
Is there no expedient to be thought of, to collect the various instructions, scattered up and down in so many voluminous tomes? To unite them under one general head, which may be easy to comprehend, interesting to pursue, and which may serve as a stimulus, even to children of this age? If one could but conceive a situation, in which all the natural wants of man would be displayed, in a manner adapted to the understanding of a child, and wherein the means of satisfying those wants are gradually discovered with the same ease and simplicity, it would be in a just and lively description of such a state, that we should first exercise his imagination.

I see the imagination of the philosopher already take fire. Impetuous genius! Give yourself no trouble; such a situation is already discovered; it is already described, and I may say, without any impeachment to your talents, much better than you could describe it yourself; at least with more exactness, and simplicity. Since we must have books, there is one already which, in my opinion, affords a complete treatise on natural education. This book shall be the first Emilius shall read. In this, indeed, will, for a long time, consist his whole library, and it will always hold a distinguished place among others. It will afford us the text, to which all our conversations on the objects of natural science, will serve only as a comment. It will serve as our guide during our progress to a state of reason; and will even afterwards give us constant pleasure unless our taste be totally vitiated. You ask impatiently, what is the title of this wonderful book? Is it Aristotle, Pliny, or Busson? No. It is *Robinson Crusoe.*

Robinson Crusoe, cast ashore on a desolate island, destitute of human assistance, and of mechanical implements, providing, nevertheless, for his subsistence, for self-preservation, and even procuring for himself a kind of competency. In these circumstances, I say, there cannot be an object more interesting to persons of every age; and there are a thousand ways to render it agreeable to children. Thus, you see, I have realized that desert island, which I at first made use of only by way of comparison. Such a situation, I confess, is very different from that of man in a state of society. Very probably it will never be that of Emilius; but it is from such a state he ought to learn to estimate others.

The most certain method for him to raise himself above vulgar prejudices and to form his judgement on the actual relations of things, is to take on himself the character of such a solitary adventurer, and to judge of every thing about him, as a man in such circumstances would, by its real utility. This romance beginning with his shipwreck on the island, and ending with the arrival of the vessel that brought him away, would, if cleared of its rubbish, afford Emilius, during the period we are now treating of, at once both instruction and amusement. I would have him indeed personate the hero of the tale, and be entirely taken up with his castle, his goats and his plantations; he should make himself minutely acquainted, not from books but circumstances, with every thing requisite for a man in such a situation. He should affect even his dress, wear a coat of skins, a great hat, a large hanger, in short, he should be entirely equipt in his grotesque manner, even with his umbrella [sic], though he would have no occasion for it. I would have him when at a loss about the
measures necessary to be taken for his provision or security, upon this or the other occasion, examine the conduct of his hero; he should see if he omitted nothing, or if any thing better could be substituted in the room of what was actually done; and, on the discovery of any mistake in Robinson, should amend it in a similar case himself, for I doubt not but he will form a project of going to make a like settlement. Not unlike to this were those ancient castles in Spain, in that happy age when the height of human felicity consisted in the enjoyment of liberty and the necessaries of life.

What opportunities of instruction would such an amusement afford an able preceptor, who should project it only with a view to that end! The pupil, eager to furnish a magazine for his island, would be more ready to learn than his tutor to teach him. He would be solicitous to know every thing that is useful, and nothing else. You would in such a case have no more occasion to direct; but only to restrain him. Let us hasten, therefore, to establish him in this imaginary isle, since to this he confines his present happiness; for the time' will now soon come, in which, if he is desirous of life, it is not to live alone, and in which even a man Friday, the want of whom does not now affect him, would not be long satisfactory.

The practice of simple manual arts, to the exercise of which the abilities of the individual are equal, leads to the invention of the arts of industry, the exercise of which requires the concurrence of many. The former may be practised by hermits, and savages; but the latter can be exercised only in a state of society, and render that state necessary. While man is subject only to the calls of physical necessity, he is capable of satisfying them himself: but, by the introduction of superfluous wants, the joint concern and distribution of labour become indispensable: for though a man by his own labour, when alone, procures only subsistence for an individual, yet an hundred men working in concert, will easily procure, in the same time, subsistence for double the number. As soon, therefore, as one part of mankind take upon themselves to live idle, it becomes necessary that the concurrent labour of numbers should supply the place of those who live without work.

