The improvement of the mind

Watts Isaac
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Author: Watts Isaac

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THE

IMPROVEMENT OF THE MIND.

BY ISAAC WATTS, D. D.

WITH

CORRECTIONS, QUESTIONS AND SUPPLEMENT.

By JOSEPH EMERSON,
Principal of the Female Seminary, Wethersfield, Ct.,
Author of the Evangelical Primer, Lectures on the Millennium, &c.

Revised Stereotype Edition.

BOSTON:
PUBLISHED BY JAMES LORING, 132 WASHINGTON ST.
The Editor indulges the belief, that this volume contains all the
instructions upon education, of much importance, ever written by the
excellent Watts. The circumstances, under which the original work
was composed and published, may account for its numerous inaccuracies.
These, however, may be regarded as minute spots upon the face of a glo-
rious luminary. That these should be wiped away, must be the desire of
every friend to the great author. This has been attempted by one, who
bega to be considered among the most ardent and devoted. The corrections
relate principally to grammar, punctuation, orthography and superfluous
words.

TO TEACHERS.

Beloved Fellow-Laborers,

Permit me to assure you, that I have found no other human text-book,
that appears nearly equal to this treatise of Watts, for interest and utility.
Having taught it to sixteen classes, it has appeared brighter and brighter,
like the finest gold. May you have occasion to estimate its solid worth
still more and more.

To teach in the best manner, you must have your own plan. If in any
measure, you adopt that of another, you must approve and use it as wholly
your own. It must become, as it were, a part of your very selves, like
your daily bread. I shall rejoice, if any of you can derive assistance from
the following

HINTS FOR TEACHING WATTS ON THE MIND.

1. Assign for a lesson from 3 to 8 pages.
2. Mention any printed questions, which you would omit.
3. Direct your pupils to read the lesson once, chiefly with a view to
understand it.
4. Let them read it again, to judge, whether the sentiments are true;
to perceive their connection, and fix in the mind the leading thoughts.
5. They may read it once more, ascertaining and committing to memory
the answers to the questions.
6. Fill your own mind and heart with the contents and spirit of the
lesson.
7. Ask your pupils the printed questions, keeping a record of their
performances.
8. Go over the lesson again, without record, with much lecturing, ques-
tioning and plain talk.
9. Make the utmost efforts to impress their minds with the truths and
duties inculcated.
10. Encourage them to state with freedom their inquiries and objections.
11. Give their questions to be answered in writing or otherwise, at a
future recitation.
12. Let their compositions be upon the subjects of their lessons.
13. Let every 5th or 6th lesson be a review of the preceding 4 or 5, the
pupils first reciting to each other, with mutual certificates, to be recorded.

Form of Certificate. Miss A—B— has promptly and correctly recited to
me — answers, in the last review.
[Date]

C—D.

14. Let them review the whole, and be faithfully examined at the close
of each quarter.
15. Inquire from time to time, their manner of studying.
16. After two or three years, let them go through the course again, in-
quiring particularly, how far they have practised the directions of Watts,
and with what advantage.

J. E.

Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1833,
BY JAMES LORING,
in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of Massachusetts.

By Exchange
Army And Navy Cigars
Aug. 13, 1929
EDITOR'S

INTRODUCTION.

1. Popularity of Watts on the Mind. Probably no other work, upon the same subject, has been so highly and so justly approved, as this little treatise of Watts—no other, upon which the hours of the reader and student have been so pleasantly and so usefully employed. And of all literary subjects, this seems to be the most important.

2. Object of this work. The grand object, which the author keeps continually in view, and continually presses upon the reader's attention, is to improve and enrich the mind; "to teach the young idea how to shoot;" "to unfold and invigorate the faculties; to store the mind with the most useful knowledge; to nip the buds of prejudice; to counteract its poison; to stay the tide of passion; to emancipate the mind enthralled; to expand, to elevate and liberalize the views; to form the habits; to subject every power, thought and pursuit, to the empire of reason; to subordinate all to the service of God—in short, to prepare the mortal and immortal part of our nature, for the greatest possible usefulness and enjoyment both here and forever.

3. Usefulness of this work. Of all human compositions, then, (this is probably the most useful for the young, as soon as they can understand it.) Such a conclusion might be warranted, though we considered merely its immediate effect upon the

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Grand object of Watts of this treatise? What would he unfold and invigorate? With what would he store the mind? What poison would he counteract? What would he subject to the empire of reason?

To whose service, should everything be subordinate? For what, would he prepare the whole of our nature? What human composition seems to be most useful to the young? How early should they attend to it?
mind. Much more must it appear just, when we consider, that the chief advantages of an acquaintance with this work, arise from its more remote influence. It lays a foundation to pursue every other study, and to employ every other means of knowledge and improvement, in the best manner.

