

The Enquirer.

"ALL POWERS, NOT HEREIN DELEGATED, REMAIN WITH THE PEOPLE."—Constitution of N. C.

VOL. III.

TARBORO, N. C., SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 1873.

NO. 47.

The Enquirer comes to the public of Tarboro, N. C. as a weekly paper, and in its columns will be found all the news of the day, and all the news of the week, and all the news of the month, and all the news of the year, and all the news of the world, and all the news of the universe.

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The Weekly Enquirer.

SATURDAY, NOV. 22, 1873

AN ADDRESS Delivered Nov. 8th, 1873, in the Hall of the Friends of Temperance.

BY H. A. WALKER, M. D.

Mr. President and Members of the Council:

The subject I have chosen for to-night is "The Mechanic Arts and their relations to Mental and Social Culture."

I am well aware that I have chosen a theme that offers a field for the exercise of the greatest intellects the world has ever produced, and probably no one will ever be able to solve all the intricate questions that would arise in a full and exhaustive discussion of this subject; hence I do not propose to try my unskillful hand on the most subtle of these mental and moral influences, but to confine myself to the more obvious and practical phases of the subject.

So intimately are the Mechanic Arts related to every advance and decline in the civilization of every nation, that to give a full account of their progress would require a review of the history of the whole world, and this tracing of their progress would become the more difficult from the fact that many nations that once played important parts in the world's history seem never to have realized the importance of this branch of industry, and most that can be learned of their development in their day must be inferred from records that have only an indirect bearing upon this subject.

The first account we have of man's triumph over the material world is found in the book of Genesis. Here we are told that Tubal-cain, a man of the seventh generation from Adam, was an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron, and some intimation of the interest we would feel in this subject is found in the fact that this record of Tubal-cain's name in connection with such matters as were permanently to affect the human race, and at a point in the world's history where whole centuries are left a perfect blank probably for want of facts of sufficient interest to record.

We must then pass on a few generations to the building of the Ark, here the details are so meager that each one is left to his own imagination to conceive what progress must have been made in the Mechanic Arts to have enabled the men of that generation to construct a vessel that was to battle successfully for many months with the storms to be met on that world-wide expanse of waters.

The accounts given of the building of the tower of Babel and the cities of that day add but little to our knowledge of this subject, as no minute descriptions are given of the materials and appliances made use of in their construction.

Many of the articles of household use and ornament excavated from the oldest ruins, display an amount of knowledge and skill we are not in the habit of accrediting to the ancients, and it is said that some of these articles require in their construction a knowledge of materials and appliances entirely unknown to this generation. However this may be we are justified in the belief that there has been a general and steady progress in the development of the Mechanic Arts, but a little care may be necessary here to prevent a confusion of two ideas whose boundary lines are sometimes so indistinct and whose relations are so intimate that our thoughts easily pass from one to the other without detecting the distinction. I refer to the Fine Arts and the Mechanic Arts. The relation in which these stand to each other may be compared to that between poetry and history. History in its strict sense is a record of bare facts; and the mechanic arts consist in an application of the facts of natural philosophy to manufactures. A poetical idea may embody a historical fact as a work of fine art may display a knowledge of philosophy, but the essence of both has its origin in the imagination and consists in the creation of new and beautiful suggestions that delight the mind without adding to its knowledge. It is not claimed in this discussion that we have improved upon the old models of painting, sculpture and architecture, but accord what we may to past ages in the matter of fanciful creations, it can not be denied that it has been left to the last two or three generations to understand the secret workings of Nature's laws and to apply them in such manner as to enable man to make them do his bidding and to crowd the results of whole days of manual labor into the space of one short hour.

