are represented in such productions. The false associations that are thus produced in the mind, may not only mislead the judgment, but, as I have endeavoured elsewhere to shew, may effectually pervert the heart—the sensibility excited by fictitious representations of human misery being very far from that genuine spirit of benevolence, that is actively exerted in alleviating the distresses which it cannot remove. Where the judgment has been strengthened by observation, and habits of active benevolence have been, in

some measure, acquired, and confirmed by religious principle, then, indeed, the luxurious tear, called forth by the witching power of imagination, may be indulged with safety; for its source will not then be mistaken. But, where, by imagination, sensibility has been brought into existence, to the woes of imagination sensibility will be confined; and far too sickly will be its constitution, to produce the active charities of life.

Taste is so intimately connected with imagination, that many of the observations applicable to the one will be found to reach the other. The emotion of taste, though simple in its operation, is derived from complex sources. Its very existence depends on the vigour of conception, and implies the exercise of judgment. Nor are these faculties alone equal to the production of this delightful emotion; as we may be convinced, by observing the numbers of persons who possess these faculties in an eminent degree, who, nevertheless,

are incapable of experiencing the emotions of taste. Without a certain portion of sensibility, I believe, true taste is never found. How much this sensibility depends upon organization, I cannot presume to determine; but that it is seldom the boon of uncultivated minds, experience affords us convincing proofs.

To perceive and to enjoy whatever is beautiful or sublime in the works of nature or of art, is the peculiar privilege of taste. Its emotions are accordingly divided by an author,\* to whose elegant and judicious remarks I confess many obligations, into the *emotions of sublimity*, and the *emotions of beauty*.”

“ The qualities that produce these emotions, are to be found in almost every class of the objects of human knowledge, and the emotions themselves afford one of the most extensive sources of human delight. They occur to us amid every variety of external scenery, and among

\* See Alison on Taste.

“ many diversities of disposition and affec-  
 “ tion in the mind of man. The most  
 “ pleasing arts of human invention are al-  
 “ together directed to their pursuit; and  
 “ even the necessary arts are exalted into  
 “ dignity by the genius that can unite  
 “ beauty with use.”

That a susceptibility to the emotion of  
 taste does not altogether depend upon the  
 original frame of our nature, is evident,  
 from its being entirely confined to minds  
 possessing a certain degree of cultivation;  
 whereas the emotions of surprise, joy,  
 wonder, &c. are felt by all. Nor is the  
 mind of the most cultivated at all times  
 equally susceptible of these emotions. All  
 must know, that there are moments when  
 objects of sublimity or beauty make no  
 impression. All must have experienced,  
 that scenes which have at one period called  
 forth the most vivid sensations of delight,  
 have at another been viewed with the most  
 perfect indifference.



The more deeply we examine this curious subject, the more fully shall we be convinced, that the emotions of taste entirely depend on the train of ideas which are called up in the mind by certain objects of perception. If the mind has not been previously furnished with a store of ideas that can be thus associated, the finest objects of sublimity or beauty will never give a pleasurable sensation to the breast. They may be viewed with wonder, with admiration, but will never produce emotions of sublimity or beauty.

The above observations may be further illustrated, by reflecting on the manner in which a taste for the beauties of nature in the material world, and for the beauties of poetry, enhance each other. A young mind, accustomed to the contemplation of rural scenery, is enraptured by the poetical descriptions which present a transcript of all that had so often charmed the imagination.

“When Nature charms, for life itself is new.”

The elevated sentiments and sublime ideas of the poet give, on the other hand, a number of new associations, which are henceforth called up by the scenes of nature, and become to the mind of sensibility a new and inexhaustible source of delight.

By the ideas associated with them, a thousand sounds that are in themselves indifferent, nay, some that are rather in their natures disagreeable, become pregnant with delight. I have for this last half hour been leaning on my elbow, listening to the distant tinkling of the sheep-bell, a sound so perfectly in unison with the surrounding scenery, as to appear enchantingly beautiful. Upon reflection, I believe it to be just such a bell as is tied to the pie-man's basket, which I have often in town deemed an execrable nuisance. The different emotions which it now excites, can only be resolved into the different trains of ideas with which the sound is associated.\*

\* I once knew a lady who had been brought up in one of the most confined streets in the city of London,

My narrow limits will not permit me to go into this subject at sufficient length; but the hints I have suggested, will, if pursued with any attention, infallibly lead us to conclude, that the foundation of the emotions of taste, with regard to natural objects and to poetical description, must be laid in distinct and accurate conceptions. By these must the ideas be accumulated, which, by the laws of association, are formed into distinct trains; which, like the genii of Alladin's lamp, appear the moment the enchanter's imagination is disposed to call them. Without some pains taken in the cultivation of the faculty of

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where her father had, by dint of industry, accumulated a large fortune. When complaining of her hard fate, in being obliged upon her marriage to leave the metropolis for the dull sameness of a country life, she drew a striking picture of the joys she had unwillingly relinquished. "There (she said) she never knew what it was to be lonely; for besides the bustle all day long in the street of carts and coaches, there were forty coopers in the back-yard, who were knock, knocking, from morning till night!" Does not this strongly evince the power of association in forming our ideas of harmony?

conception, we may learn to talk of taste, but we shall never be subject to its influence.

In creating a susceptibility to the emotions of taste, we shall find a powerful assistant in devotional sentiment. The mind that has been accustomed to associate the ideas of Infinite Power, Wisdom, and Goodness, with all that is striking in the works of nature, must have a peculiar tendency to the emotions of sublimity and beauty. It is thus that sensibility may be properly and effectually awakened. The train of thought which devotional sentiment excites, is so highly favourable to the cultivation of refined taste, that I greatly question whether its emotions were ever excited, where sensibility had not been thus called forth. So necessary is it towards the perfection of the human mind, that the cultivation of the affections should go hand in hand with that of intellect!

It is no small incitement to the cultivation of taste, to reflect, that the emotions



of sublimity and beauty are connected, not only with our devotional, but with our moral feelings. They coalesce not with any of the dissocial or malevolent passions; and can never be experienced while the mind is under their influence. By rendering the mind susceptible of the emotions of taste, we not only expand the circle of human pleasures, but as every emotion of which the heart is capable, has a tendency to produce emotions that are in the same key, we give an additional chord, if I may so express it, to the harmony of the virtues.

To those who are by their situation in society exempted from the cares and perplexities of business, it is of the last importance to have a sufficient number of such objects and pursuits, as may serve fully to occupy the time which is thus left to their disposal. The intellectual powers have little chance of being called forth, in any eminent degree, where there are no difficulties to stimulate the energies of the soul, and no object to rouse its activity.



The love of knowledge is indeed an active principle; and for that reason cannot be too assiduously cultivated in the minds of those who are born to the privilege or the *curse* of leisure: but if to the love of knowledge we do not add a susceptibility to the emotions of taste, the mind will be apt to languish, and to seek resources in those fatal scenes of dissipation, where every virtuous disposition and manly sentiment are soon obliterated.

The emotions of taste are, I believe, particularly congenial to the female mind; but it deserves our serious enquiry, how far the common mode of female education tends to cultivate, or to destroy, this natural susceptibility. When we hear a mother speak of giving her daughters *a taste for music, and a taste for painting*, we may, nine times in ten, conclude that she means nothing more by the expression, than exciting in her children an ambition to exhibit to advantage their practical skill in these accomplishments. For this purpose, the

methods generally adopted are obviously so successful, as to render it unnecessary to suggest any improvement.

With the idea of excelling in those accomplishments, is associated every idea of glory and approbation. To render the road to excellence easy of access, diffidence and modesty are banished from the youthful mind; the veil of bashfulness is torn aside by vanity, and every art made use of to render the gentle pupils callous to the public gaze. Vanity, aided by example, and stimulated by ambition, does wonders. The attention is exerted in the art of imitation, and its power is never exerted in vain. Where the best models are procured, the copies will in time be excellent. The music-master who has taste, will teach his pupils to make use of graces, which will serve as a succedaneum for that which he has it not in his power to confer; and rapid execution must inevitably be attained by unwearied application.

All this may, I confess, be accomplished without the cultivation of a single faculty of the mind, excepting those of perception and attention; but to confound this paltry art of imitation with the idea of taste, is no less absurd, than if we were to call the compositor, who arranges the types for an edition of Homer, the Prince of Poets!

The emotion of taste with regard to musical composition, depends upon association no less than it does with regard to the other objects of our perceptions.

Single sounds, we well know, are accounted agreeable or disagreeable, according to the ideas which they excite. On examination we shall find that those which particularly strike us as sublime or beautiful, never fail to produce certain trains of ideas in the mind; which, if accidentally broken, the emotions of sublimity or beauty are annihilated. An instance or two will sufficiently elucidate this truth. What sound so sublime as a peal of thunder! The emptying of a cart of stones in the

street may be mistaken for it, and, while the deception lasts, will produce the emotions of sublimity in their fullest extent; but let us discover our mistake, and what becomes of the emotions of sublimity? The melodious notes of the nightingale have been well imitated on the stage; but did they there produce the same emotions of beauty, as when heard in the stillness of the solemn grove?

