

**SUGGESTIONS RESPECTING
IMPROVEMENTS IN EDUCATION,
PRESENTED TO THE TRUSTEES OF THE
HARTFORD FEMALE SEMINARY,
AND PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST**

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Suggestions Respecting Improvements in Education, Presented to the Trustees of the Hartford Female Seminary, and Published at Their Request by Catharine E. Beecher

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CATHARINE E. BEECHER

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SUGGESTIONS

RESPECTING

IMPROVEMENTS IN EDUCATION.

It is believed that much good, which might be accomplished, remains unaffected, from the mere fact that mankind either do not know that it *can* be done, or are ignorant of the means to accomplish it. This, probably, is particularly true in the department of education.

Were the community only aware of what *might* be accomplished in those years, which, by the youth of our country, are devoted to education, could it be seen how much expense is vainly thrown away, how much time is painfully spent to no good purpose, how often the young mind is cramped and injured in some of its most noble faculties, by the discipline of the school room; could it be seen how much toil to pupils, vexation to teachers, and expense to parents, a little pecuniary aid, and improved methods of instruction would save, while the advantages of education would be increased a hundred fold, could all this be seen and realized, such effects would follow as it would now be deemed enthusiasm to pourtray.

It is believed therefore, that *teachers*, who have the best opportunity for learning and realizing these things, could not do a more essential service to the public, than by communicating the results of their experience and observation on such subjects. For until the community is apprized of the various defects of present systems of education, by those who are appointed to watch over its interests, the efforts cannot be expected which are necessary to correct them, nor that tone of public feeling which will demand such efforts.

This suggestion therefore may serve as an apology for the writer in thus communicating certain views on this subject, which have been deemed, by others, of sufficient importance to allow presenting them to the public.

Most of the defects which are continually discovered and lamented in present systems of education may be traced, either directly or indirectly to the fact, that the *formation of the minds of children has not been made a profession securing wealth, influence, or honour*, to those who enter it.

The three professions of law, divinity, and medicine, present a reasonable prospect of reputation, influence and emolument to active and cultivated minds. The mercantile, manufacturing and mechanical professions; present a hope of gaining at least that *wealth* which can so readily purchase estimation and influence. But the profession of a *teacher* has not offered any such stimulus.

It has been looked upon as the resource of poverty, or as a drudgery suited only to inferior minds

and far beneath the aims of the intellectual aspirant for fame and influence, or of the active competitor for wealth and distinction. The consequence of this has been, as a general fact, that this profession has never, until very recently, commanded, or secured the effort of *gifted minds*. These have all forsaken this for a more lucrative or a more honourable avenue; and few have engaged in it except those whose talents would not allow them to rise in other professions, or, those who only made it a temporary resort, till better prospects should offer.

In all other professions, we find *bodies of men* united by a common professional interest; we find organs of public communication in the form of periodicals, or of official reports; in all other professions the improvement of distinguished minds, and the result of their successful experiments are recorded and transmitted for the benefit of those who may succeed. The duties of all other professions are deemed of so much consequence that *years* must be spent, even after a liberal education, in preparing for these *peculiar* duties, and the public are so tenacious lest these professions should be filled by persons not properly prepared, that none may be admitted, but upon an examination before those qualified by study and experience to judge of the acquisitions of each candidate.

Even the simple business of *making a shoe*, is deemed of such importance and difficulty as to demand an apprenticeship for *years*, and mankind are usually very cautious not to hazard employing even

one of this profession who is unprepared for the business he attempts.

But to *form the mind of man* is deemed so simple and easy an affair, that no such preparation or precautions are required. *Any person* may become a teacher without any definite preparation, and without any test of skill or experience. Thousands will be found who would consider it ridiculous for a child to have his foot covered by an awkward and inexperienced artisan, who yet without a moment's examination would commit the formation of his mind to almost *any one* who will offer to do the business. Were our country suddenly deprived of every artist who could make a shoe, we should immediately witness frequent *combination* and *consultation* to supply the loss. The most ingenious would be employed to communicate to others their skill, and thousands of minds would be directing their energies to restoring this useful art to its former advance toward perfection. But the *human mind*, that spark of immortality, that wonderful origin of knowledge, invention, affection, and moral power, where has been the combined effort, the patient instruction, the collected treasures of experience, the enthusiasm of interest, which should direct in clothing this emanation of Deity with all its expanded powers, its glowing affections, and undying energies? Has it not been the desultory, disunited business of a class of persons, driven to it by necessity, performing it without the enthusiasm which glows in all other professions and leaving it whenever a livelihood could be obtained in any other respectable way?

As this has heretofore been considered a profession so simple and easy as to demand little preparation for its peculiar duties, if these duties *are* arduous, and difficult, we should naturally expect it to be filled by those who are unprepared to discharge them properly.

It is to *mothers*, and to *teachers*, that the world is to look for the character which is to be enstamped on each succeeding generation, for it is to them that the great business of education is almost exclusively committed. And will it not appear by examination that neither mothers nor teachers have ever been properly educated for their profession. What is the *profession of a Woman*? Is it not to form immortal minds, and to watch, to nurse, and to rear the bodily system, so fearfully and wonderfully made, and upon the order and regulation of which, the health and well-being of the mind -so greatly depends?

But let most of our sex upon whom these arduous duties devolve, be asked; have you ever devoted any time and study, in the course of your education, to any preparation for these duties? Have you been taught any thing of the structure, the nature, and the laws of the body, which you inhabit? Were you ever taught to understand the operation of diet, air, exercise and modes of dress upon the human frame? Have the causes which are continually operating to prevent good health, and the modes by which it might be perfected and preserved ever been made the subject of any *instruction*? Perhaps almost every voice would respond, no; we