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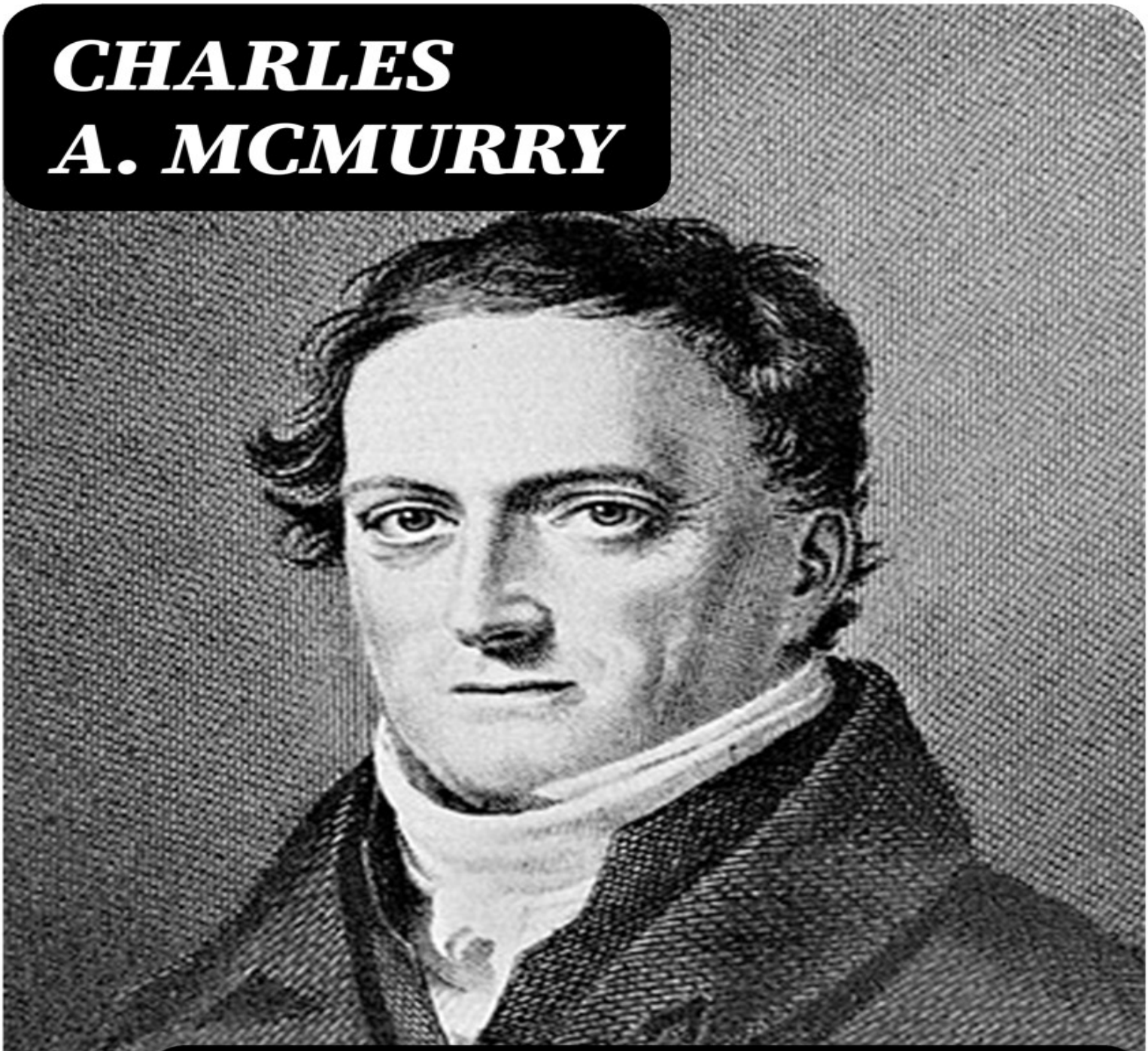

THE ELEMENTS OF GENERAL METHOD, BASED ON THE PRINCIPLES OF HERBART

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PREFACE.