Music, which is a continuation of sounds, may, from the various combinations of which it is capable, be rendered highly expressive of the tender, the plaintive, the melancholy, the cheerful, or the gay. It may be rendered elevating or depressing, soothing the soul to sadness, or exhilarating to the tone of pleasure. Now, that every one of these various emotions are occasioned by the production of certain trains of ideas connected by the laws of association, I think no person of reflection will dispute. The person who is not susceptible of these emotions, may attain a



knowledge of the laws of composition, and, acquainted with the difficulty attending the execution of laborious passages, may admire the art of the performer; but this admiration is perfectly distinct from the emotion of taste. To obtain this species of applause, is the sole aim of a number of composers, whose ambition is amply gratified by the approbation of the vulgar many; but it is the man of real taste alone, who, either in his compositions or performance, can excite the emotions of sublimity or beauty.

That the number is so few, will not be matter of surprise, when we reflect that the person who would call forth the emotions of taste, either in the disposition of material objects, or in *any* of the fine arts, must be capable of entering into all those associations that are connected with the tones of mind which he wishes to produce. Whatever rudely breaks these trains of ideas, utterly destroys the effect. Every person of taste, who has heard the Messiah



of Handel performed at Westminster-Abbey, and at the Play-House, must be sensible of the advantage with which this sublime composition was heard at the former place, where every object tended to produce associations in unison with the tone of the performance. At the Play-House these associations were forcibly broken, trains of discordant ideas obtruded themselves on the mind, and thus the effect was lost.

From the tenor of these observations, I hope it has been made clear, that a taste for the fine arts can only be cultivated by the same means which must be employed to lay the foundation of taste in general, viz. a careful improvement of all the intellectual faculties. If the conceptions have not been rendered clear and accurate, and the attention roused to give them constant employment, so as to lay in a large stock of ideas upon every subject; if the judgment has not been exercised upon the agreement and disagreement of ideas; and if the

powers of abstraction and imagination have not been called forth; it is impossible that the emotions of taste should ever be experienced. It is not by constantly practising at a musical instrument, or by handling the pencil, that taste for painting or for music can possibly be acquired. But let the basis of taste be fixed, and then by rendering your pupils capable of the practical part of these accomplishments, you enlarge the sphere of their innocent enjoyments, and afford them the opportunity of communicating pleasure to others.

The mother who is superior to the chains of fashion, and who is capable of taking an extensive view of the probabilities of human life, as well as of weighing the talents of her children with accurate impartiality, will decide with wisdom and precision on the value of those accomplishments which must inevitably be purchased at the expence of a large portion of time and attention. Does the mind appear destitute of that energy which is neces-

sary to give a zest to the intellectual pleasures, she will readily perceive the advantage which may be derived to such a mind; from having at all times the power of gratifying itself by an elegant and innocent amusement. But if her children possess sufficient intellectual vigour to find full employment from other sources, she will, perhaps, content herself with cultivating in them that taste for the fine arts in general, which will at all times ensure them most exquisite gratification.

To such minds every scene in nature presents some object calculated to call forth trains of ideas, which either interest the heart, or amuse the fancy. But if the time in which the mind ought naturally to be employed in accumulating those ideas, be devoted to acquiring a facility of execution at a musical instrument, it is evident no such ideas can be called forth.

As painting is now become a fashionable accomplishment, little less generally cultivated than music, it may be expected that

I should make a few observations that may particularly apply to it. It is a subject on which I have no assistance from the writings of others: in what I say upon it, I have, therefore, no guide but my own feelings and my own judgment, and in such circumstances it becomes me to express myself with diffidence.

The pleasure we receive from painting appears to be derived from two very unequal sources. The first, and greatest, is from the emotions of sublimity or of beauty; which in painting, as in all other subjects, depend on association. The more perfect the work of the artist, the more perfect the emotion; which is so powerful in a mind of sensibility, that it must be permitted, in some degree, to subside, before we are capable of examining with minute attention the sources from which it is derived. These are various, as design, expression, colouring, &c.; but if these were not in perfect harmony with each other, we may be assured the emotion



of taste would not be produced in any powerful degree.

The second source of pleasure in painting, is the accuracy of imitation. This corresponds to the facility of execution in the musical performer; both are sources of a certain degree of admiration and surprise, but are equally distinct from the emotions of taste. Where taste has not been previously cultivated, painting will never advance beyond an imitative art; and as the happy imitation of nature depends upon vigorous conception, it cannot be expected that those who have not had their conceptions exercised upon natural objects, can ever produce any imitations which will be worthy of even this inferior species of admiration. Masters may, indeed, give them rules of perspective, and teach them to daub on abundance of pretty colours with striking effect; but if taste be wanting, the lessons of a Raphael will be thrown away. Examples, on the other hand, are not wanting to shew what progress in this



delightful art may be made with little instruction from masters, where real taste is guided by judgment, and warmed by a brilliant imagination. I have the pleasure of knowing many ladies who so excel; but not one uncultivated mind is of the number.

Taste in the form of ornamental decoration, whether in articles of dress or furniture, is so much under the influence of the tyrant fashion, that it can no longer be styled a simple emotion. Fashion depends so evidently upon association, that it must be traced to that source by the least reflecting mind; but the associations to which it owes its wonderful ascendancy, are merely those which connect the ideas of esteem and admiration with the splendour of rank and elevated situation. The form of dress that is worn by those we account patterns of gentility, is associated with the ideas of respect and admiration, which we are accustomed to cherish towards those of a certain rank; or with the ideas of a dis-

tion still more flattering, which constitutes the glory of gay and youthful beauty. When the same form of dress descends to the vulgar, the change that takes place in our associations strips it of its adventitious lustre, and affixes to the very same object, which had before called forth our admiration, ideas of meanness and contempt.

If the sovereignty of fashion be so absolute, what use, you will say, is there in the cultivation of just and refined taste, which cannot overturn her decrees?

Notwithstanding the influence which fashion has over our opinions, taste has still a very important part to act; and if true taste (of which judgment is a necessary constituent) were properly cultivated, all the evils arising from the powerful influence of fashion would be completely done away.

Taste rejects whatever is incongruous; it requires fitness and harmony, and therefore taste will always reject the affectation of singularity. It will always, for this

reason, adopt the mode of the present fashion; but it will adopt it under such limitations, as are agreeable to its general principles. Wherever cultivated taste prevails, one general sentiment, whether of simplicity or magnificence, will pervade the scene. In the furniture of the house, in the economy of the table, the same predominant idea will be expressed; and every ornament will be rejected, that does not give additional force to the expression. If inanimate objects can be so disposed as to produce an undivided emotion, surely the decorations of the human form ought to be able to produce the same effect. True taste must revolt with inexpressible disgust from whatever does not perfectly harmonize with the character. Where purity, modesty, and virtue, dwell in the heart, it is the very acmé of bad taste to assume the dress of the wanton.

A knowledge of the principles of taste would teach our sex to preserve the appearance of modesty at least, even if the

reality were wanting. In female beauty, I believe no one will deny, that softness graced with dignity, modesty, gentleness, and purity, are ideas that perfectly harmonize with the object. Let these associations be broken by discordant images, and the emotion of beauty will be no longer felt.

“But,” says Miss Pert, “young men are strangers to the emotions of taste; to please them other associations must be excited. By dressing in the style of women of a certain description, we call up trains of ideas favourable to passion.”

True, young woman; but know, that she who glories in this species of conquest, degrades herself beneath the rank of those she imitates, and stands upon the brink of a precipice, with nothing but a little pride betwixt her and destruction. Few, however, very few of the numbers who adopt modes of dress highly incongruous with sentiments of modesty, are influenced by any other motive than the desire of being

in the very extreme of fashion. The cultivation of taste would modify this species of ambition in the young; and would lead those who have arrived at the sober autumn of life, to adopt that mode of decoration which harmonizes with the season.

The principles of which I have here given an imperfect sketch, are of universal application. They extend not merely to the disposition of material objects, but have an important connexion with moral conduct and behaviour. It is in these principles that the laws of propriety originate. From them they derive their authority; and the period in which fashion gives a sanction to such modes of conduct as the principles of taste condemn, is the epoch of depravity.

It may now be expected, that I should proceed to give some hints respecting the cultivation of taste and imagination: I shall not, however, swell the size of my letter by laying down rules, which the foregoing investigation must have rendered in some



measure unnecessary. I have endeavoured to prove, that unless we have assiduously cultivated the faculty of attention, and directed it to such objects as may enlarge the stock of useful ideas; unless we have awakened the curiosity, invigorated the conceptions, and enlightened the judgment; we can have no hopes of introducing those trains of thought which are the loftiest exercise of imagination, or those associations which are the source of refined taste.

Where the preliminary steps have been taken, and nature has granted to the character a common share of sensibility, the preceptor will find the cultivation of imagination an easy task. True taste is more difficult of acquirement. But where the first faculties of the mind have been duly cultivated, and the pupil is then directed to such subjects as are cultivated to elevate the tone of feeling, and awaken the sympathies of the human heart, there is no

doubt that the principles of taste will take root and flourish.

Should our efforts prove unsuccessful, it is in the neglect of the early affections that we shall probably find the cause of our disappointment. If we have suffered pride, self-will, arrogance, hatred, envy, or any other malignant passion, to gain an ascendancy in the disposition, we need not expect that taste will be either felt or cultivated. Its emotions were never known to the selfish; they harmonize with the most generous feelings of our nature, and seek alliance with all the virtues!

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## LETTER XI.