Your greatest care should be to keep from your pupil the notions of those social relations, which he is not in a capacity to comprehend; but when the connection of his ideas oblige you to speak of the mutual dependance of mankind, instead of presenting him at first the moral side of the question, divert his attention as much as possible to industry and the mechanic arts, which render men useful to one another. In going about with him to the work-shops of various artisans, never let him see any thing performed without lending a hand to the work, nor come out of the shop without perfectly understanding the reason of what he observes there. To this end, you should work yourself, and in every thing set him an example. To make him a master, be you in every thing the apprentice; and, reflect that he will learn more by one hour of manual labour, than he will retain from a whole day’s verbal instructions.

The different arts are entitled to various proportions of public esteem, and that in an inverse ratio to their real use. This esteem is directly as their inutility, and so it politically ought to be. The most useful arts are those which are the worst paid for or least rewarded; because the number of workmen is proportioned to the wants of the whole society, and the labour the poor must purchase must necessarily be at a low price. On the contrary, those important artisans, who, by way of distinction, are termed artists, and are employed only in the service of the rich and idle, set an
arbitrary price on their workmanship; and as the excellence of their baubles is mere
matter of opinion, their high price constitutes great part of their merit, and they are
esteemed in proportion to what they cost. The value thus set upon them is not on
account of any use they are of to the rich, but because they are too costly to be
purchased by the poor. *Nolo habere bona nisi quibus populus invidet.*

What will become of your pupils, if you permit them to adopt this ridiculous
prejudice, if you encourage it yourself, or see them, for example, enter, with more
respect the shop of a jeweller than that of a locksmith? What a judgment will they
form of the real merit of the arts and the intrinsic value of things, when they see whim
and caprice universally opposed to real utility, and find the more a thing costs the less
it is worth? If ever such ideas as these take root in their minds, you may as well give
up at once the remaining part of their education; they will, in spite of all you can do,
be educated like the rest of the world, and you will have taken, for fourteen years past,
all your trouble for nothing.

Emilius will see things in a very different light, while he is employed in
furnishing his island. Robinson Crusoe would have set a greater value on the stock in
trade of a petty ironmonger, than on that of the most magnificent and best furnished
toy-shop in Europe. The first had appeared to him a respectable personage, while the
owner of the latter had been despised as frivolous and contemptible.

I doubt not but some sagacious member of society will make the following
objection. “My son,” he will say, “is formed to live in the world; not to reside among
a set of philosophers, but to herd with fools; it is proper, therefore, he should be
acquainted with those follies that influence their conduct. The knowledge of things, as
they are, may be useful; but that of men and opinions is much more so; for, in society,
the knowledge of mankind is the best means to make the most of them, and he is the
wisest man who acquires the most and makes the best use of it. To what purpose,
then, is it to give children the ideas of an imaginary order of things directly contrary
to that which custom has established, and by which they must regulate their
behaviour? Read them, first, lectures to make themselves wise, and then you may take
what method you will to instruct them in what respect others are fools.”

Such are the specious maxims, on which is founded the false prudence of
parents, who endeavour to make their children slaves to those prejudices in which
they themselves are educated. How many things are necessary to be known, previous
to the study of mankind! This is the last and most arduous task of the philosopher, and
you would have it be the first of a child. Before you instruct him in the knowledge of
your own sentiments, you should begin, by teaching him to form some estimate of
their truth and propriety. Our opinions are imparted to children as reasons; is this the
way to teach them the folly of them? In order to attain wisdom, it is necessary to be
able to discern what is not so. How shall your child know how to study mankind, if he
is incapable to judge of their sentiments, or to detect their errors? It is a misfortune for
him to know their opinions, while he is ignorant whether they be true or false. Teach
him first, therefore, what things are in themselves; and you may afterwards instruct
him at leisure, what are the general sentiments of mankind. Thus will he be enabled to
judge of our opinions by the criterion of truth, and soar above the mistaken notions of
the vulgar. To adopt prejudices is not to know them as such, nor are the multitude
governed by those who are like themselves. If you begin by making your pupil
acquainted with the opinions of the world, before you have taught him how to judge of them, you may assure yourself, say what you will, they will become his, and you will never after be able to eradicate them. I conclude this subject, therefore, by laying down as a maxim, that to render a youth sensible and judicious, we ought to form his opinion of things and not to dictate ours.

