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# REASONS,

SHEWING THE NECESSITY OF

*T. M. Ray*

EXTENDING FREE EDUCATION

*Richmond Bridewell*

TO THE

1844

## FEMALE CHILDREN

OF THE

DISTRESSED OF THE HIGHER AND PROFESSIONAL RANKS IN SOCIETY.

BY

**MRS. RACHEL OWEN.**

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## R E A S O N S ,

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THE establishing of a School for educating the Female Children of respectable, but distressed parents, is of such moment as to arrest the attention, not only of those whom it immediately concerns, but also of the higher classes, and of the aristocracy at large.

It is well known, that, whilst the state and the rich maintain and educate the children of the humbler class, parents, who, by the vicissitudes incident to human affairs, are unable to prosecute their original intention towards their children, are neglected, and, as if, forgotten. So evident is this truth, and with such power and conviction does it come home to us, that, it is only surprising, that a plan for the education of this class of females has not as yet been laid before the public.

Universities and Schools pervade the face of the country, to protect, educate, and fit for the purposes of life, the MALE children of the higher classes, and such

as can afford to pay; which institutions do somewhat also, for many who are respectable, but cannot afford to pay. Youth is thus shaded from temptation—the beauty of virtue is opened to their view; they are instructed in the precepts of religion—they form respectable and useful members of society, and, in their turn, succeed to the bench, the senate, and the church.

But, alas! there is no provision at all for the female children of like respectable but distressed parents. As if undeserving of notice, and unworthy of thought, they are overlooked: the fit time of instruction being allowed to pass by, they are found in all the horrors of their perilous situation, poor, uninformed, and, consequently, an easy prey to the insidious and designing.

The formation of such a School would, therefore, supply a desideratum in education; the utility thereof would be generally felt; its effects would be beneficial, permanent, and extended; its establishment would be acknowledged of individual benefit, and be claimed as a national good.

If such be the fact, that neither society, nor the state, has provided for educating this class of females, is it not a melancholy reflection?—does it not deserve timely regard, with Christian consideration? Attention to this movement in education, would not be beneath the

state itself, which munificently provides free education in other cases ; it would be deserving the consideration of commissioners, or those entrusted with the management of funds for education purposes. This subject would claim the protection and aid of the Heads and Fellows of Universities and Colleges—of Teachers generally, and of Proprietors of Seminaries ; it is a subject worthy to be responded to by the affluent and benevolent of the land.

In any grade of society the mind of man will not be unoccupied ; if not well employed, it will be ill employed. Idleness, and incapability of respectable employment, are known to put all ranks upon courses wicked and dishonest. Now the danger to be apprehended from idleness and incapability in the children of respectable but poor parents, is tenfold greater than in those in the humbler walks of life ; and for this reason, amongst others, that their higher rank, politer company, more expensive habits, will require a more unusual and refined course of vice to sustain them apart from adequate fortune, mental improvement, or useful employment.

It is true, there exist Schools, public and private, diocesan and endowed, for the purposes of education ; but far less is done in this way, than might be expected from the immense sums expended ; and the good which

is accomplished is exclusively for *boys*, the idea of educating *girls* being a thing never contemplated in these schools. Yet girls in this rank of life require education equally as boys:—they also are capable of receiving a liberal education. When distress happens in families, the girls are most likely to be neglected, or, at least, their education will be sooner suspended, or made give place to the pressure of circumstances. To the female are open fewer avenues to respectable employment than to the male. It is grievous for either sex to want the cultivation of the mind, but if the female be deficient, to what line of industry can she turn? She is precluded the variety of situations open to the other sex; the army, navy, counting house, and agricultural pursuits hold out to her no hope of occupation; she must needs possess the means of living, or seek a provision in marriage, or be dependent on friends and relations, or enter into some mode of living for which she is not suited. Without education, the wealthy female will not be enabled to dignify the station which her birth and means entitle her to hold; and without education the needy but respectable female cannot be expected to retain her position in society.

Females, improved by education, are more immediately instrumental, than men, to the good of individuals, and of families: Females, being more susceptible of the

refined and elevated feelings which education is fitted to impart, they, with more ease and certainty, inspire others with the like feelings : Females are more within the domestic circle, and so, their example is the more influential, as it is the nearer, and more constantly observed. They are the first and early instructors of children ; in which engaging office, the formation of the infant mind is their important duty. In fine, the ascendant given to woman, by grace and nature, over man's heart and affections, renders it most essential, that, by education and religion, she should know to use that powerful influence for good only, and not for evil. Whilst great pains, and large sums of money are bestowed by government, and by private individuals upon the education of the lowest class of society, corresponding pains are not bestowed upon such other classes, as are unable to meet the expenses of education. And here, it would seem to be a thing unworthy of a paternal government,—unworthy also a free and enlightened people, to say, or act upon this principle, that the party which seeks a liberal education, being poor, and unable to purchase it, should be content with that which is offered to the lowest class.