### ABSTRACTION.

*Explanation of the Term.—Use of Abstraction in Science, in Reasoning, and in the Conduct of Life.*

WORDS not in common use, such as Abstraction, and Generalization, appear so formidable to readers who dread the trouble of thinking, that I wish it were possible to describe the advantages to be derived from cultivating the power of reasoning, without employing any terms but such as are perfectly familiar. I, however, flatter myself, that the terms alluded to, as they refer to operations of the mind of which we are all, in some degree, capable, may without

any great effort of attention be completely understood.

Abstraction, as defined by Mr Locke, is “that power which the mind has of separating an idea from all other ideas that accompany it in its real existence.” Thus, for instance, colour always exists in company with something coloured; but we can think and talk of the beauty of purple or of lilac, without combining the idea of these colours with a bonnet or a ribbon: and when we think of the colour independently of the thing coloured, it is an exercise of abstraction.

When we speak of the duty of man as an accountable agent or a member of society, we do not speak of the duty of *John* or *Thomas*, or any particular individual, but of *man* in general, from an abstract consideration of his powers and situation. Without the capability of this consideration of the peculiar powers which distinguish the species, it would be impossible to reason upon the subject of his duties.

All classification depends upon the power of attending to some general qualities characteristic of a *species*, so as to arrange all the individuals in which it is found into one distinct class. In objects of science these are again divided and subdivided, so as to abridge the labour of scientific research. It is by this previous arrangement, that the naturalist, who visits distant regions, is enabled, upon an examination of new and unknown objects, either in the animal or vegetable tribes, to pronounce with certainty upon their habits and properties. This classification may properly be called the *grammar of science*. And its use may, perhaps, to many of my readers, be best exemplified by the advantage that is derived to language from the classification of words. When, in learning a language, we refer each word to its proper station, as noun, verb, or preposition, we must exercise the power of abstraction; fixing our attention upon the power of the word, without any consideration of its



meaning. While we are thus employed, *to love* and *to hate* appear words of the same class, no other idea but that of verb being attached to either.

By the explanation that has been given of the laws of association in several parts of these letters, the impossibility of carrying on any just or comprehensive train of reasoning, while the mind is perpetually referring to particulars, will clearly appear. Whenever our ideas concerning any moral quality or action are formed, not from an abstract consideration of the quality or action under consideration, but from the particular individuals who possess or practise them, a thousand casual associations, unavoidably attached to these individuals, will bias the mind and pervert the judgment. Hence arise those inconsistencies in opinion and conduct, with which we so frequently meet in persons of good hearts and ardent imagination, but who, from being incapable of general reasoning, change their notions of vice and virtue,

merit and demerit, as they are led by their passions and prejudices to approve or to condemn individuals. What in a favoured friend they extol as meritorious, they consider in an adversary as wicked and indefensible. To every part of the conduct, and to all the opinions of the persons they love, they attach the ideas of *right*; and to the whole of the conduct and opinions of those they hate, they attach the idea of wrong: The result of those false associations on their own conduct, we can be at no loss to determine.

Until we attain the power of disengaging our minds from these false associations, we can neither reason, nor understand the reasoning of others; and as the attainment of this power depends upon the exercise of the faculty of abstraction, it follows, that without the cultivation of this faculty we must remain, in a great measure, the slaves of prejudice. Strict integrity, and a firm adherence to the dictates of conscience, will preserve from

gross errors in conduct, where the path is obvious and free from all perplexity ; but where any intricacy occurs, the mind that is destitute of general principles, will for ever be in danger of being led astray. Hence arises the advantage of deductive reasoning, by which alone general principles can be established.

Until these principles are thus fixed in the mind, the observance of many moral and religious duties will depend solely upon habit and situation. Let us suppose two young persons, who have been from infancy accustomed to the performance of the duties of public and private devotion ; the one, enlightened by clear and distinct views of the principle upon which the propriety and utility of those duties is established ; the other, performing them from no other motive than the example of the society in which he lives, and the associations of duty and propriety. Suppose them both to be sent forth into the world. Which will then be most likely to adhere

to the performance of these duties? When the scene is changed, is it not probable that new habits will be formed, and new associations arise, which may affix to the observance of public and private devotion, ideas of derision and contempt in the mind of him who depended on habit and association solely; while he who is enlightened by more comprehensive views, will remain uninfluenced by the habits and opinions of those with whom it is now his fate to be surrounded?

Of two young women that have had the misfortune to be married to men of dissolute characters, will not she, who is capable of taking a general view of her duties as an accountable and intelligent being, have a manifest advantage over her who has always been confined to the consideration of particulars? The former, fixed by principle, will remain firm in duty, acting from the assurance that the most flagitious conduct of him with whom she is connected, can not absolve her from

obligation to its performance: The latter will ever be in danger of considering the conduct of her husband as an excuse for her own. The same observation will apply to all who have enlisted under the banners of party.

The partizan weighs no opinion in the impartial scales of truth. It is sufficient for his sanction, that it is adopted and supported by the side which he espouses. The consequences have already been hinted at in one of my former Letters upon the improvement of judgment, the exercise of that faculty being the first step towards preventing a tendency to the reception of prejudice; but when prejudices have been already imbibed, it is by abstract reasoning alone upon the nature of things, that they can be detected and overcome. I shall illustrate this by instances from opposite characters.

When the zeal of bigotry has been early and fully imbibed, it will be considered not only as a prerogative, but as a duty,



to denounce the vengeance of GOD against all whose metaphysical and speculative opinions upon abstruse points of doctrine differ from the party whose tenets have been espoused. By particular texts of scripture this rash judgment will perhaps be justified. But let the reasoning faculty be employed, and it will be acknowledged, that on subjects so far beyond the sphere of human knowledge as, but for the light of divine revelation, to be involved in darkness, it becomes us to pronounce with humility. It will be seen that the spirit of the gospel breathes charity and love, and that its tenour is not only glory to GOD, but good will to man.

Without the capability of such comprehensive views, the spirit of bigotry will be apt to produce a re-action leading to infidelity. Instead of considering the tendency of the gospel dispensation, and its admirable adaptation to the principles of the human mind, and the circumstances of the human race, the sceptic confines his ob-

jections to particulars, and from a few passages that appear to him incomprehensible, rejects the whole. It is among those who have formed their opinions from views equally narrow, that he will be most likely to make converts; and these converts will become bigotted in infidelity, in proportion as they have imbibed that spirit of opposition which is inseparable from party prejudice. It is a fatal mistake to imagine, that the cultivation of the reasoning powers is inimical to faith or piety; and it is not a little surprising, that such a mistake should, in any instance, exist among those who have studied the writings of the Apostles.

From the little pains that have commonly been bestowed on the mental cultivation of our sex, it is not surprising that the powers of abstraction and of generalization should be so very seldom met with. Happily, in the sphere in which it is most frequently our lot to move, these are not so indispensably requisite, as that sound

judgment which is vulgarly denominated common sense. The duties of mankind in general, and of our sex in particular, are oftener active than speculative; and an ever wakeful attention to the minutiae of which they are composed, is absolutely essential to their performance; but those who would, for this reason, deny the utility of cultivating the higher powers of the mind, ought, by a parity of reasoning, to consider gold as useless, because small coin is more frequently requisite in transacting the common business of the day.

In common conversation, we often ascribe to judgment results that could not be effected without the power of abstract reasoning. The man who in the choice of his friends manifests much discrimination, is said to chuse with judgment, but it is evident that the qualities to which he wisely shews a preference, must have been previously examined and appreciated; for it is on a conviction of the real value of these qualities, that the preference is

founded. Had the nature of truth, honour, integrity, &c. never come under his consideration, these qualities would never have been the object of his preference. The mind that is incapable of abstraction, can neither love virtue, nor hate vice, nor can it perceive the consequences of adhering to the one, and shunning the other, unless as these consequences are exemplified in particular instances.

Without being capable of pronouncing on the truth or falsehood of propositions, independently of any reference to individuals, we cannot enter into the reasoning of others, and are in danger of perverting and misapplying every general observation that is made to us. Addison has produced an excellent illustration of the truth of this remark, in the account he has given of a lady, who, on reading “the Whole Duty of Man,” discovered in the description of those vicious propensities, against which the pious author endeavours to guard his readers, the characters of her

friends and neighbours, and by regularly recording their names upon the margin, converted a system of Christian morality into a libel upon the whole parish.

It has been asserted, that few err through ignorance of their duty: and under certain limitations the assertion may be just; as there are few so ignorant as to be insensible to a glaring deviation from moral rectitude. But when the path is smoothed by fashion, and filled by numbers, the descent becomes so easy as to be imperceptible to such as are incapable of taking those bearings which accurately mark the moral distance.

The present and immediate consequences of our actions are seldom alarming, and to the remote consequences it is only reason that can look forward. Were mothers more frequently capable of this exertion of intellect, education would no longer be guided by the caprice of fashion. But where mothers have never been taught to reason or to think, are fathers therefore



absolved from the parental duties? Have their offspring no claim upon them for improvement and instruction? Let them consider how far they are accountable for the future conduct of their children. Let them lay aside all prejudice, and, taking a fair and impartial view of the influence of the female sex upon the manners and morals of society, consider how far they are justified in neglecting and contemning the cultivation of that faculty, which is not only essential to principle, but which, by its influence over the passions, has a tendency to promote the harmony of social life.