You will observe that hitherto I have said nothing to my pupil about mankind, he would have had too much good sense to understand me, if I had; his connections with, and relations to, his fellow-creatures, are not as yet striking and conspicuous enough to enable him to judge of others by himself. He has no ideas of human nature but what center in his own person, and even his self-knowledge is but very confined. If his ideas, however, are contracted, at least they are just. He knows not the relative situation of others, but he is sensible of his own, and keeps his place. Instead of restraining him by social ties, the force of which he could not comprehend, we have bound him by the obvious chains of necessity. He is as yet little better than a mere physical being; let us continue to treat him as such.

He forms his judgment, and estimates the value of the works both of nature and art, by their relation to his own convenience, security and preservation. Hence, he looks upon iron, as a more precious metal than gold, and glass to be more valuable than diamonds. For the same reason he hath more respect: for a shoe maker, or a mason, than for all the celebrated jewellers in Europe. A pastry-cook is, in his opinion, a person of singular importance, and the whole academy of sciences of less consequence than the respectable personage of the meanest confectioner. Goldsmiths, engravers, and gilders, are, with him, idle insignificant people, who amuse themselves in employments frivolous and Useless; nay, he does not hold even a watchmaker in very high estimation. Happy in the enjoyment of this native liberty, he profits by time without knowing its value. That tranquillity, which, undisturbed by the violence of passion, makes its succession equal, serves him instead of a machine to measure the quantity elapsed. In supposing his pocket to be furnished with a watch, as in supposing him to cry, I only made use on that occasion of an Emilius vulgarly educated, for the sake of illustration: for, in fact, a child, so different from all others, can hardly be made use of as an example, in any case.

There is another order of distinction, not less natural, and still more judicious, according to which the arts may be ranked agreeable to their order in that necessary chain which connects them together; placing the most independent in the first class, and those which depend on the greatest number of others, in the last. This method of arrangement, which may furnish important considerations on the order of society in general, is similar to the former in that it is equally subject to be perverted by the prepossessions and caprices of mankind. Hence it is, that all manufactured substances, are first laboriously operated on by workmen below consideration, and almost without pay; that the more hands they pass through, the more expensive becomes the labour and the more creditable the profession of each successive artisan. I will not here enquire whether it be true, that industry is more exerted in the elegant arts, than in those which give the first form to the massive substance and fit it for common uses. But I affirm that in all cases, those arts which are the most general and indispensable are incontestably those which deserve to be held in the greatest esteem; and that such as require the least assistance from others, deserve still less to be degraded lowest of all, when they are at the same time the most free and independent. These rules form
the true criterion whereby to judge of the merit, and estimate the value, of arts and industry. All other are arbitrary and capricious. The first and most respectable of all arts and professions is that of agriculture. Next to the husbandman I rank the smith; to the smith succeeds the carpenter, and so on. A child, who should not have acquired a misjudging partiality from vulgar prejudices, would rank them all precisely in the same order. How many important reflections on this subject, may not Emilius deduce from Robinson Crusoe! What will he think in seeing the arts carried to perfection, by being divided and subdivided into such a number of branches, and by the invention of such an infinite variety of implements to work with? Will he not call their ingenuity ridiculous, and think they are afraid their arms and fingers are not fit for use, that they have contrived so many expedients to work without them? To exercise one trade, they must be furnished with tools by a thousand others. The artisans of a whole town must be employed to set any one of them to work. As to my companion and myself, our ingenuity lies in our dexterity; we make use of the tools we carry about us. Let the proudest workman belonging to the nicknackitories of Paris come to our desert island, his talents useless here, he will be glad in his turn to serve an apprenticeship to us.

Confine not your observation here, reader, to the corporeal exercise, and manual dexterity of my pupil; but consider the proper methods we take to gratify his childish curiosity; remark the effects of his good sense, his genius for invention, his foresight and other intellectual abilities. In whatever he sees, or is employed in, he wants to know the reason of every thing; tracing back one instrument from another, till he arrive at the first and most simple. He takes nothing upon supposition or on trust; but refuses even to learn any thing that requires a previous knowledge of which he is not possessed. If he sees, for instance, a file, or a spring, he immediately recurs to the method of working up the materials from the ore. If he sees the sides of a chest fitted together, he must know the methods of felling the timber and sawing it into planks. If he be, himself, at work, he never fails to reflect on every new tool he makes use of, and to consider how he might have constructed such an implement, or have made shift without it.

1 Petron.
2 * We lose our constitutional measure of time, when the passions would subject its duration to their will. The philosopher’s time-piece is evenness of temper and tranquillity of mind; he is always in his own time and knows it exactly.