It is not so easy to alter nature to suit circumstances. Associations and attachments will ever be inseparable from the state in which persons have been accustomed

to live. Hence it seems a fitter exertion of benevolence, to maintain persons in certain grades of society, by assisting and educating them therein, than, by refusing them aid, to endeavour to sink them to a common level. The subject should demand, even from motives of *self-interest*, the attention and consideration of the nobility and affluent gentry, and for this reason: The nobility and gentry are concerned in, and affected by, the females of this class, who act in the capacity of governesses, companions, and the like. Now it is well ascertained, that the characters of children receive an impression from a very early period of their existence, from the persons occupied in their care and tuition; the children of the higher class are usually left to the care of the governess, or nursery maid; and, if such be the case, should not means be adopted to secure the efficiency of persons to whom so important a trust is committed?

To fit the governess for her important charge, requires more than a common school-education, a superficial knowledge of music, and a smattering of the French and Italian languages. To rear the tender thought, culture the growing intellect, develop the infant faculties, direct the feelings of the heart; in short, to unfold the faculties of the mind, and bring them forward in just proportion and beauty; these

things require no ordinary qualifications in persons who would undertake the arduous duty of instructing others.

The general plan of education consists, in compelling the child to commit to memory, a number of words, a portion of lessons, certain tasks, rules of grammar, scraps of geography, and such like; whilst little or no attention is paid to engage and interest the mind of the child in what it is learning; so that, with some, it is a painful necessity; with others, a cruel imposition; and with few, a pleasure or delight. The learned and ingenious Dr. Brice has spoken much and ably on this point. I make the following extracts from an essay of his on general education:—

“ We propose that the next generation of teachers should be persons of good education, not below mediocrity, and, in particular, that they should be made acquainted with the SCIENCE OF THE HUMAN MIND, as an indispensable particular; for the same reason that medical students begin their professional studies with anatomy. We do not mean that they should all spend their time in weighing the merits of the countless systems and theories which form so large a part of metaphysics, but that they should be made acquainted with the few facts which have been ascertained concerning the operations of the mind, in order that they may be able to act rationally and effectually in their endeavours to manage and instruct the minds of their scholars. . . . .

“ We can state as the result of our own reading and experience, that there is AN ART OF EDUCATION; that is a system of rules for managing the minds of children, every one of which can be referred to some *known principle* of the human mind. It is highly desirable that children should understand every thing they read,

and more especially every thing they commit to memory, yet there is not a child in ten thousand, that is not doomed to read, and to say by rote, what, at its age, is as unintelligible as Arabic. . . .

“ The excuse offered for this is, that it is impossible to do otherwise ; but the fact is, that teachers, being generally unacquainted with the laws which govern the operations of the mind, are unable to accompany the lessons of the book with such oral explanations as would be necessary to make them intelligible. They know not the laws by which thought and language are connected, and must, therefore, perform the works of communicating ideas, and explaining words and sentences, in much the same way, that a man, ignorant of anatomy and physiology, would perform a surgical operation, and regulate the treatment of the patient when the operation was over. . . .

“ Every person who undertakes to manage the young mind, ought to have his or her own mind refined and invigorated by a good and solid education. The different parts of human knowledge are so connected together, that each throws light upon the other ; and they who know but one subject, can scarcely know it well. . . .

“ This intellectual cultivation can only be attained by studying several departments of science and literature with assiduity and zeal. The noblest intellect, trained to the utmost promptitude and precision in its operations, by an extensive and varied course of study, will find ample employment in all its energis, when we consider what is to be done in managing the mind of a child, how we must enter into all its modes of thinking, anticipate all its doubts and difficulties, discover, often from a look, or tone of the voice, its secret thoughts,—detect, from broken hints that misconception or oversight of some simple fact, or, that chasm in its previous knowledge, which retards its progress, or gives rise to apparent dulness, and encounter a hundred other nameless obstacles, every hour varying. . . .

“ But the same qualifications are those, which will enable a person to preside, with some prospect of success, over the moral education of youth. . . .

“ There is properly but one MORAL PRINCIPLE, namely, a desire to please God, not through fear of punishment, or hope of reward, but because He has an abstract right to our obedience. Now to implant this principle, the efforts of men are not sufficient, ‘ it needs the grace of God ;’ yet there are means appointed to be employed for accomplishing even this object ; namely, exhortation, example, and prayer. The formation of good habits, also contributes materially to the same end, as we learn from the frequent and strongly expressed testimony of the sacred writers. . . . .

“ The influence of general intellectual cultivation, on the mind of a teacher, will operate two ways in qualifying him to attend to the moral education of his pupils. That vigor and promptitude in using the understanding, which we have already stated to be the result of diversified study, is not less necessary in the moral department of education, than in the intellectual. And, at the same time, persons whose minds have been thus trained can scarcely fail to be of improved temper, they will not degrade themselves, nor blast their usefulness by passionate behaviour to their pupils, or by allowing the punishments or reproofs which may sometimes be necessary, to be tinctured with a spirit of personal resentment. Our minds become elevated and refined, as they become enlarged and enlightened, and our passions are restrained and humanized by the influence of a liberal education.”

I have, in general, alluded to the deficiency of qualification in this class of teachers ; in which allusions it is not intended to cast a slight upon the class itself, in which, as in every profession and department of life, are many qualified, and many ignorant of their proper duty. The design of these observations is to gain attention to the subject, and thus to ameliorate and improve the condition of persons thus employed.