Conversation, which, to cultivated minds, affords a never-failing fund of improvement and delight, degenerates, with people who cannot reason, into a source of mischief and malevolence. Those who cannot speak on general subjects, must, when they speak at all, refer to particulars. Their observations never extend beyond individuals. And what is the sum of these

observations? How trifling! How silly! How insignificant! Yet trifling as they are, what bitter disputes do they occasion! One asserts that Miss A. is taller than Miss B. Another denies the assertion. The former maintains her argument; the latter redoubles the strength of her opposition: both appeal to those who are present, who, if they be divided in sentiment, may, by joining the disputants, prolong the debate *ad infinitum*. And in such sort of debates do the females of a numerous class, pass all the hours devoted to *the pleasures of conversation*. But when minds confined to a narrow range of ideas, turn their attention to the *actions* of their friends and neighbours, the consequences are still more fatal. Vanity, in such minds, frequently predominates; and then self is seen to be the standard of perfection. By this standard the actions, nay, the words of friends and neighbours are tried: and as it is not possible, in the nature of things, that they should always speak and act, as the person

who sits in judgment would speak and act in similar circumstances, sentence must of course be passed against them. I sincerely believe, that the quantity of malevolence thus engendered exceeds all calculation. It is melancholy to observe, how seldom they who employ themselves in minutely investigating the actions of their neighbours, report any thing to their advantage. Those, on the contrary, who are most capable of taking comprehensive views of human character, are always in their judgments the most charitable. By referring to a fairer standard they form more liberal conclusions, and consequently are not embittered against individuals, on account of those oppositions in taste or opinion, which to the selfish and short-sighted are subjects of perpetual warfare. A casual act of kindness, from the vain or capricious, will not excite in such minds expectations of steady friendship; nor, consequently, when a contrary line of conduct takes place, will it call forth the bitterness of resentment,

The more nearly we become connected with individuals, the more does the capability of taking such general views of character become essential to our peace. For as the merit of the very best of characters is nothing more than the preponderance of good qualities over bad ones, those who are unable to make the estimate, and who confine their observation to particulars, will consider the slightest blemish as a counterbalance to a thousand virtues; or, should they meet with any thing attractive, will build upon the basis of a few extraneous graces, expectations that may wound the heart.

This slight view, though it exhibits but a few of the advantages resulting from a cultivation of the reasoning powers, may suffice to convince us of their value and importance. It now remains for me to point out the means by which the reasoning faculty is to be developed—and to shew the causes which operate to retard its pro-

gress, or to render it ineffectual, or unproductive.

I have already remarked, that attention is the main spring of all the faculties. By attention directed to the objects of perception, we obtain the power of observation. By attention to the ideas of such objects as they are called up by memory, we obtain the power of forming notions or conceptions of objects that are described to us; and by this power our ideas are multiplied, even in infancy, to a degree that is incalculable. By attention to the qualities of sensible objects, we learn to exercise our judgment on objects of perception; and by attention to the ideas contained in a proposition, the judgment separates the true from the false. And so quickly, in many instances, are its decisions pronounced, as to be deemed intuitive. By attention to the form and properties of a certain class of objects, we obtain that power of nice and delicate discrimination, which causes or excites the emotions of sublimity and



beauty. Attention is therefore the primary agent in the creation or improvement of taste. In the development and cultivation of the faculty of abstraction, we must have recourse to the same assisting power: assured that our success wholly depends on the degree in which we can command its services.\*

It has been said, that children soon begin to reason, and to understand reasoning: but the reasoning of children is only a simple exercise of judgment. It is an exercise in which children, who have not been rendered stupid by neglect, take great delight: witness the puzzling questions concerning the causes of things, which they so often ask; and to which they ought ever to receive such answers, as may improve or satisfy the judgment; for if told that the question cannot be an-

\* In a work, for which the author of these volumes has, through a series of years, been assiduously collecting materials, and which, if life and health be granted, will speedily be brought to a conclusion, the subject here so slightly mentioned will be more fully investigated.

answered until they are older and wiser, and have more knowledge, they will be perfectly satisfied. I have not had sufficient opportunities for observation, to determine whether boys be in general more strongly impelled to these exercises of judgment than girls of the same age. But should the fact be admitted, it will only prove that the education of boys is better calculated to strengthen the power of attention. For when girls are compelled to exercise their attention on the objects of judgment, the judging faculty appears to be in them no less sound and vigorous, than in the other sex.

If it be difficult to fix the attention of girls at an early age, to those simple objects of comparison on which the judgment begins to be exercised, how much more difficult will it be found, when we present to the attention propositions, on which judgment must operate with rapidity, and at the same time accurately weigh each link of the extensive chain?

In this respect, reasoning may be compared to the rule of addition in arithmetic. In order to learn the sum total—we must attend to the value of every figure that makes up the column. A mistake in any one of these would cause an error in the result. A column of 60 single figures, placed under each other, is as easily reckoned as a column of 6; it only requires so much longer time, and so much more attention. To a child, when he first begins to count, such a stretch of attention would be extremely painful; but after he has been accustomed to the employment, he sees the value of each figure at a single glance, and compounds them so quickly, as to be quite insensible of their having been separate objects of attention during the operation.

In reasoning, we employ not figures but words. The first thing therefore necessary, is, to acquire a clear and distinct notion of the value, or meaning, of the words we use. Exercises on the definition of

words, is therefore strongly recommended. As the pupil advances in knowledge, exercises upon words that are nearly synonymous may be rendered very amusing, and will be found highly useful; for as from the poverty of language, the same word is frequently used in a variety of senses, it must be of infinite importance to have a ready and quick apprehension of the different ways in which words and terms are applied, and the different meanings attached to them, according to their different applications.

This species of knowledge is as necessary before attempting to reason, as the knowledge of figures is, before attempting to sum up an account; and as the child who is most perfectly acquainted with the properties of each separate number, will find least difficulty in combining them, so will the young person who is best acquainted with the meaning of words, find least difficulty in comprehending the tenor of an argument. Attention to the meaning

of words, as it is one of the first exercises of the faculty of abstraction, so is it one of the most essential. Were it more frequently cultivated, how many fruitful sources of dispute and altercation would be cut off? It is one of the greatest advantages to be derived from learning any language in addition to our own, - that we necessarily get better acquainted with our own in the course of acquiring the other. Were this object to be kept in view, the time spent in learning languages which we are never to use, would not, as it generally is, be entirely thrown away. But alas, this advantage enters not into the calculation of the governess or language master!

It is true, that the knowledge of words will not form a just and accurate reasoner, any more than the knowledge of the powers of each separate number will form an excellent arithmetician. The knowledge in both instances, must be put to use. But while the teacher of arithmetic compels his scholar to apply the rules with which he



has furnished him, and to go on, step by step, through the whole process, until, by combining every figure in the sum, he arrives at the result; it too often happens, that those who aim at cultivating the understanding, permit their pupils to look on, while they work the question; and think they do enough, when they teach them to repeat the answer. Let us not deceive ourselves so far as to imagine that we can teach our children to reason, by this procedure. We may in this manner teach them to talk wisely, even to talk learnedly; but it is not thus that we will ever make them either wise, or learned. A young person gains more by discovering the truth of one proposition, through the exertion of his own faculties, than he could gain by listening to twenty harangues. To this exertion of their faculties, young women are, in the course of their education, seldom or never compelled. In many instances they receive excellent instructions, and these produce salutary associa-

tions, connecting the idea of vice with disgrace and misery; and connecting with the idea of virtue, ideas of honour and happiness; and these impressions, if they are strong, and never counteracted, will certainly have an influence on the conduct. But it cannot be denied that they are often counteracted: often found too weak to resist the temptations and allurements of the world. Would it not then be wise to strengthen them?

In order to strengthen them effectually, the mind must be engaged, and obliged, if I may thus speak, to work out demonstrations of their truth. A sensible mother will prepare the minds of her children for this exercise of their faculties, by accustoming them to make remarks on all they read. Under this wise management children may learn to extract gold from dross; the most trifling story book containing something that may be converted to use; for even in discovering its errors and absurdities the mind will be making acqui-

sitions truly valuable. Children who have been accustomed to make these observations may always be observed to read with greater attention than other children; and by this habit of attention every difficulty is smoothed. Didactic compositions, which appear insufferably dry and tedious to those who have not learned thus to exercise their attention, afford not only instruction but delight to those who have.

In every didactic composition, whether in prose or verse, the propositions are abstract. Without such a command of attention as is necessary to place the idea before us, the proposition cannot be understood; and it is only by habit that such a command of attention can be acquired. A sermon, for instance, is a didactic composition in which some general truth is stated and illustrated. Pick out one of the most excellent that ever was written, and let it be read to two young ladies whose education has been conducted on different principles; one loaded with the fruits of the

labours of other minds, the other accustomed to labour with her own. At the conclusion both pronounce the sermon beautiful. But ask them to give an account of the arguments adduced in proof of the truth of the proposition which formed the subject of the discourse;—You shall find that the young lady who has been taught every thing by lessons, was utterly incapable of the degree of attention necessary to follow the preacher; that the words sounded in her ears, without conveying any ideas to her mind; and that the only part of which she is capable of giving any account, is perhaps some simile made use of as an illustration. And why does she remember this? Because it attracted her attention.