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The Herbart School of Pedagogy has created much stir in Germany in the last thirty years. It has developed a large number of vigorous writers on all phases of education and psychology, and numbers a thousand or more positive disciples among the energetic teachers of Germany.

Those American teachers and students who have come in contact with the ideas of this school have been greatly stimulated.

In such a miscellaneous and many-sided thing as practical education, it is deeply gratifying to find a clear and definite leading purpose that prevails throughout and a set of mutually related and supporting principles which in practice contribute to the realization of this purpose.

The following chapters cannot be regarded as a full, exact, and painfully scientific account of Herbartian ideas, but as a simple explanation of their leading principles in their relations to each other and in their application to our own school problems.

In the second edition the last chapter of the first edition has been omitted, while the other chapters have been much modified and enlarged. The chapter on the Formal Steps is reserved for enlargement and publication in a separate form.

Normal, Ill., November 4, 1893.

CHAPTER I.

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THE CHIEF AIM OF EDUCATION.

What is the central purpose of education? If we include under this term all the things commonly assigned to it, its many phases as represented by the great variety of teachers and pupils, the many branches of knowledge and the various and even conflicting methods in bringing up children, it is difficult to find a definition sufficiently broad and definite to compass its meaning. In fact we shall not attempt in the beginning to make a definition. We are in search not so much of a comprehensive definition as of a central truth, a key to the situation, an aim that will simplify and brighten all the work of teachers. Keeping in view the end from the beginning, we need a central organizing principle which shall dictate for teacher and pupil the highway over which they shall travel together.

We will assume at least that education means the whole bringing up of a child from infancy to maturity, not simply his school training. The reason for this assumption is that home, school, companions, environment, and natural endowment, working through a series of years, produce a character which is a unit as the resultant of these different influences and growths. Again, we are compelled to assume that this aim, whatever it is, is the same for all.

Now what will the average man, picked up at random, say to our question: What is the chief end in the education of your son? A farmer wishes his boy to read, write, and cipher, so as to meet successfully the needs of a farmer's life. The merchant desires that his boy get a wider reach of knowledge and experience so as to succeed in a livelier sort of business competition. A university professor would lay out a liberal course of training for his son so as to prepare him for intellectual pursuits among scholars and people of culture. This utilitarian view, which points to success in life in the ordinary sense, is the prevailing one. We could probably sum up the wishes of a great majority of the common people by saying, "They desire to give their children, through education, a better chance in life than they themselves have had." Yet even these people, if pressed to give reasons, would admit that the purely utilitarian view is a low one and that there is something better for every boy and girl than the mere ability to make a successful living.

Turn for a moment to the great *systems* of education which have held their own for centuries and examine their aims. The Jesuits, the Humanists, and the Natural Scientists all claimed to be liberal, culture-giving, and preparatory to great things; yet we only need to quote from the histories of education to show their narrowness and incompleteness. The training of the Jesuits was linguistic and rhetorical, and almost entirely apart from our present notion of human development. The Humanists or Classicists who for so many centuries constituted the educational elite, belonged to the past with its glories rather than to the age in which they

really lived. Though standing in a modern age, they were almost blind to the great problems and opportunities it offered. They stood in bold contrast to the growth of the modern spirit in history, literature, and natural science. But in spite of their predominating influence over education for centuries, there has never been the shadow of a chance for making the classics of antiquity the basis of common, popular education. The modern school of Natural Scientists is just as one-sided as the Humanists in supposing that human nature is narrow enough to be compressed within the bounds of natural science studies, however broad their field may be.