For fear of being misunderstood I will remark here that I do not wish to detract from the honor due those who have devoted their lives to the study of pure science, as distinguished from those pursuits that direct the attention only to the application of science, and justice demands that we should accord more to the man that can enter unexplored fields and bring to light the hidden things of nature, than to him whose labor it is to apply this knowledge in its various useful forms. That was a higher effort of the intellect that discovered the existence of the electric fluid and its power to force itself through a mental wire around the world at lightning speed, than that of conceiving an instrument to record the flashes of this subtle fluid. But our business to-night is not with the scientist but with the artisan and the influence of his calling on the world and on himself; and in this discussion I shall assume that the application of familiar science to supplying our daily wants is due to the development of the Mechanic Arts; for in so far as the scientist has made these applications he has so far been a mechanic.

The influence that has been exerted on

the world by the printing press and telegraph is so direct and so evident to every one, and the subject has been worn so threadbare by innumerable essays that I shall pass by these without further notice.

The first general proposition I shall lay down is that the present civilization of the world could never have existed without labor-saving machinery.

Education, it had at all, must be gotten at the expense of time and means, and must be generally denied to those who have not more than enough of these to provide for the daily recurring necessities of the body; and when the labor of production has to be carried on in such a way as to consume the whole available time of a large majority of the people in producing the food and clothing necessary to maintain the world, then leisure to devote to the improvement of the mind must be confined to the fortunate or powerful few, and be forever denied the populace whose arduous labors make them even indifferent to the advantages of education.

The popular idea on this subject seems to go no further than this; if my neighbors use labor-saving machinery they can produce the necessities of life cheaper than I can without it, and I am forced to use it to be able to make any profit on my productions at the reduced price; and that there is eventually no benefit to any one, the price of all productions having declined in proportion to the amount of labor necessary to produce them. The fallacy of this view can be exposed by one simple illustration. Suppose a family, and in this case the family might represent the whole human race, to be composed of persons of both sexes and of all ages, and on account of the use of inferior tools the members of the family who are able to work can not produce more than enough of food and clothing to supply the necessities of the family, with improved tools a larger number of the members of the family could become producers and each one be enabled to produce more, thereby giving a surplus to be devoted to the education of some of their number. But some one may say that if every one were to produce this surplus there would be no demand for it and their last state would be no better than their first; in this case they would only spend sufficient time in labor to provide for their daily wants and could devote their leisure time to the improvement of their minds.

It may be objected that a sufficient amount of leisure for education may be had without labor-saving machinery; but an examination of the habits and mode of life of those nations that retain the use of primitive tools will reveal the fact that their leisure time is not the leisure the thrifty man enjoys after performing all necessary labor, but is the result of laziness and indifference to the comforts of life; time taken rather than saved from their ordinary labors, a kind of leisure that never spends itself in the mental effort of study.

It may also be objected that labor-saving machinery is one of the results of our civilization and not one of its causes. The answer is that history proves the two have always gone hand in hand, and though it may be difficult, where this state of things exists and effect, on account of their reflex influence upon each other; still no one would be so bold as to say that our civilization could exist without this improvement in the mechanic arts, when all experience shows neither has ever existed without the other.

Man by nature has a dislike for manual labor, and to those persons, who realize the necessity of labor being performed, there is a great incentive to invest some means of partially relieving themselves from burdensome toil; and this very study of one branch of the mechanic arts becomes an educator itself and successful study here not only gives leisure for mental improvement but offers a great inducement to others to follow in the same path.

The influence of works of fine art as a civilization is so obvious to every one that we never look for specimens if it in the abodes of the vulgar, but they always strike us as becoming in the dwellings of the refined; and until the art of picture making by mechanical means was brought to such perfection as to multiply copies of pictures of high merit, and until the moulders art reproduced the finest works of the sculptor, their refining influence could be felt only by the wealthy. Now with a comparatively small expenditure the homes of the poor can be enlivened with works of high artistic taste, that educate the mind by the vivid impressions they give of scenes and faces to be remembered, and soften the heart by the ever reminding life-like pictures of dear but absent ones.