The other young lady accustomed to deduce conclusions by trains of reasoning, found on this occasion no extraordinary exertion of attention necessary. She followed the course of every argument, and can point out those which appeared most

forcible and conclusive. Let us now ask, which of these two young persons is likely to receive most benefit from the sermon? On examination, we shall find, that the chief cause of the difference between them, arises from the different direction given to the power of attention. To discover the truth or fallacy of an abstract proposition, to follow the arguments necessary to the discovery, requires not only the power but the habit of attention. Where custom has not rendered the habit familiar, the degree of attention requisite will be found irksome, and will consequently never be voluntarily given. As a proof of this we may observe how soon most women tire of books which do not in some degree engage the imagination. This, I believe, proceeds in most instances from a defective education, which, by having never given the proper degree of exercise to the faculty of attention, renders it so weak and languid, as to require a constant stimulus. The mother who is anxious that her daughters should



escape this calamity, must take care gradually to strengthen, and habitually to exercise the minds of her children on subjects within the reach of their capacity. Young persons are often very forward in delivering their sentiments and opinions. Many opportunities may thus be offered for affording a salutary exercise to the reasoning powers. When the sentiment or opinion happens to be erroneous, let it be put in the form of a proposition, and given as an exercise, when the futility of the arguments brought in support of it will clearly be seen. The same may be done with opinions of an opposite nature, which are often repeated without any due conviction of the reason in which they are founded. By forcing the mind to find out these reasons, it will obtain much clearer views of their truth. Nothing can be of more importance, than to be able to appreciate the quantity of real good, or of real evil, that exists in the objects of our pursuit or aversion. But this can never be done by those

who never penetrate beyond the surface of things. If we would examine them fairly, we must examine them as they are in themselves, stripped of all the adventitious colouring they derive from fashion and prejudice. As to the common objects of desire and pursuit, their value depends upon the degree in which they can contribute to augment our happiness. But in this investigation we must always keep in mind, that happiness itself is only to be appreciated by duration. It rises in value, not according to its intenseness, but according to its durability. The object, therefore, which will contribute to our happiness for a whole day, is more desirable in its nature than that which will contribute to it for an hour. That which will make us happy for a year, must be three hundred and sixty-five times more valuable than that which will only make us happy for a single day: and as far as what is infinite exceeds what is finite and of short duration, so far do those things which will influence our hap-

piness through all eternity, exceed in value those which can at best confer only temporary felicity.

It must be admitted, that were mothers to argue in this way, a considerable change in the present plan of education would necessarily be produced. Before such sacrifices of time and attention were made to the acquirement of accomplishments, the real value of these accomplishments would be strictly ascertained. I do not say that they would, upon investigation, be found to have *no* value; but I much suspect, that were they to be estimated according to the degree in which they are to contribute to the well-being and happiness of the young persons who devote to them the most precious period of life, they would be found as dust in the balance! Were the higher powers of the understanding to be more universally cultivated, the very accomplishments which are now greatly over-rated would become more truly useful. For to a deficiency in the power of general rea-

soning, we may fairly ascribe, not only the injudicious management of education, but the subsequent neglect of those accomplishments to which education has been solely directed. Languages being studied merely as languages, accomplishments attained because they are accomplishments, without any central point or specific object, the young lady is no sooner removed from school, than her attention is completely estranged from pursuits, to which the whole of her time and attention had been hitherto devoted. Of the elements of taste or science in her possession she makes little use; they remain as detached pieces, isolated fragments of an unfinished fabric. They are not considered as foundations on which to build; nor are they applied to as resources, with which to give interest and dignity to domestic retirement. If not occasionally called forth by vanity, they are considered as useless, are consequently neglected, and at length forgotten. Happy they who are blest with



parents, whose enlarged minds are capable of comprehensive views! In their education there is nothing vague, desultory, or unconnected. Every branch forms an integral part of a great whole; all tends to accomplish one definite end. The acquirements of youth are thus rendered instrumental to the happiness and usefulness of after-life, and even the amusements of childhood, by the trains of ideas they have introduced, made a source of enjoyment to age!

By the mother who is incapable of general and extensive views, the education of neither sex can be conducted with propriety; for by such the effects of present conduct upon future happiness can never be foreseen. When you speak to such mothers on the subject of education, they agree with every thing you say. Ever ready to admit the force of your arguments, and to coincide in your opinion concerning the vast importance of education, you exult in having convinced them, and expect to see



an immediate change take place in the reprehensible part of their conduct towards their children. But alas! your expectations are fruitless, your hopes are vain! Without the capability of generalizing their ideas, they cannot see the relation which every particular part bears to the whole: and therefore, though they admit your opinion upon the whole to be just and proper, they do not perceive how it concerns any particular point, and, with the best intentions in the world, go on in their former track, nor give one glance towards the consequence.

They will tell you, that there is nothing they so earnestly desire, as that their daughters should be wise and virtuous; and that good sense and good principles are, in their estimation, beyond all price. But if you inquire what plan they pursue in order to imbue the minds of their daughters with these qualities and principles, you will probably be answered by an account of the infinite pains they have taken to procure

a governess who is *perfect mistress of music*; and that their daughters have the advantage of receiving instruction from the most capital masters both in music and dancing! Ask again, what they think will be the consequence of devoting the attention exclusively to sound and motion? and whether it be likely, that while the attention is thus occupied, much sense or wisdom can find entrance to the mind? They will then be forced to shelter themselves behind the shield of example; and having no argument to offer, refer you to the numbers of excellent mothers, who think, that when they have provided their daughters with an accomplished governess, they have completely fulfilled the whole of their maternal duties!

This species of argument is always considered, by those who offer it, to be quite decisive. It may be termed the stronghold of folly. But it is not to folly alone that it affords a refuge; for it is equally serviceable in the defence of vice: vices

which are not sufficiently enormous to be noticed by the laws, however numerous they be to society, being too frequently sheltered from reprehension, on account of the numbers or rank of the individuals who are addicted to them.

Now, to a mind capable of forming a judgment of right and wrong, it must appear evident, that that which is in its nature wrong, cannot be made right by a multiplication of examples; neither can that which is in its nature right, be converted into wrong, merely because there are but few who practise it. To those who study the Scripture precepts on this head, all that can be added on the subject must appear superfluous; but by those who cannot reason, the general spirit of the Scripture precepts are never an object of attention. Where the mind has not obtained the power of comparing ideas, and of separating or abstracting them from all with which they are not necessarily connected, the true spirit of a precept or proposition

can never be seen or understood. Sophistry is an attempt to give an appearance of connection between ideas that are not necessarily connected. By those who cannot reason, sophistry will never be detected; and, consequently, those who cannot reason will ever be in danger of being led into error. Witness the number of converts which the preachers of absurd and chimerical doctrines are sure to make. Nor is it from the false reasoning of others only that people are liable to be imposed on. Where the attention has not been duly exercised in acquiring clear and distinct ideas, people are very apt to impose upon themselves; especially when reasoning on a subject in which the passions have any interest; for the passions, as Reid well observes, "are the most cunning sophists we meet with." So necessary it is to lay a foundation for the right use of reason, by regulating the passions of the heart!

Upon a careful examination of all the arguments that have been produced to



prove the danger or inutility of cultivating the reasoning powers, (especially as they regard our sex,) I have not been able to discover one that may be converted into a solid support of the theory I have endeavoured to illustrate.

The first and most specious of the arguments adduced by the enemies of female cultivation, is an inference made from observing, that women who have cultivated the higher powers of the mind with most success, have often been most negligent of the peculiar duties of their sex and situation. I answer, that this blameable neglect of duties, arises not from their being capable of reasoning, but from their being *incapable* of observation—and this because their attention has never been sufficiently exercised on the objects of perception. It is observed secondly, that women who have reasoned upon subjects of abstract speculation with much skill, have, in their conduct, shewn neither judgment, nor pro-



priety, nor a delicate sense of moral rectitude.

In answer to this, I observe, that wherever the higher faculties have been prematurely called forth, before the earlier and essential ones have acquired sufficient strength, the character must, upon the whole, be weak and imperfect. Where care has not been taken to preserve the infant mind from those false associations which produce selfishness, pride, vanity, &c., these passions will soon obtain sufficient strength to corrupt the judgment and mislead the imagination; and that where attention has not been sufficiently exercised on those simple judgments which chiefly influence the conduct, errors in conduct will infallibly be the consequence.

It is moreover observed, that though men of talents and learning are generally modest in proportion to the superiority of their attainments, vanity is often the consequence of superior attainments on the mind of women.

In an irregularly cultivated mind, vanity must be ever apt to spring. And how seldom, alas! are the minds of women judiciously cultivated! Receiving for the most part an education, which, instead of expanding the various powers and faculties of the soul, has a manifest tendency to cramp and destroy them; without the incitement of vanity, these faculties would, in many instances, become altogether useless. When vanity leads to the acquirement of knowledge, it will naturally overrate the value of its acquirements, and hence vanity will be increased; but never shall we find such acquirements productive of vanity in a well regulated mind. When the judgment has been taught to appreciate the real value of every object of pursuit, and the idea of superior excellence has been firmly associated with the proper discharge of the religious, the moral, and the domestic duties; where the heart has been early taught to bow with reverence to virtue, however humble the garb in

which it is found; and the conceptions enabled to enter into the characters and feelings of others; there the mind will be in no danger of being inflated with vanity, on account of a conscious superiority in the reasoning powers. Persons of this description will, on the contrary, be often humbled by a conscious sense of their inferiority in point of real worth, when comparing themselves with those who boast not the same advantages. Such humiliation is salutary to the soul, and dangerous is the state of those who have never felt its influence.

In all the instances which have come under our consideration, it is evidently not the cultivation of the reasoning faculty, but a deficiency in the faculties of attention, conception, and judgment, which have occasioned a departure from the path of duty and of common sense. Though in these instances I have confined myself to my own sex, the same argument will doubtless be found to apply with equal

force to the other; speculative men, who are incapable of conducting the common concerns of life, being little less frequently met with, than reasoning women who are neglectful of its duties.