But the systems of education in vogue have always lagged behind the clear views of educational *reformers*. Two hundred fifty years ago Comenius projected a plan of education for every boy and girl of the common people. His aim was to teach all men all things from the highest truths of religion to the commonest things of daily experience. Being a man of simple and profound religious faith, religion and morality were at the foundation of his system. But even the principles of intellectual training so clearly advocated by Comenius have not yet found a ready hearing among teachers, to say nothing of his great moral-religious purpose. Among later writers, Locke, Rousseau, and Pestalozzi have set up ideals of education that have had much influence. But Locke's "gentleman" can never be the ideal of all because it is intrinsically aristocratic and education has become with us broadly democratic. After all, Locke's "gentleman" is a noble ideal and should powerfully impress teachers. The perfect human animal that Rousseau

dreamed of in the Emile, is best illustrated in the noble savage, but we are not in danger in America of adopting this ideal. In spite of his merits the noblest savage falls short in several ways. Yet it is important in education to perfect the physical powers and the animal development in every child. Pestalozzi touched the hearts of even the weakest and morally frailest children, and tried to make improved physical conditions and intellectual culture contribute to heart culture, or rather to combine the two in strong moral character. He came close upon the highest aim of education and was able to illustrate his doctrine in practice. The educational reformers have gone far ahead of the schoolmasters in setting up a high aim in education.

Let us examine a few well-known definitions of education by great thinkers, and try to discover a central idea.

"The purpose of education is to give to the body and to the soul all the beauty and all the perfection of which they are capable."—*Plato*.

"Education includes whatever we do for ourselves and whatever is done for us by others for the express purpose of bringing us nearer to the perfection of our nature."—*John Stuart Mill*.

"Education is the preparation for complete living."—*Herbert Spencer*.

"Education is the harmonious and equable evolution of the human faculties by a method based upon the nature of the mind for developing all the faculties of the soul, for stirring up and nourishing all the principles of life, while shunning all one-sided culture and taking account of the

sentiments upon which the strength and worth of men depend."—*Stein*.

"Education is the sum of the reflective efforts by which we aid nature in the development of the physical, intellectual, and moral faculties of man in view of his perfection, his happiness, and his social destination."—*Compayre*.

These attempts to bring the task of education into a comprehensive, scientific formula are interesting and yet disappointing. They agree in giving great breadth to education. But in the attempt to be comprehensive, to omit nothing, they fail to specify that wherein the *true worth* of man consists; they fail to bring out into relief the highest aim as an organizing idea in the complicated work of education and its relation to secondary aims.

We desire therefore to approach nearer to this problem: *What is the highest aim of education*?

We will do so by an inquiry into the aims and tendencies of our public schools. To an outward observer the schools of today confine their attention almost exclusively to the acquisition of certain forms of knowledge and to intellectual training, to the mental discipline and power that come from a varied and vigorous exercise of the faculties. The great majority of good schoolmasters stand squarely upon this platform, knowledge and mental discipline. But they are none the less deeply conscious that this is not the highest aim of education. We scarcely need to be told that a person may be fully equipped with the best that this style of education can give, and still remain a criminal. A good and wise parent will inevitably seek for a better result in his child

than mere knowledge, intellectual ability, and power. All good schoolmasters know that behind school studies and cares is the still greater task of developing manly and womanly character. Perhaps, however, this is too high and sacred a thing to formulate. Perhaps in the attempt to reduce it to a scientific form we should lose its spirit. Admitting that strong moral character is the noblest result of right training, is it not still incidental to the regular school work? Perhaps it lies in the teacher and in his manner of teaching subjects, and not in the subject-matter itself nor in any course of study.

This is exactly the point at which we wish to apply the lever and to lift into prominence the *moral character-building aim* as the central one in education. This aim should be like a loadstone, attracting and subordinating all other purposes to itself. It should dominate in the choice, arrangement, and method of studies.