But, besides *self-interest*, there are superior motives

to induce the higher class to exertion in this cause, as, the conferring upon individuals, and upon society a positive benefit by enabling a deserving class of persons to educate their female children; and these will again be the medium of communicating instruction to others; and thus in succession the improvement will be continued to society. This class of females, if placed by God's providence in affluent circumstances, will, being properly educated, turn to better use the advantages they possess; and, if placed in confined and limited circumstances, they will have proportionate advantages.

Females of this class, possessing in themselves the blessings of education, will, from the higher to the intermediate class, reflect its grace and beauty; and as they hold a nearer position to the lower class, the force of example, the quickness of imitation, and the faculty of immediate intercourse, will lend their united aid, to raise, civilize, and improve that order of persons, who most need our care and sympathy.

But in the training of their own children, how great are the advantages to the mother, when properly educated? They are beyond estimation. Where the heart is influenced much more good is accomplished than where indifference prevails. Affection and kindness, are the most powerful inducements to knowledge,

and to the observance of moral and religious precepts. The mother, therefore, whose affection to her children is implanted by nature, and in whom this natural tenderness is improved by a sense of duty and religion, possesses both the highest inducements, and peculiar facilities, towards the education of her children. The non-existence of an Institution to educate this class, has been, in numerous cases, the cause of their ruin, and so an injury to society. It is asserted, that, if proper education had been afforded at the fitting time, many unsuspecting females had escaped the temptations and sins, which have inflicted on them speedy ruin, or have caused them to become the melancholy outcasts of society, or the degraded inmates of workhouses and prisons. This is a subject so fruitful of distressing instances, that it seems preferable to make but the general allusion, than to lay open the source of woe and misery, where are no adequate remedies to stay and meet them in their progress.

The more pleasing duty seems to be, to reflect on the dignity of the female character, its power over society at large, particularly, to humanize, and awe into virtue, the many who are prone to rudeness and aggression. We should remember the influence of the female in the domestic circle, to instruct, by example and precept, her tender and confiding charge; to

awaken the languishing spirit of devotion ; and to keep all that are within her household alive to a sense of duty and religion.

Thus it appears, Education and Religion impart to the female all which can render her influence amiable and useful in society. But if we omit, or withhold these, the essential ornaments, there will be defects, which natural and personal qualities, however great, will not be able to supply.

There are different plans for supporting schools ; some are supported by endowment, others partly by endowment, and partly by payments from the pupils, some conjointly by endowments, and by charity. It may appear of little moment from what source funds come, provided they be sufficient for the purpose intended. However, the source from which the funds are derived seems somewhat to affect the character of the school. Thus, in a *free school*, the Teacher is in danger to regard his Pupils as mere objects of charity, and to rest satisfied with less exertion than would be required in a school upon his own responsibility, and deriving from him its claim to support. There is danger, too, that the pupils of such school, may undervalue the education, towards which they contribute nothing, and may thus feel and manifest a want of self-exertion and independence. In a school *free to some*

pupils, *but not to all*, there is also danger of inconvenience. The free pupil is made to hear the secret of his dependence. He begins to doubt of the equal attention of the teacher to him, and to others who pay for their tuition. He is reproached by his school-fellows who pay; which things seem to impede the advance of youthful instruction. But these evils can be entirely obviated by a well regulated system; and in order the more effectually to afford the inestimable blessing of education to such as cannot afford to pay, it would seem a thing to be desired, that the pupils of the school, or their parents or guardians, should pay what they can afford, or contribute what they may be found willing; and that the funds of the institution, from whatever source derived, should be available to supply the deficiency.

To conclude, we would simply ask, is this subject worthy of public consideration? I know there are numbers of the respectable class, who would come forward, and would hail such an institution as a decided advantage, but they are so limited in means as to be unable to contribute towards its formation. Is this subject so deserving the consideration of the higher and wealthier class, as to induce them to advance, and by their benevolence and influence, to call into being an Institution for the Education of Females circumstanced as herein stated?

Should this subject be entertained by such as can alone place it in a position at first, and give it an impetus and velocity by which it may afterwards proceed and advance, then only can the hope exist, that the want will be supplied, and that the daughters of respectable, but distressed persons, in various professions, clerical, legal, medical, and the like, shall be properly educated, and so rendered capable of conferring lasting benefit on society. Should persons of wealth, station, and influence be found to lend their aid and countenance to a work thus needful and benevolent, there will be little difficulty hereafter, in fixing upon the plan of operation, and in carrying their kind intentions into effect.

The thing at present desirable seems to be, to awaken an interest to the subject—to unite in one body such as are favourable to the undertaking, to solicit the co-operation and support, especially of the higher and professional ranks, in this and the sister country.

This being done, the persons so uniting, may set on foot a subscription list, as extended as the thing contemplated; may appoint their committee of management; may determine on the propriety of a Model or Central School; may arrange all preliminaries and details, in a manner to deserve public confidence, and to meet the necessities of time and circumstances.