The unhesitating voice, of every examiner, seems to have been, "The work is excellent." It is, doubtless, the most approved and admired, of all the prose works of the great, the good, the candid, the liberal, the useful man, whose name it bears. It is not the growth of a day; but the worthy product of twenty years—a product, from the choicest seed, in the richest soil, with the finest culture, beneath the most genial suns, and refreshing showers.

4. Johnson’s Encomium. "Few books," says Dr. Johnson, in his Life of Watts, "have been perused by me, with greater pleasure, than his Improvement of the Mind; of which the radical principles may indeed be found in Locke's Conduct of the Understanding; but they are so ramified by Watts, as to confer on him, the merit of a work, in the highest degree useful and pleasing. Whoever has the care of instructing others, may be charged with deficiency in his duty, if this book is not recommended."

5. This work, considered as a Logic. Considered as a treatise of Logic, it is probably superior to any work, bearing the name—better suited to answer the great and noble end of Logic. The author, indeed, seems to have regarded this work as something very much like a Logic. Having some years before, published a treatise of Logic, that had been well received, he thought "the learned world might possibly admit this as a second part or supplement to that treatise."

But though the author considers it scarcely worthy to be called a treatise, yet to me, it appears greatly superior to the elder work, and in point of merit, much better entitled to be considered the first or principal part. There is another reason, why it should be considered the first part, at least, in the order of time, or in the arrangement of studies. It is much more easily understood.

If, as it is generally and most justly acknowledged, Logic is the art of investigating and communicating truth, this little work, which the author was willing should pass for a mere Supplement, is perhaps better entitled to be called 'A Loze,' than any other, that has yet appeared. Surely no other human
production is suited to afford such a clear, steady, safe, brilliant light, to direct, animate, and encourage us, in the path of knowledge. Its unrivalled simplicity and perspicuity of style, notwithstanding some minor faults, its lively and touching illustrations, its plain, sound and useful maxims and precepts, can hardly fail to recommend it to the understanding and heart of every lover of truth.

6. Its Grand Characteristic. [Its grand characteristic is, that it is so practical.] While it is far enough from being an assemblage of dry maxims, a mere compend of dogmas—while the author most fully, clearly, and delightfully states his reasons, he is continually informing us, how to think, how to feel, how to converse, how to act, in order to grow wiser and better—"and better thence again, and better still, in infinite progression."

7. It most happily combines theory and practice. Probably in no other work of man, are excellent theory, practical direction and illustration more happily combined. We are addressed, as being at once capable of the most noble speculation, and the most useful practice; and each of these is made to reflect the most brilliant lustre, from the effulgence of the other. Perhaps it is not venturing too much to say, that probably this little volume contains a greater number and weight of useful directions, to aid us in the most important business of life, than are to be found in all the great works of Locke, Reid, Stewart and Brown.

8. Should be faithfully studied. A work, so enriched with instructions—instructions, so excellent, so momentous—instructions, which are continually needful, to regulate our conduct, and rouse our energies—instructions, that should be most familiarly fixed in the mind, and seem to make a part of our very identity—a work, replete with such instructions should be studied; faithfully and laboriously studied. One or two hasty, or even thorough perusals of such a work, are by no means sufficient.

9. Yet one reading may be useful. Not that in such a case, indeed, the time would be lost. One reading, and that a very rapid one, may prove of real utility to a vigorous youth, who pants for improvement. Though he may be able to retain scarcely a maxim or an idea, for a single year, yet his mind receives impressions, that can hardly fail to be salutary. He is induced to form a higher estimate of knowledge and mental improvement, and his heart beats higher and more effectually

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<td>What does this work most happily combine?—Meaning of theory?</td>
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for their attainment. Pride, egotism, prejudice, dogmatism, prating, reviling, &c. are here most powerfully assailed; and though he gains but very faint and obscure views of these evils, yet he sees something of their odious deformities, and receives an impulse, to hate, avoid and shun them; while on the other hand, he gains a glimpse of the beauty and loveliness of candor, docility, meekness, kindness, affability, liberality of feeling, and independence of thought, which urges him to assume and wear these more than earthly ornaments. An impression is thus made upon his feelings and habits, which tends to give a turn to his future pursuits, and to render him greater and better. It must be confessed, however, that in such a case, such happy results, would be very likely to be in a great measure, prevented by untoward circumstances.

There is probably no other book, that will more richly reward the labor of ten or fifteen hours' cursory application. (The style is so luminous, the thoughts so weighty, the illustrations so striking, that it seems hardly possible to read a page of it, without some advantage.)