Let us examine more carefully the convictions upon which the moral aim rests. Every wise and benevolent parent knows that the first and last question to ask and answer regarding a child is "What are his moral quality and strength?" Now, who is better able to judge of the true aim than thoughtful and solicitous *parents*? In the second place, it is inconceivable that a conscientious *teacher* should close his eyes to all except the intellectual training of his pupils. It is as natural for him to touch and awaken the moral qualities as it is for birds to sing. Again, the *state* is more concerned to see the growth of just and virtuous citizens than in seeing the prosperity of scholars, inventors, and merchants. It is also concerned with the success of the

latter, but chiefly when their knowledge, skill, and wealth are equaled by their virtues. Our country may have vast resources and great opportunities, but everything in the end depends upon the *moral quality* of its men and women. Undermine and corrupt this and we all know that there is nothing to hope for. The uncorrupted stock of true patriots in our land is firmly rooted in this conviction, which is worth more to the country than corn-fields and iron mines. The perpetual enticement and blandishment of worldly success so universal in our time can not move us if we found one theory and practice upon the central doctrine of moral education. Education, therefore, in its popular, untrammeled, moral sense, is the greatest concern of society.

In projecting a general plan of popular education we are beholden to the prejudices of no man nor class of men. Not even the traditional prejudices of the great body of teachers should stand in the way of setting up the noblest ideal of education. Educational thinkers are in duty bound to free themselves from utilitarian notions and narrowness, and to adopt the best platform that children by natural birthright can stand upon. They are called upon to find the best and to apply it to as many as possible. Let it be remembered that each child has a complete growth before him. His own possibilities and not the attainments of his parents and elders are the things to consider.

Shall we seek to avoid responsibility for the moral aim by throwing it upon the family and the church? But the more we probe into educational problems the more we shall find the essential unity of all educational forces. The citadel of a

child's life is his moral character, whether the home, the school, or the church build and strengthen its walls. If asked to define the relation of the school to the home we shall quickly see that they are one in spirit and leading purpose, that instead of being separated they should be brought closer together.

In conclusion, therefore, shall we make *moral character* the clear and conscious aim of school education, and then subordinate school studies and discipline, mental training and conduct, to this aim? It will be a great stimulus to thousands of teachers to discover that this is the real purpose of school work, and that there are abundant means not yet used of realizing it. Having once firmly grasped this idea, they will find that there is no other having half its potency. It will put a substantial foundation under educational labors, both theoretical and practical, which will make them the noblest of enterprises. Can we expect the public school to drop into such a purely subordinate function as that of intellectual training; to limit its influence to an almost mechanical action, the sharpening of the mental tools? Stated in this form, it becomes an absurdity.

Is it reasonable to suppose that the rank and file of our teachers will realize the importance of this aim in teaching so long as it has no recognition in our public system of instruction? The moral element is largely present among educators as an *instinct*, but it ought to be evolved into a *clear purpose* with definite means of accomplishment. It is an open secret in fact, that while our public instruction is ostensibly secular, having nothing to do directly with religion or morals, there is nothing about which good

teachers are more thoughtful and anxious than about the means of moral influence. Occasionally some one from the outside attacks our public schools as without morals and godless, but there is no lack of staunch defenders on moral grounds. Theoretically and even practically, to a considerable extent, we are all agreed upon the great value of moral education. But there is a striking inconsistency in our whole position on the school problem. While the supreme value of the moral aim will be generally admitted, it has no open recognition in our school course, either as a principal or as a subordinate aim of instruction. Moral education is not germane to the avowed purposes of the public school. If it gets in at all it is by the back door. It is incidental, not primary. The importance of making the leading aim of education clear and *conscious* to teachers, is great. If their conviction on this point is not clear they will certainly not concentrate their attention and efforts upon its realization. Again, in a business like education, where there are so many important and necessary results to be reached, it is very easy and common to put forward a subordinate aim, and to lift it into undue prominence, even allowing it to swallow up all the energies of teacher and pupils. Owing to this diversity of opinion among teachers as to the results to be reached, our public schools exhibit a chaos of conflicting theory and practice, and a numberless brood of hobby-riders.

How to establish the moral aim in the center of the school course, how to subordinate and realize the other educational aims while keeping this chiefly in view, how to make instruction and school discipline contribute unitedly to

the formation of vigorous moral character, and how to unite home, school, and other life experiences of a child in perfecting the one great aim of education—these are some of the problems whose solution will be sought in the following chapters.