Besides an extensive acquaintance with the various associations attached to the same word, it is necessary that an extensive knowledge of things should be acquired by the young person whom we wish to have prepared for exercising the speculative faculties to advantage.

Those who enter upon general reasoning with a stock of ideas derived from few sources, will, notwithstanding the accuracy of the ideas they possess, be liable to many errors. Narrow as the sphere of human knowledge is, it is too extensive for the grasp of human intellect; yet so curiously interwoven are its various branches, so dependent on each other are all its parts, that none can be thoroughly understood without a comprehensive view of the whole. This observation ought to be illustrated



to young people in a variety of ways. It will be the best preservative against that vanity and presumption, which a *little learning* is so very apt to produce. It will likewise be a stimulus to the acquirement of ideas upon various subjects; and prevent the mind from over-rating the value of its own pursuits, or depreciating that of others.

What I have here advanced upon the necessity of acquiring a variety of ideas, may, upon a superficial view, appear inconsistent with what I formerly said upon the inutility of desultory reading. In the ideas I have expressed, there is, however, nothing irreconcilable. That mode of desultory reading which I condemn, does not make sufficient impression to produce those trains of thought which are favourable to arrangement; and without arrangement we shall only, by augmenting the number of ideas, augment confusion. Those who possess but a scanty wardrobe, may cast the few things they have into an open



drawer, where they will readily be found when occasion calls for them; but if all sorts of things are stuffed, without order, into the same place, in vain will you search for the smaller and more delicate articles amid the cumbrous heap. Still, however, what you put into the drawer you will find in it. Not so with what is put into the mind; unless its contents are fastened by the chain of association, they will either be entirely lost or useless.

“Except some professed scholars,” says Mr Gibbon, in a letter to a young lady, “I have often observed that women, in general, read much more than men; but for want of a plan, a method, a fixed object, their reading is of little benefit to themselves or others.” The observation of method in reading, so far from being unfavourable to the acquirement of a variety of ideas, is essential to it; and is therefore worthy of our serious attention.

The following illustration will serve to place this subject in a clear point of view.

Supposing your pupil to be acquainted with the general outlines of ancient and modern history, and that it is wished to give him or her a more particular knowledge of some one of the European states, the first books you would naturally consult are those which treat of its origin; you then have recourse to the authors who trace its progress through all the purifying conflicts it has sustained from barbarism to refinement. But this knowledge of the succession of public events in the order in which they occurred, would be of little avail, if not traced to those hidden springs in which they had their source. These are, the passions, the opinions, and the prejudices of the chief actors on the given theatre. To have clear ideas concerning these, there must, in the first place, be an adequate knowledge of the human mind; and, in the second, accurate conceptions of the views and associations on which the opinions and prejudices described originated. Unless accurate ideas concerning these are obtain-

ed, the subject can never be thoroughly understood. Nor will a distinct conception of the moral causes of events be sufficient for our purpose; to these must be added adequate ideas of the physical. The relative situation of the country, its geographical and natural divisions, soil, climate, produce, &c. &c. must be known; or many of the events related will be unintelligible. Thus we see, that to obtain a perfect knowledge of any one country or district of the globe, a variety of books on different subjects must necessarily be consulted. But while one object is kept in view, the ideas acquired, however various, will be so arranged as to be always useful; and the greater the number of these ideas, the better will the mind be enabled to take general and comprehensive views on every part of the subject. Whoever enters the field of knowledge with his eyes fixed upon one object, and thinks to arrive at it, by resolutely remaining blind to every other, will find that he has mistaken his path;

while he who has no fixed object in view, will wander in an everlasting labyrinth of perplexity and confusion.

As no accurate idea can be formed of any object which is only seen in one point of view, it follows, that the opinions formed from such a partial knowledge, must ever be erroneous and superficial.

Observations upon the opinions and associations of others, as these are modified by situation and circumstances, is such an essential source of ideas, that persons placed in circumstances which afford no opportunities for this species of observation, must, of necessity, have a very limited fund. In order to make these observations effectually, the mind must be in full possession of the primary faculties; and to enable it to draw just inferences from them, it must be capable of generalization. To persons thus qualified, that station in society which affords the most extensive views, is evidently the most advantageous. The higher and the lower walks of life are,

in this point of view, attended with equal inconvenience; while those who are placed on that happy isthmus in society, from which they can occasionally make excursions into either of the neighbouring countries, are alone blest with the opportunity of making just observations on the inhabitants of both. They see the confined views of every little circle; they contemplate the effects of those various associations which characterize each separate class; and, appreciating the value of their pursuits and enjoyments according to the standard of reason, rejoice in the goodness of the Great Creator, who, while he implanted the desire of happiness in the human breast, taught imagination to seek for it in such a variety of objects.

Before your pupils enter upon speculative inquiry, it is above all things essential, that their judgment should be exercised in ascertaining the limits of human knowledge. All speculations concerning what is placed beyond the reach of the



human faculties, ought to be avoided; for from them no possible advantage can be derived. They must ever end, as they begin, in uncertainty and doubt; but, far from being a harmless waste of time, they frequently excite the violence of prejudice and animosity.

I shall conclude with some observations from Dr Isaac Watts, of the truth of which I am qualified to judge from observation, though not in all respects from experience. He advises the pupil *to accustom himself to clear and distinct ideas, to evident propositions, to strong and convincing arguments.* “Converse much,” he continues, “with those friends, and those books, and those parts of learning, where you meet with the greatest clearness of thought and force of reasoning. The mathematical sciences, and particularly arithmetic, geometry, and mechanics, abound with these advantages: and if there were nothing valuable in them for the uses of human life, yet the very speculative

“ parts of this sort of learning, are well  
 “ worth our study; for by perpetual ex-  
 “ amples, they teach us to conceive with  
 “ clearness; to connect our ideas in a train  
 “ of dependence; to reason with strength  
 ‘ and demonstration; and to distinguish  
 “ between truth and falsehood. Some-  
 “ thing of these sciences should be studied  
 “ by every man who pretends to learning,  
 “ and that,” as Mr Locke expresses it,  
 “ *not so much to make us mathematicians, as*  
 “ *to make us reasonable creatures.*

“ The habit of *conceiving clearly*, of  
 “ *judging justly*, and of *reasoning well*, is  
 “ not to be attained merely by the hap-  
 “ piness of constitution, the brightness of  
 “ genius, or the best collection of logical  
 “ precepts. A coherent thinker and a  
 “ strict reasoner is not to be made at once  
 “ by a set of rules, any more than a good  
 “ painter or musician may be formed ex-  
 “ tempore, by an excellent lecture on mu-  
 “ sic or painting.” This, like all our  
 other habits, must be formed by *custom*  
 and *practice*.

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## LETTER XIII.

### REFLECTION.

*Different Applications of the Term.—Sense in which it is at present used.—Advantages of Reflection.—Foundation of it to be laid in early Life.—Inutility of Reflection, when not exercised under the Influence of Religious Principle.—Illustrations.—Conclusion.*

YOU know, my dear Friend, that by Reflection, in the popular sense, nothing more is understood than a serious re-consideration of any subject which engaged our attention. By metaphysicians, however, the term is applied in a stricter sense, to denote that power which the mind has of examining its own operations. Few persons of education are destitute of reflection in the former application; but if we

strictly adhere to the latter meaning of the term, I am afraid, we shall find that the number of those who are capable of exercising it, is extremely limited.

The exercise of reflection implies the possession of all the preceding faculties; and where any of these are defective, we need not expect that the mind will ever be brought to reflect upon its own operations: as to do so effectually, is the highest and most useful exertion of the intellectual powers. If this exercise of intellect be wanting, it is not the knowledge of all the sciences, nor an acquaintance with all the branches of human learning, that will lead to true wisdom. For this great purpose, an accurate knowledge of one's own heart is more essential than all the learning in the world. Deceit is the great vice of society; but, I believe, few people practise so much of it upon others as upon themselves; nor is it possible, that self-deceit can be avoided by any other means than the frequent exercise of reflection.

Though reflection is the last of the powers of the human mind in the order of appearance; yet, like all the other faculties, it will certainly spring by a proper preparation of the soil. It was to pave the way for its production, that, in treating of the cultivation of the heart, I so strongly recommended a frequent appeal to the feelings in the conduct of children toward each other. By this they are early taught to bring things home to their own bosoms, and to see every part of their conduct in the light in which it is viewed by others. It is thus, that the feelings and affections of the heart may be made to assist and strengthen the opening judgment, instead of misleading and perverting it. It is thus, too, that the conceptions concerning the judgment of others upon our own conduct may best be improved. And whenever this preliminary step has been neglected, I believe the cultivation of reflection will become difficult, if not impossible.



