

FIRST STEPS.

BY THE EDITOR.

HOW can we judge of a civilization, and is there any standard at all by which we may gage its power and significance?

This question should not be impossible to answer and we believe that the replies given by different thinkers will be characteristic of their philosophy. It is a test question that will reveal the true nature of a system of thought. St. Francis of Assisi and his followers find its answer in the supremacy of the spiritual over the material, understanding by the spiritual the mode of thought which is entertained by the priest. The philosopher of matter and motion measures the advance of society by the complexity of its phenomena; to him evolution is a progress from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous. We agree with neither and would say that culture is attained in the measure that truth has been actualized in life.

We insist that the actualization of truth is the only standard which can be used as a criterion, but we will not deny that there are many indicators of progress which like straws in the wind are signs of the times, and most of them will not be contradictory with each other. Of these indicators there are as many as there are diverse attitudes in life, nay more than that, as many as there are functions of life in which progress may manifest itself; and we will enumerate only a few of them.

It has been claimed that the standing of woman in the community, the respect shown to her, the assurance that her rights will be protected, may be regarded as an unfailing evidence of civilized conditions. The financier is inclined to regard that nation as leading the others in the march of progress which controls the finances of the world. The engineer takes his measure of value according to the amount and efficiency of machinery used for the manufacture of goods. In the domain of transportation most is made of the proportion of railroad lines to the area, or perhaps the

population of a country. So every one uses the measure to which he is accustomed in his own home, his own trade, or his own vocation, and even the soap-manufacturer gages the civilization of a people according to the consumption (i. e., the use, perhaps even the waste) of soap.

But if we attribute to the parent the sentiment that the rank of a community in the scale of progress should range according to the significance ascribed to the education of children, we would perhaps have an indicator that comes nearest to the real criterion of true culture.

The higher an animal ranges in the scale of life the more it stands in need of education. The lowest organisms need no parental care whatever for they merely vegetate, but the more prominent becomes the part played by the mind the less complete is a creature at its birth, and the less prepared for the struggle of existence. More than other creatures, man needs protection and instruction, so as to be preserved during the tender age of infancy and fully equipped for the heavy demands of life.

Our frontispiece, a picture by Georges Lavergne, represents a child's first steps under the mother's guiding love, symbolizing the instinctive anxiety of mankind to lead the growing generation in the right path and develop its latent forces so that when the present generation has passed away it will in its turn take up the light which has been handed down and carry it further on in the advancement of the race.

The educational ideal does not merely mean a preservation of the treasures of the past, but includes future progress. It is not sufficient that the children of to-day be like their fathers. We understand the meaning of the law of evolution better than our ancestors did, and since we can give our children better chances in their lives than we ourselves possessed, we can expect of them more than we have accomplished. They should surpass us, and it is our duty to enable them to do so; for Goethe was right when he urged that "the son be better than his father!"

And the first steps we make in life, especially the first steps in our intellectual and emotional development, are not so indifferent as may at first sight appear.

Children are imitative, and their souls are built up by the impressions which they receive. Every single experience, every observation of older folks, of parents, of nurses, but especially of elder brothers and sisters, and generally of all belonging to the

circle of their acquaintance, exercises a powerful influence in the building up of the character of the child.

The child inherits from its ancestors a great many things which constitute the capital with which man starts in life. This capital consists not only of the bodily organism with all its details, but also of the mental as well as emotional dispositions and aptitudes, the significance of which can never be overrated. But this endowment is not definite either in quantity or quality, because the application made of it, the use to which it is put, and the moulding of this raw material into concrete forms is not inherited. The formative work is done during the life of the individual, first by education, then by experience; during childhood in our homes, our schools, and social surroundings, and when we have reached maturity and become independent, by ourselves. Hence the paramount importance of education.

The babe's brain contains besides other areas of importance, an undeveloped part in the so-called Island of Reil, which is to be the center of speech. The disposition to develop language is absent in any animal brain. But while the aptitude for speech is inherited, language itself is not. Our mother tongue is not born with us but must be acquired. A talkative propensity may be inherited, but the language which a man is to speak in life depends on the influences of his early childhood, which determine not only the nature of his cast of mind, his nationality, etc., but also the character and usage of his speech in after life, whether or not his linguistic talent will make of him an orator, a poet, an author, a philologist, a linguist, or perhaps a mere gossip.

A child endowed with musical talent might with proper surroundings become a second Mozart, the model of a pure and classical taste, or a composer of rag time tunes; or, if he grows up among absolutely unmusical people, his musical disposition may remain latent and show itself only in a freakish way, producing, like a fallow field, an exuberance of tonal weeds.

The raw diamond is valuable in itself, but its greatest worth consists of opportunity. It becomes a valuable solitaire only by cutting.

The soul of every babe that is born into the world possesses a worth that needs development if its opportunities shall be changed into actual values. It is the duty of parents to see to it that this is done, and the right kind of parents will endeavor to have the better part of their own selves, with an excision of their shortcomings, reared in their children.

We all of us owe much, in fact our entire being to the past, for we actually are the sum total of the soul-life of all of our ancestors; and here in our children,—or for those who have no children of their own, here in the growing generation,—is the place to pay our debt. We have received the torchlight, we must hand it on.

And upon the whole, parents are well inclined to do their duty. Nature has her own sly ways of doing her pleasure, and so she makes people press on to the destined goal that she proposes. She appeals to self-love, and even to vanity, to make us work for her great aim which is the procreation of an increasingly improved mankind. We believe in evolution, and the doctrine of evolution promises that the future man shall range as much higher than the present man, as the present man ranges above the proto-savage, the primitive *homo in spe* just emerging from the state of brutehood. As yet we have only imperfectly realized the human ideal. The man of the future shall be a true man, higher and better and nobler than the average man of to-day. We can all do our share in reaching our aim. We are all tending toward it and yearning for it; some do so consciously, some unconsciously, and more or less intelligently. All our most personal interests, our love of life, our instinct of self--preservation, our interest in our own character, our hankering after the immortalization of our own particular personality, our determination to maintain ourselves in the struggle for life, are intimately interwoven with the great plan of nature, with the realization of the highest type of manhood,—the actualization of the human ideal. This explains why parentage is respected among all races and nations as the noblest calling of man.

The first impressions made on a child's mind are especially important as they form the basis of man's whole future development, and they remain for a long time, sometimes forever, the standard by which all later impressions are measured. Should we not, therefore, exercise the greatest care, and instead of leaving the first mental impressions of children to accident, see to it that they are throughout correct?

How many of us are oblivious to the fact that whatever we do and say, whatever error we commit, whatever example we may set, is impressed upon and perpetuated in the little souls in our charge! Let us keep this in mind and let us look upon the child as a sacred trust.

Let us give children the right start in life, and let us begin at the very beginning. Let us not wait until the children have grown

old enough to understand us and be capable of entering into our plans and ideas. Let us begin the work of moulding their souls while they are still plastic, and not wait until character is already forming, for then it may be too late.

Let all parents join in the sentiment expressed by the great apostle of education in the words, *Kommt, lasst uns unsern Kindern leben!* "Come, let us live for our children!"