It will be especially our purpose to show how *school instruction* can be brought into the direct service of character-building. This is the point upon which most teachers are skeptical. Not much effort has been made of late to put the best moral materials into the school course. In one whole set of school studies, and that the most important (reading, literature, and history), there is opportunity through all the grades for a vivid and direct cultivation of moral ideas and convictions. The second great series of studies, the natural sciences, come in to support the moral aims, while the personal example and influence of the teacher, and the common experiences and incidents of school life and conduct, give abundant occasion to apply and enforce moral ideas.

That the other justifiable aims of education, such as physical training, mental discipline, orderly habits, gentlemanly conduct, practical utility of knowledge, liberal culture, and the free development of individuality will not be weakened by placing the moral aim in the forefront of educational motives, we are convinced. To some extent these questions will be discussed in the following pages.

CHAPTER II.

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RELATIVE VALUE OF STUDIES.

Being convinced that the controlling aim of education should be moral, we shall now inquire into the relative value of different studies and their fitness to reach and satisfy this aim. As measured upon this cardinal purpose, what is the intrinsic value of each school study? The branches of knowledge furnish the materials upon which a child's mind works. Before entering upon such a long and up-hill task as education, with its weighty results, it is prudent to estimate not only the end in view, but the best means of reaching it. Many means are offered, some trivial, others valuable. A careful measurement, with some reliable standard, of the materials furnished by the common school, is our first task. To what extent does history contribute to our purpose? What importance have geography and arithmetic? How do reading and natural science aid a child to grow into the full stature of a man or woman?

These questions are not new, but the answer to them has been long delayed. Since the time of Comenius, to say the least, they have seriously disturbed educators. But few have had the courage, industry, and breadth of mind of a Comenius, to sound the educational waters and to lay out a profitable chart. In spite of Comenius' labors, however, and

those of other educational reformers be they never so energetic, practical progress toward a final answer, as registered in school courses, has been extremely slow.

Herbert Spencer says: "If there needs any further evidence of the rude, undeveloped character of our education, we have it in the fact that the comparative worths of the different kinds of knowledge have been as yet scarcely even discussed, much less discussed in a methodic way with definite results. Not only is it that no standard of relative values has yet been agreed upon, but the existence of any such standard has not been conceived in any clear manner. And not only is it that the existence of such a standard has not been clearly conceived, but the need of it seems to have been scarcely even felt. Men read books on this topic and attend lectures upon that, decide that their children shall be instructed in these branches and not in those; and all under the guidance of mere custom, or liking, or prejudice, without ever considering the enormous importance of determining in some rational way what things are really most worth learning. * * * * * Men dress their children's minds as they do their bodies, in the prevailing fashion." Spencer, *Education*, p. 26.

Spencer sees clearly the importance of this problem and gives it a vigorous discussion in his first chapter, "What knowledge is of most worth?" But the question is a broad and fundamental one and in his preference for the natural sciences he seems to us not to have maintained a just balance of educational forces in preparing a child for "complete living." His theory needs also to be worked out into greater detail and applied to school conditions before it

can be of much value to teachers. It can scarcely be said that any other Englishman or American has seriously grappled with this problem. Great changes and reforms indeed have been started, especially within the last fifty years, but they have been undertaken under the pressure of general popular demands and have resulted in compromises between traditional forces and urgent popular needs. An adequate philosophical inquiry into the relative merit of studies and their adaptability to nurture mental, moral, and physical qualities has not been made.