Those who are least accustomed to reflect upon the operations of their own minds, will ever be found most forward to judge with severity of others. Who are the evil speakers? Who are the retailers of petty scandal? Are they not those who never cast a thought on the motives by which they themselves are governed? The knowledge of one's own mind will ever bring such a sense of the imperfection of its various faculties, and of the impositions to which they have been liable, from the influence of passion and prejudice, that candour must be the inevitable result. To this salutary exercise of the power of reflection, pride and selfishness oppose such insurmountable obstacles, that wherever they predominate, it can never be expected to take place. By Him who "knew what was in Man," and whose doctrines tend to bring all his various powers and faculties to the highest perfection of which they are susceptible, pride and selfishness were therefore condemned in all their branches;

and in order to destroy their influence in the human heart, self-examination (which is nothing but a mode of exercising the power of reflection) was enjoined as an essential duty. Here we have another striking instance of the consonance of the institutions of the Gospel with the first principles of the philosophy of the human mind. It is by this self-examination that we are commanded to prepare ourselves for the most solemn ceremony of our religion; by it alone we can come at a knowledge of the governing motives of our conduct, which on that solemn occasion we are to try by no capricious standard. Love to God, and unconditional benevolence to man, with all their correspondent desires and affections, are the unerring rules by which we are to judge of the state of our hearts, and the complexion of our actions. On this account I cannot but consider the frequent repetition of the duty above alluded to, as a most efficacious means of

cultivating the power of reflection, and of rendering the exercise of it habitual.\*

I well know, that by making religion the basis of my theory, I shall expose myself to the derision of some minds, and the contempt of others: as all that I have advanced will, by certain persons, be attributed to the prejudices of education. I can, however, aver, that they are not its *unexamined prejudices*; and that if I still adhere to the old-fashioned principles in which I was brought up, it is not without a liberal and candid examination of those which others have embraced.

When I first began seriously to contemplate the operations of the human mind, I

\* How little the forms of confession, which are often put into the hands of young people, upon this occasion, are calculated to answer the end proposed, must be obvious to every thinking mind. If, instead of seeking to discover the hidden springs and sources of their own actions, and judging of them as they appear in the sight of GOD, they are taught to pronounce themselves guilty of all manner of sins in the lump, the heart will be little benefited by this religious duty.

was far from being fully aware of the intimate connexion which subsisted betwixt these and the Divine commandments; nor had it ever occurred to me how very eminently the one was adapted to the other. In vain did I endeavour to find in any other system a perfect conformity with the human character, in all its various modifications. Other systems applied to particulars, that of the Gospel alone I found to be of universal application; and when, with this view, I examined its contents, I in vain endeavoured to find one passage, the spirit of which was not in unison with the theory of the human heart.

When the intellectual faculties became the subject of investigation, I found, and confess I delighted in finding, that so far from being inimical to their highest cultivation, the sacred volume afforded the greatest assistance; while its doctrines held forth the most animating encouragement to the improvement of all the mental powers. Nor ought I to conceal, that the

examination of the principles of the human mind gave, on the other hand, strength to my faith, and confirmation to my belief in the Divine origin of the sacred oracles.

I hope that after this candid declaration, none will accuse me of prejudice, till they have thoroughly examined the tenour and tendency of the principles I have avowedly adopted; as, if they decline this task, I think I am at full liberty to retort the charge of prejudice on them.

Let us now see, how far the advantage to be derived from the exercise of reflection is increased or diminished by religious principle.

I presume it will on all hands be admitted, that whatever tends to augment the benevolent affections, and to destroy the influence of the malevolent passions, has likewise a tendency to increase the happiness of the individual and of society. When a person, whose notions of moral obligation are founded on the selfish principle, takes a view of the operations of his own



mind, and perceives the unworthiness of the motives by which his best actions have been sometimes influenced; when he is made sensible of the errors of his judgment, and the fallacy of his reason; what is the result? Instead of humbling himself before the Searcher of hearts, and imploring the Divine assistance, he looks round upon the world, and in the follies and the crimes of others, finds excuse and consolation. A sense of his own weakness diminishes not the force of pride, or abates the arrogance of presumption. If obliged to confess that some appear to act more wisely or more virtuously than himself, it is to superior cunning, or superior good-fortune, that he attributes the difference. The knowledge of his own motives produces suspicion with regard to the motives of others. The consciousness of his own erroneous judgment begets scepticism with regard to their opinions. These feelings and associations are not of a nature to inspire benevolence;

they are, on the contrary, intimately allied to all the malignant and dissocial passions.

Very different is the improvement that will be made by the man of religious principle, from the conscientious exercise of the power of reflection. A sense of the many instances in which he has been influenced by those passions which it has been his endeavour to subdue, will beget contrition and humility: conscious that his actions are known to the world, while his contrition and repentance are unknown to all, save GOD and his own heart, he will naturally suppose it to be the same with others, and will, accordingly, be inclined to pity rather than to censure. The difficulty he finds in keeping his good resolutions, and in acting up to the calm decisions of enlightened judgment, will lead him to reverence and esteem those whose conduct evinces a greater degree of energy and consistency; while, at the same time, it will render him careful of attributing bad motives to all who are guilty of im-

proper conduct. In tracing the source of his erroneous judgments, he will discover so many associations originating in circumstances over which he had little or no control, that he will view the prejudices of others with as much candour as he considers their actions. Never will the person who is capable of the exercise of philosophical reflection, presume to take the prerogative of *judgment* from the MOST HIGH: never will he arrogantly decide upon the acceptance or reprobation of a fellow mortal, on account of the speculative opinions he may have embraced. Every emotion excited, every affection produced, by serious reflection, are, (while reflection is exercised under the impression of religious principle) of the benevolent class. Humility, diffidence, earnest desire of Divine assistance, hope towards God for future aid from a sense of former mercies, and love and gratitude springing from the same source, are each allied to benevolence.

In exact proportion as the power of reflection is enjoyed, shall we reap advantage from the cultivation of every other faculty, If incapable of applying our judgments respecting right or wrong to ourselves, we shall not be much the better for their accuracy. If we cultivate imagination so as to produce the most brilliant combinations, and are without the power of reflecting on their tendency, and from an examination of our own heart, discovering the emotions and dispositions which produced them; we may amuse ourselves by wandering in the flowery fields of fancy, but will never gather any of its precious fruits.

Without the exercise of reflection, the faculty of abstraction is a dangerous gift. If we are incapable of referring to our own consciousness for the truth of those opinions derived from general reasoning, we shall be liable to be imposed upon by sophistry, and be destitute of means to detect the imposition. Even in the cultivation of taste, it is impossible to proceed to



any length without the exercise of reflection. Those who are destitute of this power never can be made to comprehend the principles upon which taste is founded. They, therefore, suppose the emotions of sublimity and beauty to be derived from some inherent instinct, as natural and as universal as that which assists us in distinguishing sweet from bitter. Nor, without reflection upon the operations of their own minds, is it possible that they should see it in a different light.

As a still farther argument in favour of the cultivation of this power, it may, with propriety, be remarked, that without the assistance of reflection, we shall neither have "manners void of offence towards all men;" nor will any appear to have manners void of offence towards us. Persons who are accustomed to take circumscribed and narrow views upon every subject but their own importance, consider every aberration from the line of conduct they prescribe, as an intended insult or manifest



impropriety. They consider that as disrespect, with which no idea of disrespect was associated in the mind of the offending party. They construe thoughtlessness into insolence; and neither make allowance for the levity of youth, nor the infirmity of age. Whatever is said of them one note below the key of panegyric, is so offensive as to be deemed unpardonable. The friend who points out an error, is accused of hatred and malignity. And here it may be observed, that to those who never examine their own hearts, the imputation of blame must necessarily be intolerable, because they know not how far it may be just or unjust; and willing to impose upon themselves, they revolt at the idea of being scrutinized by others. Hence the heart-burnings, jealousies, and strifes, which are, alas! so prevalent in the world.

Let us see how far the evils above-mentioned would be remedied or removed, by a more general exercise of the power of reflection.

When we reflect upon our notions of propriety or impropriety, with respect to manners, we find them entirely dependent on association. In members of the same society, the same associations will doubtless take place, though modified by the disposition and character of individuals. For this modification the person of reflection makes allowance, from the conviction that, from stronger associations of propriety attached to certain forms, some lay a greater stress upon them than he does; he therefore concludes, that what he deems essential, others may consider as indifferent. Conscious that his own omissions are void of pride, insolence, or malignity, he considers the omissions of others as equally blameless: or if he at any time perceive his feelings hurt by neglect, or wounded by improper treatment, instead of indulging in the bitterness of wrath, he takes a serious retrospect of his own actions, and severely scrutinizes his own conduct, lest

he, too, should be guilty of inflicting a wound in the bosom of the innocent.

With regard to the judgments of the world, or of individuals, it is only the person of reflection that can be superior to their influence. Without such a perfect knowledge of ourselves, as enables us to appreciate with truth and precision the strength of our faculties, and the merit of our conduct, we shall be liable to be elated with flattery on the one hand, or depressed by censure on the other. By reflection, and by reflection alone, can this knowledge of ourselves ever be attained.

“ When self-esteem, or others’ adulation,  
 “ Would cunningly persuade us we were something  
 “ Above the common level of our kind,  
 “ ’Tis *this* gainsays the smooth-complexion’d flattery,  
 “ And with blunt truth acquaints us what we are.”\*

Nor is a just acquaintance with ourselves less necessary to prevent dejection when popular favour takes flight. Severely must

\* Blair.

those, who have no other measure of their own worth but popular opinion, feel the loss of that public applause on which they rested. The person, on the contrary, who under the impression of religious principle, has exercised philosophical reflection, will be alike superior to popular applause and popular condemnation. He will make use of both as means of further improvement in virtue. Conscious that in the former case his merits have, in many instances, been over-rated, the consciousness will increase humility. And where his actions are misrepresented by calumny, or mistaken by prejudice, he will rejoice that it is to mistake and misrepresentation, and not to truth, that he owes his present loss of favour. Or if, on a scrutiny of his motives, he does not find them blameless, far from feeling malignity towards those who have anticipated him in the discovery, he will acknowledge his error, and thus have an opportunity of exercising some of the

noblest and most heroic of the human virtues.

