THE MICROCOSM.

The world was made so various that the mind of desultory man, studious of change and pleased with novelty, might be indulged.—COWPER.

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FOR THE MICROCOSM.

LETTERS ON EDUCATION.

No. 7.

Mr. Editor,

"*Nunc ad thesaurum inventorum, atque omnium partium rhetoricæ custodem, memoriam*" *Rhet. ad Heren. III.*

The memory is the store-house of of the mind, and education must furnish it with goods: for 'no man out of an evil treasury bringeth forth good things.' This faculty is next to reason in importance; its cultivation generally occupies the largest share of our schooldays; we practise it every moment of life and draw from it the materials of all our actions: ought it not then to be well understood, correctly trained and carefully furnished?

The powers of memory appear to be almost incredible: it is nevertheless true that it can be exercised to a prodigious extent.—Argus remembered his master Ulyses after an absence of twenty years. Even in the brute creation examples of great memory occur. The same natural strength of recognition is found among the Indian tribes. In the annals of History, Themistocles, and other great generals are said to have remembered the names and faces of all the soldiers who served under their command. Students are known to have memorised extensive works; many have been able to repeat the whole of the Bible and New Testament.—Short hand writers and reporters usually acquire almost unlimited facility to recollect the substance and expressions of the various speeches to which they attend in the course of a day. I have known a child memorise four hundred lines of Phœdrus in two hours. Persons in business are frequently met with who never forget the features they have once seen.

The committing to memory of words, facts, dates &c. must not be confounded with the habit of retaining them. I am inclined to think that the former can be improved by exercise, of the latter I am doubtful. One merchant may have a larger store room than another, but he can place in it no more goods than it will contain

The various phenomena of memory may all be resolved into the association of ideas. Malebranche, I believe, first observed it, Locke, Hume, & Stewart have written largely on the connection of ideas, but have not demonstrated how they are linked together. Some ideas are connected naturally as roundness and hardness with a marble ball, or the roots, branches and leaves with the trunk of a tree: others are arbitrarily united as goodness and learning with a particular friend; to blend the idea of justice with that of the trunk of a tree would be still more arbitrary as more remote from nature. Necessary connections exist between ideas, when the one includes or implies the existence of the others; thus the idea of a steel knife necessarily connects the associated ideas of steel, knife, handle, blade, &c.

I am induced to think that all ideas, when associated, are joined by the simple act of attentive perception, the mind conceiving them as one idea composed of parts, or as objects constituting one idea; its unity arising from the act of perception, (for the mind cannot form two acts at once) and its division arising from the analysis of the attention which separates the unity into fractions. A group of figures in a picture would easily illustrate my opinion: the group is unity, the figures are the fractions, and when the mind recalls the idea, it cannot recall one fraction (or figure) without conceiving the whole unity or group. Thus the Geometrician cannot conceive the idea of angle or side in a triangle without having the idea of a whole triangle. and the simplicity and unity of every idea or act of the mind, (taken simpliciter in actu quantum sit actus) is admitted by all philosophers, as the simple modification of an uncompounded energy. I therefore consider the association of ideas to be the effect of perception aided by attention. And if we admit this theory to be true, there will be no difficulty in demonstrating all the phenomena of memory, or shewing why one idea suggests a thousand others.

Getting by heart, as it is sometimes called, (perhaps to signify the heart-felt attention necessary to the performance) is nothing more than connecting ideas by place, order or time. The more vigorous the perception and more vivid the attention, the stronger will be the associatian and the more durable the impression. To memorise written or printed language is to associate the ideas of words in successive order and place: linking each separate word with the one which it precedes in one continued chain of succession. Hence the quickest readers are the best memorisers: and what is heard is better retained than what is read; because a larger portion is comprehended into a single idea, and the attention is better confined to that exclusive act; because the voice of authority com mands more respect than the silent letters of a book.

What Locke has observed on memory seems to confirm my opinion, for to follow his directions a pupil must exercise his perceptive and attentive faculties with considerable energy. He says "What the mind is intent upon, and for fear of letting it slip, often imprints afresh on itself by frequent reflection, *that*, it is apt to retain: but still, according to its own natural strength of retention, I fear this faculty of the mind is not capable of much help and amendment in general, by any exercises or endeavors of ours: at least, not by that used upon this pretence in grammar schools——Strength of memory is owing to a happy constitution, and not to any habitual improvement got by exercise." He here blames the injudicious practice of European schools requiring youth to commit to memory long and difficult grammars written in the Latin language, which it was usual to exact with the strictest rigor even from the youngest students who were about to apply themselves to the learned languages, a method more likely to exhaust than to improve the faculty of memory; but it is evident that he requires frequent perception and close attention as the best means of memorising.—The firmest associations for connecting ideas not naturally united are probably those of place and order, by which we easily find objects which we have laid aside, and revive ideas long absent from the mind.

AN OLD FIELD TEACHER.

FOR THE MICROCOSM.

Master LEONIDAS—Late last night I called to see friend L. but not finding him in, and seeing the following letter on the table, I commenced copying, and as he did not arrive till I had finished, I hand it you for publication:

Raleigh, Dec. 23, 1838.

My dear SUSAN:

The day after to-morrow will be Christmas. This is the time for merry-making and keep-sake gifts. I send this representative of myself to be merry with you. It is to remind you of a brother. It is to recall to your mind gay scenes and jolly moments now quietly slumbering on the mighty surface of the *past*. I send it not as a keep-sake, but to supply its place. A keep-sake is something sensible, tangible, costly—something substantial, possessing form and size, and is usually a neat "*Annual*," bound in morocco, garnished with gold, embossed and embellished with the finest specimens of the pencil of art, embalming beautiful delineations of the age and genius of romance, and suffused over with the honied inspiration of poesy and passion. Such a present is a fit token to commemorate not only the kindlier feelings of the donor, but the solemnly merry occasion which consecrates the act.

At Mr. Hughes's Book Store may be found the greatest variety of these beautiful annual productions—of sentiment, feeling, genius, and wit—and it is a glorious occasion for such tokens. Christmas, in truth, comes but once a year; and for this reason should be esteemed the more sacred. But, as I am not with you, I am compelled to forego the pleasure it would afford me to endorse these assurances of brotherly attachment with suitable and appropriate presents. I rest contented, however, on the belief that you do not doubt my anxiety to do so. I know, too, that professions are but words—but I pray you to remember that words are the representatives of things; and since I can but give you words, I do hope they will pass for more than mere empty professions. They are intended as keepsakes, which, though not possessing form and devoid of all those external embellishments of gold and glitter which usually adorn Christmas gifts—yet are anxious to pledge to you the rich gift of a brother's heart; not the idle ceremony of professional attachment, repeated to continue our intercourse and connection as brother and sister of the same family; but to exhibit the position of my feeling in the great chain of sympathy which binds man to his fellow man in one universal philanthropy, and points out how near and relatively dear they are to you and yours. They are intended to represent to you the fact that time and distance does not—cannot separate those near and dear by kindred ties, respected and remembered by virtuous merit and contented modesty. So, during all your Christmas pastime and hilarity, I beg to be considered as one of your party; joyous and merry, whenever there is joy and merriment; happiest and light-heartedest, where all hearts are happy and light—participating in every sport—singing upon and impersonating every feeling and sympathising with every emotion, in the pleasant abode of my beloved sisters. I feel as if I were now present, enjoying that greatest, best boon to man, sweet and affectionate con-