EDUCATION WITHOUT BOOKS: BY DR. CHARLES A. EASTMAN (OHIYESA)

IT IS commonly assumed by the more advanced nations that the untutored peoples have no well-considered system of instruction for their young. Technically this may be allowed, in that they have no schoolhouses, no books, no regular school hours. Broadly speaking, however, it is far from true. I still recall vividly my own early education, and I can say for the North American Indians that their physical training was thorough and intelligent, while as to the moral and spiritual side of their teaching, I am not afraid to compare it with that of any race.

It is understood that I am not speaking of the Indian of today, but of the original North American, when I affirm that he taught his children both by example and precept, but with the emphasis upon the example, as is the logical and effective method. He conceived the art of teaching as, first and foremost, the development of personality, and the fundamentals of education as love of the “Great Mystery,” love of nature, love of country and people.

Under the love of nature, he inculcated a brotherly feeling for the animal creation, the appreciation of beauty, of music, poetry, and eloquence; under love of country, fidelity in friendship, and respect for family and ancestry.

In order to fit himself for the highest enjoyment of life, the Indian youth set about body-building rather than house-building. He perceived that if he built fine houses, he must shut out nature, and he preferred to build the body and to be inseparable from nature. He read in nature the “Great Mystery,” and in simplicity an abiding strength. He believed that prudishness or false modesty breeds evil, but in true modesty with plain speaking he recognized a genuine safeguard of virtue.

Since the essentials of well-being are peace for the soul and health for the body, and since no material abundance can satisfy a disturbed spirit, the basis of all efforts at teaching must inevitably be toward the establishment of a spiritual equipoise. Second only to this comes the development of a perfect body, the external evidence of a gracious spirit. The Indian believed that this body should be able to defy the elements, rather than be dependent upon shelter and abundance. The provision of bodily comfort and luxury, which appears to be the main business of civilization, he despised, as tending to undermine the courage and vitality of the race.

To us it would seem that the white man has built his civilization upon a principle not far removed from the ethics of the gambling den; he calls it competition. In other words, each man stakes
his powers, the product of his labor, his social, political and religious standing against that of his neighbor, to gain—what? To gain control over his fellow-workers, and the results of their labor.

The philosophy of the Indian was socialistic and at the same time individualistic. Earth, the All-Mother, was free to all, and no one sought to impoverish or enslave his neighbor. Unlike the modern, he seriously undertook to live his religion and carry his rules of life into practice.

The spiritual teaching of the child was very simply and faithfully carried out in every detail. The mother was especially entrusted with this, the most sacred of all duties, and she anxiously and thoughtfully laid the foundation of its education before her child was born. Alone in the solitudes with nature and God, she carried her holy burden, and in seeking for her unborn child the impress of the Unseen, she herself became abundantly supplied with strength and faith.

When at last she received the little body in her arms, she bent all her energies to direct the unconscious spirit toward its real maker and father. In the most natural, the simplest way, she established her child’s sense of a vital relation with the Unseen, beside which all else is as nothing. From these earliest attempts of hers, it gathered that an awe-inspiring Something, very powerful, but very good and kind, must not be offended.

“Hush, hush, my child! Listen, hear the birds sing to Him! Hear His voice in the waterfall! The trees are whispering of their Maker!” True, the infant is not yet able to speak, but the mother is on the watch to forestall the dawning intellect with this precious faculty—the love of the “Great Mystery!” The Indian child thus learned that it is sweet to be alone with Him; that it is the true medicine for pain and restlessness; that it gives patience, strength, endurance. Silence and solitude are the fertile soil in which there springs up the perfect flower of religious reverence.

MEANWHILE, the child’s grandparents were not idle or neglectful. Their oft-told legends and tales inspired in his breast the love of heroes, pride of ancestry, and devotion to country and people. They were old and wise; they had lived and achieved; and in them the Indian recognized the natural and truest teachers of the young. The long winter evenings were the time for learning folk-lore, and those traditions which had their roots in the past and led back to the source of all things. The subject lay half in the shadow of mystery; therefore it had to be taken up at night, the
proper realm of mysticism. The mind was not only enlarged and the imagination stimulated by these old legends, but they furnished the best of memory-training, as the child was required to remember and repeat them one by one before a critical household audience.

There was usually among us some old man whose gifts as a story-teller and moralist spread his fame far beyond the limits of his immediate family. In his wigwam, at the time of the winter camp, the children of the band were accustomed to gather with more or less regularity. This was our nearest approach to a school of the woods, and the schoolmaster received his pay, not only in gifts of food and other comforts, but chiefly in the love and respect of the village.

For the instruction of the boy in manly arts his father was responsible, although uncles and other relatives assisted, and the womanly training of the girl, of course, devolved upon the mother. The pupil was frequently called upon to meet some reasonable test of progress, thus leading by degrees to actual feats of hunting on the boy’s part, and skilled housewifery on that of the girl. The earliest play in each case was almost entirely imitative of the life of their people, reproducing that life in little, and becoming a sort of school. On this mimic stage the serious pursuits, and even the solemn ceremonies of the tribe, were acted with much spirit and painstaking detail.