It is not denied that men of great refinement and high culture have lived in ages of the world that knew nothing of our modern machinery; men whose perceptions were so keen and whose tastes were so refined that the effusions of their minds would be admired for ages after the works of the brightest intellects of our day have passed into oblivion; but these facts controvert nothing of the argument for in those ages the many were made to serve the few and the cultivated were the people of leisure. And it is not the genius of our civilization to expend itself in creating one bright star whose brilliance shall be the combined light of all its fellows, but rather to diffuse the light till the darkest corner shall feel its genial influence.

Having said this much of the influence of the mechanic arts on society at large, let us now examine some of the influences of mechanical labor on the artisan himself.

There is a great deal of manual labor performed in handling the commerce and

conducting the business of the world that can not well be classified under any particular head; leaving this out of the account, labor may be divided into three departments; mechanical, agricultural and domestic. As most of the latter kind is performed by persons not well fitted to do either of the other two kinds, and as the influence of domestic labor makes but little impression on the world as compared to that of mechanical and agricultural labor, the first two only are generally considered when this topic is under discussion. As far as my knowledge on the subject extends it has been only in the last few years that a calling in the department of mechanical labor has been much preferred to that of agricultural labor. There were so many hardships to be endured by the apprentice, so many years to be spent under instruction before he was allowed to seek employment of his own choosing, so small a remuneration for his labor during these years and so much of practical slavery in his relation to his employer, that many young men no doubt were deterred from learning a trade and driven to engage in agricultural labor, where the present freedom was greater, though the hope of future reward was less.

But now behold the changes that have taken place in our day; changes so radical, so sudden that they have shaken society to its very foundation. But in all of these upheavals the voice of the farm laborer has not been heard; he seems to be counted a mere cipher in the great questions of the day. And how are we to account for this great difference in the influence of two classes of people who seem to have started out so nearly equal in the beginning of the race? We can not answer that one party has used its power, while the other has been content to remain unnoticed; for human nature acts too uniformly when the question of personal aggrandizement is presented to admit of this explanation. We can only answer that there is something in the calling of one that develops his intellect and opens his eyes to the relation in which he stands to the world, and enables him to grapple with the notions and interests of the world that are antagonistic to his own; while the calling of the other dwarfs his intellect and fixes him in a stolid indifference to all else than bodily comfort.

The influence that mechanics, by their steadily increasing numbers and intelligence, might have exerted on society, was for a long time so hemmed in by the meshes of crafty capitalists had woven around them, that they were all unconsciously of the power for good or evil that lay within their grasp; but like the waters of a gentle stream, that have been dammed till no barrier can longer hold them, they broke their bonds and rushed headlong, a mighty flood, carrying destruction to all that stood within their reach.

It might not be out of place, in connection with this subject, to give some account of Trade's Unions as they exist in this country; but the good they have done being the natural result of organized effort, and the evil they are responsible for being the natural outgrowth of the tyranny their members had suffered, and neither being attributable to any influence peculiar to their calling, I will not discuss the matter here; but will proceed to show that mechanical labor offers opportunities for mental and social culture, and to consider wherein mechanics fail to improve these opportunities.

The present high price that skilled labor commands, and the system of working ten hours a day, puts the question of time and means for improvement at rest. Mechanical labor, unlike mere drudgery, does not tempt the powers of the mind to stagnate, but keeps them in active and healthy exercise; nor does it bring that depressing fatigue to the body that produces mental lassitude after the hours of labor.

Here we have a class of people whose pay is sufficient to insure a comfortable living and furnish means for the purchase of books and periodicals, with sufficient leisure time for study; engaged in occupations that are honorable and calculated to foster a manly independence, without which there can be no true development; but good opportunities are bad companions unless turned to good account.

To say nothing of the general information that may be obtained during hours of leisure, almost without cost, there is an endless variety of learning, in reach of every mechanic, bearing directly on his particular trade. The whole field of architecture is before the carpenter, the science of drawing and construction is open to the machinist and a thorough knowledge of the melting and combinations of metals would occupy the life time of the moulder; and all may find pleasant and profitable study in that much neglected branch, the nature and strength of materials.