Thus, it appears, that in all the circumstances and situations in which an intelligent being can be placed, reflection is essential towards the perfection of the human character. Those who are aware of the consequences attending its cultivation, will find abundant opportunities for laying the foundation of it in the minds of their pupils. Every observation on the actions of others, on the ways of Providence, or the events of human life, may, by the care of a judicious instructor, be rendered subservient to the cultivation of reflection. If the advantages resulting from reflection be kept perpetually in view, pains will be taken, even from the earliest period of life, to remove all obstacles that might impede its progress. What these obstacles are, I have, in the *Letters on the Cultivation of the Heart*, attempted to delineate. By their removal the path will be left open; but without the assiduous cultivation of



all the intellectual faculties, it will never be trod. By destroying pride, self-will, arrogance, and all the dissocial and malevolent passions, and introducing associations favourable to benevolence, we render the disposition amiable; but let us remember, that to be amiable is not to be virtuous. Virtue consists in the right direction that is given not only to the affections of the heart, but to the powers of the mind. It is not of a negative, but of a positive nature. It implies the proper employment not only of the moral but of the intellectual powers. These the wisdom of the Great Creator has ordained to a mutual dependence on each other, so that neither can be in any considerable degree improved, while the other is neglected. Where the feelings of benevolence are unknown, the exertions of the understanding will be circumscribed by selfishness within narrow limits; and where the impulses of the benevolent heart are not controlled and directed by judgment, they will be productive of only par-

tial good, and may eventually lead to extensive misery.

Considering it as one of the chief advantages resulting from the exercise of philosophical reflection, that it enables us to attain a more perfect knowledge of the motives which govern our actions, I shall beg leave to offer such hints with regard to this species of self-examination, as may be found of use to those who are desirous of entering on the difficult but important task.

As the passions and affections are the active principles of the human mind, it is to their influence that upon a strict scrutiny we shall trace the motives of our conduct. This influence is frequently so imperceptible as to escape our observation. In order to penetrate it, it is not sufficient that we frequently review the tenour of our actions, and accurately examine the propriety of our sentiments; for not by reflection upon these alone can we become thoroughly acquainted with the dispositions

of our hearts. The slave of selfishness and pride may occasionally perform generous and noble actions, and just and sublime sentiments may be formed by the understanding, while the desires are impure and the passions malevolent; but in no instance will the trains of thought which perpetually pass through the mind, be untinged by the predominant affection. To the nature of these, then, we are to direct our strict research. When busied in active employments, occupied by study, or engaged in the intercourses of society, our thoughts must necessarily be directed into various channels. But let us inquire what is their natural course in the stillness of solitude? What the complexion of the first-fruits of that renewed existence which we experience every succeeding morning? If our affections are influenced by love to God and good-will to man, shall not the lifting-up of our hearts be as the morning sacrifice? If, on the contrary, the trains of thought which first begin to flow, are

connected with ideas of our own comparative excellence, while plans for our own exaltation and the degradation of others spontaneously present themselves, we may be assured that pride and vanity are the main-springs of all our actions. As the strength of memory depends much upon the strength of the impression, I would not have the person consider himself in a safe or healthful state of mind, whose first thoughts presented all the circumstances of a former injury; nor let the consciousness of many infirmities sink the person into despair, who, in shaking off the chains of sleep, feels the joyful sense of gratitude to his Great Creator, and whose first impulse leads to the consideration of means for promoting the happiness of his fellow creatures. By thus reflecting upon the nature of the thoughts which spontaneously occur, we shall be enabled to lift that veil of self-deceit which conceals from our view the operations of our own hearts.

Before I conclude this my last Letter, I would make it my earnest request, that every one to whom the subject is interesting, may take pains to inquire and to examine into the truth of those principles which I have adopted, and which appear to me to be the only solid basis upon which education can be founded.

Reflection, which in its operation requires seriousness, is wisely ordained by nature to be the last power that unfolds itself in the human mind. Nor does it begin to operate, till the ideas are numerous, and the judgment strong. Where these preliminaries are enjoyed, reflection will not be found inimical to cheerfulness. It is the slow succession of ideas which produces low-spirited listlessness; and the incessant intrusion of the same train of ideas that produces melancholy. But where such a perfect command has been obtained over the power of attention, as to render the mind for ever alive to the passing scene, the ideas must necessarily be too numerous,



and have too much variety, to admit of either of these consequences. Where the languid and the absent see nought but a joyless blank, the active mind finds sources of improvement and delight. The former lives as on a desert island, where he depends on foreign supplies for his existence. The latter extracts from the surrounding scene an ample store of nourishment; nor does the continual feast which nature spreads for the light heart and the ardent imagination, pass unenjoyed; while habits of philosophical arrangement and reflection render his pleasures not only harmless but wholesome.

If the sketch I have endeavoured to give of the human mind, be drawn from truth and nature, the absurdity of attempting its partial cultivation, by an inversion of nature's laws, will be an obvious inference. According to the plan which my feeble hand has attempted to delineate, it appears that the vital parts of the corporeal frame are not more intimately connected,

or more essentially dependent on each other, than the active and intellectual powers of the mind; and that as the muscular strength of a single limb does not constitute bodily health or vigour, so neither does the capability of exerting a single faculty, in however eminent a degree, give any title to mental superiority.

In prescribing for the diseases of infancy, he must be a bad physician who did not extend his views to the probable consequences of his prescriptions on his patient's future health; how much more blameworthy the person, who, in giving advice with regard to the human mind, limited the consideration of consequences to the contracted span of the present life!

My views will, I trust, be found to be more extensive; they embrace a wider portion of existence. May those who adopt them, find, to their blessed experience, that they lead to the path of GLORY, HONOUR, and IMMORTALITY!

## NOTE.

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AS a proof that the memory of Perception may be enjoyed in high perfection, where all the other faculties are defective, I shall beg leave to adduce the following instance, which I had in very early life from a venerable friend, who was then advanced in years and had in youth been witness of the fact:—An idiot, so utterly destitute of the faculty of conception as never to be capable of acquiring the use of speech, (though it did not appear that his organs, either of speech or hearing, were at all defective) was for a great number of years confined to an apartment, where he was occasionally visited by his family and their friends. In this apartment stood a clock, to the striking of which he evidently appeared very attentive, and it was the only sign of attention which he ever displayed. Every time the clock struck, he made a clucking noise with his tongue, imitative of the sound; and this he continued to do as often as the hour returned. After standing many years in the room with him, the clock was removed; when, to the surprise of all, he continued, as the hour came, to make exactly the same

noise as he had learned to do from it. He was perfectly exact in the calculation of the time, and never missed an hour in the day or in the night: nor did he ever cluck one too many or one too few; but continued to the hour of his death to give the exact notice of the lapse of time, without mistake or variation.

It was with considerable uneasiness I learned from several of my friends, that the above particulars were thought by some to be no other than a story manufactured from the old anecdote given in Plott's History of Staffordshire, and copied from it into the Spectator. The name of the late Mr Wilsons, of Murray's-hall, by whom I heard the fact related, would, to all who were acquainted with his character, have been sufficient evidence of its truth. But with regard to what I had heard in childhood, it was possible that I might myself be mistaken. The doubt was painful; for though my friends would only have attributed the fault to memory, those *who knew me not*, might call my veracity in question. Anxious to ascertain a point in which I considered myself so deeply interested, I hastened to make inquiry, and with inexpressible satisfaction received the assurance that I had been perfectly correct in my statement with regard to every particular, excepting that the clock, instead of being removed from the room, did not strike from being out of repair; and that it was this circumstance of the boy's continuing regularly to mark the hours while the clock was not going, that drew the attention



of the neighbourhood. The idiot lived at Culross on the river Forth, in Scotland, where my venerable friend, Mr Wilson, likewise resided in early life. The following letter, which I have just received from one of that gentleman's daughters, corroborates all the above mentioned circumstances, and I shall therefore trust to her goodness for pardoning its insertion.

“ DEAR MADAM,

“ No words can express my vexation, when informed  
 “ that ----- had neglected to deliver the letter I did  
 “ myself the honour of writing you in the beginning of  
 “ February; in which I informed you, that both my  
 “ sisters perfectly and distinctly recollect to have heard  
 “ my father often speak of the idiot you mention in your  
 “ valuable book on education; and his sisters, who  
 “ were older than him, used to mention more minute  
 “ particulars, such as the chair where the boy sat being  
 “ opposite to the clock, &c.; and they were often in the  
 “ house.

“ My sisters remember to have heard my aunt Janet  
 “ speak of this idiot, and of its exactly imitating the  
 “ clock, though then not going, (which was the only  
 “ thing made them all speak of it) with a Mr David  
 “ Robison, uncle to Colonel Robison, of Fawrs, who  
 “ also lived in the neighbourhood, and knew all these  
 “ circumstances perfectly well.



“ I am extremely sorry to have sent my letter by any  
 “ conveyance but the post, and am grieved that this is  
 “ so much later than it ought to have been.

“ I remain, dear Madam,

“ With much esteem,

“ Your very humble servant,

“ JANET WILSONE.”

“ *Murray's-hall, 5th April 1803.*”

THE END.

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Printed by WALKER & GREIG,  
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