

**THE
SCHOOL OF LIFE**

BY
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NEW YORK
Charles Scribner's Sons
1905

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MANY fine things have been said in Commencement Addresses about "Culture and Progress," "The Higher Learning," "American Scholarship," "The University Spirit," "The Woman's College," and other subjects bearing on the relation of education to life. But the most important thing, which needs not only to be said, but also to be understood, is that life itself is the great school.

This whole framework of things visible and invisible wherein we mysteriously find ourselves perceiving, reasoning, reflecting, desiring, choosing and acting, is designed and fitted, so far at least as it concerns us and re-

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veals itself to us, to be a place of training and enlightenment for the human race through the unfolding and development of human persons such as you and me. For no other purpose are these wondrous potencies of perception and emotion, thought and will, housed within walls of flesh and shut in by doors of sense, but that we may learn to set them free and lead them out. For no other purpose are we beset with attractions and repulsions, obstacles and allurements, helps and hardships, tasks, duties, pleasures, persons, books, machines, plants, animals, houses, forests, storm and sunshine, water fresh and salt, fire wild and tame, a various earth, a mutable heaven, and an intricate humanity, but that we may be instructed in the nature of things and people, and rise by knowledge and sympathy,

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through gradual and secret promotions, into a fuller and finer life.

Facts are teachers. Experiences are lessons. Friends are guides. Work is a master. Love is an interpreter. Teaching itself is a method of learning. Joy carries a divining rod and discovers fountains. Sorrow is an astronomer and shows us the stars. What I have lived I really know, and what I really know I partly own; and so begirt with what I know and what I own, I move through my curriculum, elective and required, gaining nothing but what I learn, at once instructed and examined by every duty and every pleasure.

It is a mistake to say, "To-day education ends, to-morrow life begins." The process is continuous: the idea into the thought, the thought into the action, the action into the character. When

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the mulberry seed falls into the ground and germinates, it begins to be transformed into silk.

This view of life as a process of education was held by the Greeks and the Hebrews,—the two races in whose deep hearts the stream of modern progress takes its rise, the two great races whose energy of spirit and strength of self-restraint have kept the world from sinking into the dream-lit torpor of the mystic East, or whirling into the blind, restless activity of the barbarian West.

What is it but the idea of the school of life that sings through the words of the Hebrew psalmist? “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go. I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle lest they come

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near unto thee." This warning against the mulish attitude which turns life into a process of punishment, this praise of the eye-method which is the triumph of teaching,—these are the notes of a wonderful and world-wide school.

It is the same view of life that shines through Plato's noble words: "This then must be our notion of the just man, that even when he is in poverty or sickness, or any other seeming misfortune, all things will in the end work together for good to him in life and death; for the gods have a care of any one whose desire is to become just, and to be like God, as far as man can attain His likeness by the pursuit of virtue."

Not always, indeed, did the Greek use so strong an ethical emphasis. For him the dominant idea was the unfolding

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of reason, the clarifying of the powers of thought and imagination. His ideal man was one who saw things as they are, and understood their nature, and felt beauty, and followed truth.

It was the Hebrew who laid the heaviest stress upon the conception of righteousness. The foundations of his school were the tablets on which the divine laws, "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not," were inscribed. The ideal of his education was the power to distinguish between good and evil, and the will to choose the good, and the strength to stand by it. Life, to his apprehension, fulfilled its purpose in the development of a man who walked uprightly and kept the commandments.

Thus these two master-races of antiquity, alike in their apprehension of existence from the standpoint of the

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soul, worked out their thought of vital education, along the lines of different temperaments, to noble results. *Æschylus* and *Ezekiel* lived in the same century.

Reason and Righteousness: what more can the process of life do to justify itself, than to unfold these two splendid flowers on the tree of our humanity? What third idea is there that the third great race, the *Anglo-Saxon*, may conceive, and cherish, and bring to blossom and fruition?

There is only one,—the idea of *Service*. Too much the sweet reasonableness of the *Greek* ideal tended to foster an intellectual isolation; too much the strenuous righteousness of the *Hebrew* ideal gave shelter to the microbe of *Pharisaism*. It was left for the *Anglo-Saxon* race, quickened by the new

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word and the new life of a Divine Teacher, to claim for the seed an equal glory with the flower and the fruit; to perceive that righteousness is not reasonable, and reason is not righteous, unless they are both communicable and serviceable; to say that the highest result of our human experience is to bring forth better men and women, able and willing to give of that which makes them better to the world in which they live. This is the ultimate word concerning the school of life. I catch its inspiring note in the question of that very noble gentleman Sir Philip Sidney, who said, "To what purpose should our thoughts be directed to various kinds of knowledge, unless room be afforded for putting it into practice, so that public advantage may be the result?" These then are what the edu-