10. *Watts a Pellucido.* Perhaps no writer is more like the picture of his own favorite Pellucido, which he has so finely drawn, than Watts himself. “Sometimes,” says he, “you will find a person, who in his conversion or his writings, delivers his thoughts in so plain, so easy, so familiar and perspicuous a manner, that you both understand and assent to every thing he says, as fast, as you read or hear it. Hereupon, some have been ready to conclude in haste, “Surely, this man says none but common things. I knew as much before, or, I could have said all this myself.” This is a frequent mistake. Pellucido was a very great genius. When he spoke in the senate, he was wont to convey his ideas in so simple and happy a manner, as to instruct and convince every hearer, and to enforce the conviction through the whole illustrious assembly; and that with so much evidence, that you would have been ready to wonder, that every one, who had spoke, had not said the same things. But Pellucido was the only man, that could do it.”

11. *Danger from this excellence.* One evil, however, may result from this incomparable excellence of Watts. As we do not give him credit for half the instructions we receive from him, we are not so likely to ponder them, to fix them in our minds, and make special efforts to apply them in practice, as though they were more difficult, and had more of the charm of novelty. Doubtless, many might have derived much more advantage from this work, if it had not appeared so easy and

Why is it hardly possible to read a page of it, without advantage? For what, are we not likely to give the author full credit?
familiar—so much like an old acquaintance and friend. Having read it once or twice through, and perhaps reviewed some parts of it, they seemed to know almost the whole of it, while in fact, their practical acquaintance was almost nothing. They afterwards continued to talk at random, to dispute at random, to read at random, to think at random, &c. very much as they had done before. The admired maxims of Watts were not sufficiently known, to prove of any considerable advantage; at least their utility was almost nothing, compared with what it might have been. Hence it appears exceedingly desirable, that this work should be studied, faithfully, laboriously and abundantly studied, and often reviewed and pondered.

12. The knowledge of this work a great attainment. To become thoroughly acquainted with this work, to gain a familiar knowledge of all its practical instructions, to apply them continually to the great business of thought, feeling and action, is a task far greater, than any person, at first, can easily imagine. I have been grieved and distressed, to find after the tenth perusal—nay, after teaching its contents more than ten times—after lecturing and conversing much upon the various topics, I have been grieved and distressed, to find how many of its admirable precepts, I had but imperfectly learned, and more imperfectly practised. Yet I cannot but indulge a hope, that this work has been of some advantage to me—that every hour, that I have spent in studying, pondering, teaching or recommending its contents, has conduced to aid me in the regulation of my thoughts, feelings and pursuits—has conduced to render my practice less defective, than it otherwise would have been. Had I regularly and thoroughly studied it in my childhood and youth—had I been cheered and animated, by affectionate and ardent classmaters, and aided by a kind, able and faithful teacher, there is no doubt, that the advantage might have been incomparably superior. O that it had been the appointed text-book of my youth, instead of the immortal work of Locke.

13. Should be taught to millions. It is my heart's desire and prayer to God, that millions of youthful students, of the present, and of future ages, may derive from this work, all the advantages, that I have realized—all that I might have gained, and much more. For such an object, I would gladly do something more, than to wish and pray. Something more than this, I have indeed already done. For fourteen years, it has been my most delightful task, season after season, to instruct a class in Watts. No other literary branch, that I have taught, has been so gratifying to myself, and probably no other so interesting, or so profitable, to successive pupils. Under no other instructions, have I witnessed such manifest improvement of mind.
14. **Different methods of teaching it.** With different classes, I have pursued methods somewhat different, hoping, however, that I have been enabled to make some improvement from year to year, and certainly finding my task more and more delightful. So far from fading—so far from growing old and dry, this tree of intellectual life has appeared more green and more fragrant every year.

15. **Written Questions.** For some years, I have used written questions. Notwithstanding the labor of transcribing, the advantage of these has been manifest. (The questions are doubtless much better, than I could suggest extemporaneously). They direct the pupils’ attention to the most important points of instruction; and are suited to rouse their attention to a particular consideration of those points. But perhaps the most important advantage is, by asking the same questions over and over, and especially by using them at examinations, forever to rivet the most important ideas in the mind. There is not the least reason to think, that this could be nearly so well effected in any other way. If the whole book were committed to memory verbatim, it is doubtful, whether the knowledge acquired, would be so much, or so permanent. Or if the pupil should learn all the ideas, so as to be able to answer every minute question, he would not be likely to distinguish between the more important and the less important; and would be in danger of much sooner forgetting the whole together.