The Germans have worked to a better purpose. Quite a number of able thinkers among them have given their best years to the study of this problem of relative educational values and to a working out of its results. Herbart, Ziller, Stoy, and Rein have been deeply interested in philosophy and psychology as life-long teachers of these subjects at the university, but in their practice schools in the same place they also stood daily face to face with the primary difficulties of ordinary teaching. At the outset, and before laying out a course of study, they were compelled to meet and settle the aim of education and the problem of relative values. Having answered these questions to their own satisfaction, they proceeded to work out in detail a common school course. The Herbart school of teachers has presumed to call its interpretation of educational ideas "scientific pedagogy," a somewhat pretentious name in view of the fact that many leading educators in Germany, England, and elsewhere, deny the existence of such a science. But if not a science, it is at least a serious attempt at one. The

exposition of principles that follow is chiefly derived from them.

With us the present time is favorable to a rational inquiry into relative educational values and to a thorough-going application of the results to school courses and methods.

In the first place the old *classical monopoly* is finally and completely broken, at least so far as the common school is concerned. It ruled education for several centuries, but now even its methods of discipline are losing their antique hold. The natural sciences, modern history, and literature have assumed an equal place with the old classical studies in college courses. Freed from old traditions and prejudice, our common school is now grounded in the vernacular, in the national history and literature, and in home geography and natural science. Its roots go deep into native soil. *Secondly*, the door of the common school has been thrown open to the new studies and they have entered in a troop. History, drawing, natural science, modern literature, and physical culture have been added to the old reading, writing, and arithmetic. The common school was never so untrammeled. It is free to absorb into its course the select materials of the best studies. Teachers really enjoy more freedom in selecting and arranging subjects and in introducing new things than they know how to make use of. There is no one in high authority to check the reform spirit and even local boards are often among the advocates of change. *In the third place*, by multiplying studies, the common school course has grown more complex and heterogeneous. The old reading, writing, arithmetic, and grammar could not be shelved for the sake of the new studies and the same

amount of time must be divided now among many branches. It is not to be wondered at if all the studies are treated in a shallow and fragmentary way. Some of the new studies, especially, are not well taught. There is less of unity in higher education now than there was before the classical studies and "the three R's" lost their supremacy. Our common school course has become a batch of miscellanies. We are in danger of overloading pupils, as well as of making a superficial hodge-podge of all branches. There is imperative need for sifting the studies according to their value, as well as for bringing them into right connection and dependence upon one another. *Fourthly*, there is a large body of thoughtful and inquiring teachers and principals who are working at a revision of the school course. They seek something tangible, a working plan, which will help them in their present perplexities and show them a wise use of drawing, natural science, and literature, in harmony with the other studies. *Finally*, since we are in the midst of such a breaking-up period, we need to take our bearings. In order to avoid mistakes and excesses there is a call for deep, impartial, and many-sided thinking on educational problems. Supposing that we know what the controlling aim of education is, we are next led to inquire about and to determine the relative value of studies as tributary to this aim.

It is not however our purpose to give an original solution to this problem and to those which follow it. We must decline to attempt a philosophical inquiry into fundamental principles and their origin. Ours is the humbler task of explaining and applying principles already worked out by

others; that is, to give the results of Herbartian pedagogy as applied to our schools.

Instead of discussing the many branches of study one after another, it will be well to make a broad division of them into three classes and observe the marked features and value of each. First, *history*, including the subject matter of biography, history, story, and other parts of literature. Second, the *natural sciences*. Third, *the formal studies*, grammar, writing, much of arithmetic, and the symbols used in reading.

The first two open up the great fields of real knowledge and experience, the world of man and of external nature, the two great reservoirs of interesting facts. We will first examine these two fields and consider their value as constituent parts of the school course.

History, in our present sense, includes what we usually understand by it, as U. S. history, modern and ancient history, also biography, tradition, fiction as expressing human life and the novel or romance, and historical and literary masterpieces of all sorts, as the drama and the epic poem, so far as they delineate man's experience and character. In a still broader sense, history includes language as the expression of men's thoughts and feelings. But this is the formal side of history with which we are not at present concerned. History deals with men's motives and actions as individuals or in society, with their dispositions, habits, and institutions, and with the monuments and literature they have left.

The relations of persons to each other in society give rise to morals. How? The act of a person—as when a fireman