16. **It is an advantage of fixed questions, that they aid and encourage the pupils to question each other.** It is most deeply to be regretted, that some distinguished teachers are disposed to object to the use of fixed questions, written or printed. Surely their objections will not stand the test of judicious, faithful experiment, and sound philosophy. If questions already extant, are not good, let them make and publish better. The method of using fixed questions, is undoubtedly the greatest improvement, that has been extensively adopted by teachers of the present age. Some extemporaneous questions, however, should be interspersed with these, to ensure the pupil’s attention to his whole lesson; not that he may become equally acquainted with every minute particular, but that he may have a clear view of the connection, and fully understand the most important parts.

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<td>Why should extemporaneous questions be interspersed?</td>
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<td>Meaning of verbatim?</td>
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17. **Printed Questions.** Though some special advantages may result from using questions in manuscript, and from the pupil's transcribing them, it seems much better, on the whole, that they should be printed. (It saves the great labor of transcribing) This is more especially the case, when important additional questions, with answers, are thrown in among them. Such are a great number of the following questions; at least, it is hoped, that they will be found valuable. These, with the answers, are to be considered a part of the Supplement.

18. **A Supplement to this work desirable.** It seems peculiarly desirable, that this supplement, in a concise and cheap form, should be added to this work of Watts. The whole work of Watts on the Improvement of the Mind, may be considered, as consisting of three parts. But the volume, bearing this title, so extensively circulated, and so much admired, contains only the first of these parts. This first part is longer, and unquestionably very much better, than the other two. Some parts of these two, however, are much more valuable, than some parts of the first, and may well constitute a part of the Supplement. Still more important parts may be drawn from his Logic. And here it is important to be considered, that the author seems to take it for granted, that those, who attend to his work on the Improvement of the Mind, are already acquainted with his Logic. In consequence of this, no doubt, the former work is considerably different, from what it otherwise would have been. It seems, then, of peculiar importance, that some parts, at least, some ideas, should be taken from the Logic, to supply intentional omissions in the other work. Such supplement is here attempted.

19. **Definition-Questions.** It is earnestly desired, that no one may be displeased with the questions, requiring definitions for answers. In proportion to the ground they occupy, these may be found the most useful of all the questions.

20. **Importance of defining words.** There is, probably, no other branch of literary education of equal importance, that is so neglected, or imperfectly taught, as defining — no other, that has now such demands upon the attention of teachers. It is often astonishing and grievous to see, how grossly ignorant are children and youth, and even men and women, of the meaning of important words and phrases — an ignorance, which in general, they are very far from feeling or mistrusting. They cannot express their thoughts, for the want of words; and often, they express thoughts, very different from what they intend, because they do not understand the words they employ. And
very frequently from the same cause, they take no idea, or wrong ideas, from what they read and hear. Probably, more than three fourths of the disputes, that have troubled the world, have arisen from the ignorance or misapprehension of words. No doubt, one of the greatest reasons, why so little good is effected by preaching, is, that the language of the preacher is but very imperfectly understood by most of the hearers. Said a venerable and pious lady to her little grandchild, just recovering from sickness, “Now, you must be thankful.” But the poor little child did not know—could not guess, the meaning of thankful; and was afraid to ask. So her excellent instruction was lost upon the child, at least for years, till he ascertained the meaning of the word. So it is, no doubt, with a great part of the instructions, that parents and teachers, as well as ministers, give to those under their care.

A remedy for these various and abounding evils, is devoutly to be wished and sought. What is it? Proper attention to the exercise of defining, is doubtless one of the remedies, and perhaps the best of all. And it would be easy to show, that all other methods must be ineffectual to gain an accurate knowledge of words, at least of many words, without this.

But the exercise of defining, may not only prevent much evil, but effect much positive good. When properly attended to, it is one of the best of exercises for improving at once the memory and the judgement, and storing the mind with useful knowledge. And when a good acquaintance with language; I mean the vernacular language, is once acquired, this knowledge is one of the best aids, ever devised by human ingenuity, to assist the reasoning faculty in the search of truth. We make much use of words in thinking, especially in close thinking; and it is perhaps impossible to pursue a train of thought, to any considerable length, without their aid. But how often do we impose upon ourselves, and draw wrong conclusions, by imperfectly understanding the words, we silently and perhaps insensibly use, or by using them in different senses. And how often do we think in words, of which we have no definite understanding, flattering ourselves, that we are nobly investigating thoughts and things, while in reality, we are only making progress in pride and darkness. As words are only the signs of thoughts and things and the relations of things, so it is very important, in order to improve our acquaintance with thoughts, things and relations, that we should have a very clear and correct knowledge of the meanings of words, or the ob-

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