Inspired by the examples thus kept ever before him, the boy very early developed ambition as a hunter. Admittedly he inherited something of this, but far more the hunting exploits daily recounted in his hearing had sunk deep into his mind. At four or five years of age, as soon as his grandfather had strung his miniature bow, he stepped boldly from the tepee into the forest at its doors, eager for his first great adventure. In his heart he dreamed of overtaking a moose or bear, while in sober reality he was hunting the smaller beasts and birds, for practice and to verify the instructions received in babyhood. At this period he adhered strictly to what he had been told, but later on began to make his own discoveries and to think for himself with the confidence of the born explorer. The rabbits, the squirrels, and the birds were to him tribes of little people, with much wisdom and cunning of their own, against which he must match his wits in the contest for life. At the same time, he learned in the cradle to respect the unplumbed intelligence behind their dumbness as something wakan or mysterious, and dimly hoped to gain from them supernatural information. In his eagerness to come in closer touch with these woodland folk, the little fellow often forgot how long he had been from home, and how far he had wandered.

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By the time he was ten years old, he had become an independent hunter and fairly adept in the arts of self-preservation and defense. He was then able to bring in small game to his mother, and each time he did so he was praised and encouraged to further effort. He cooked for himself when hungry, and developed wonderful ability to find his way at night, on the unbroken plain, or in the depths of the forest. His own account of the discovery and pursuit of his game was compared point by point with those earlier hunting stories that he had learned by heart, thus making every detail clear and definite in his own mind.

One of the earliest things he mastered was the language of foot-prints. He was taught that the habits of every animal may be learned, its very mind read, by intelligently following its trail. The season of the year, the time of day, the sex and age of the animal in question, all these affected the problem, which was to determine whether he was at play or in flight, in pursuit of his mate, or merely roaming in search of food. The answer must decide how far the hunter should pursue that trail.

He also learned thoroughly the characteristic maneuvers of the animal he was hunting, the detours or circles made before lying down, which vary with the different tribes, such as moose and deer. These larger animals he began to hunt when he was about twelve years old. At fifteen, if strong and well-grown, he was considered fit to go upon the buffalo-hunt or the war-path.

With all this, his physical development was by no means neglected. All the boys of a village met daily for athletic sports, such as swimming contests, jumping contests, climbing trees, and running races. There were mock fights, games of ball, and various other games, in which the boys were often supervised by older youths, and thoroughly instructed in the art of reserving their strength so as to win in a long-continued struggle. Their "staying power" is still one of the strongest points of the Indian athlete.

The boy was accustomed to rise at daybreak, when game is readily met with, and weather observations may be taken. One can also travel best during the early part of the day. Therefore the Indian slept early, unless on duty for a night watch, or for scouting.

During the period of growth, or what we might call his "school days," he was given the harder portions of the meat, and made to chew his food thoroughly, while the tender meat and the soup or broth were reserved for the old people. He was warned against drinking too freely of water, especially in long-distance running. Thus the body was kept lean, lithe and symmetrical—the ideal of manly beauty as exemplified in these "Greeks of the forest." After the
coming of the horse into primitive life, the boy was early trained to ride, swim and handle him.

THE education of the girl was conducted along distinctively womanly lines by mother and grandmother, and she was as carefully prepared for her duties as the boy for his. Even though she was not expected to be a hunter, woodcraft and nature study were, next to religion, the basis of her training. All the edible and medicinal herbs, roots and berries had to be accurately learned, together with their favorite haunts and proper time of gathering. The family life of the birds and smaller animals, even of the insects, was lovingly studied. She was taught that all things grow in pairs, and that the main business of life is parenthood.

Beginning with her dolls and their miniature teepees and garments, the little woman learned all the domestic arts, the sewing, embroidery, preparation of food, fetching of wood and water, and finally the most difficult lessons of all, those of tanning and dressing skins and making and pitching the teepee itself. Perhaps it was as well for her future content in life that no book lessons took precedence of these, or in any way detracted from their dignity and importance in her eyes. She early learned that the comfort and peace of the household were in her keeping, and she cheerfully accepted the trust.

It will be seen that our education was primarily religious, and after that mainly vocational, concerning itself directly with the necessary business of living. In these fundamentals the Indian himself was quick to perceive its superiority over the education urged upon him by the white man, who so far surpassed us in material conquests and in technical culture.

Our work in the fine arts was crude and primitive, yet not without value, as the dominant race is now beginning to discover. Songs of simple and appealing cadence were a part of life from babyhood onward. The very cradle songs inspired to brave deeds the miniature warrior, or encouraged womanly aspirations in the maiden.

Painting and carving were applied by our men to purely decorative and symbolic as well as useful ends, and our women developed a rare instinct for color and form in their art handicrafts—the wonderful basketry, blankets and pottery produced by different tribes, as well as in the embroidery which they lavished upon their garments and other belongings.

Having touched upon our prenatal, religious, historical, vocational and artistic training, it remains to speak of that social education in which, strange as it may appear, the “untutored savage”
often puts civilized man to the blush. Silence and modesty of demeanor in the young, reverence for elders, and general family decorum, were surely more characteristic of the Indian children of my day than of the average American household. Rudeness toward strangers, and especially toward the poorly dressed, the old or unfortunate, so commonly observed on the streets of every town, would never have been tolerated among us. Our rules of courtesy in the matter of salutations, visits, the taking or offering of food, and the like, were strictly observed, profanity or "slang" was unknown, intercourse between the sexes was closely guarded, and the whole fabric of our etiquette was more binding than written law.

In one further respect the Indian child under the old régime was unquestionably superior to the white child or to the product of the white man's schools—that is, in the courage which comes only with complete self-reliance, and the power of independent initiative that is after all a certain test of education.

IN THE OLD APPLE ORCHARD

IN THE Spring she laughed to see them—snow-white blooms upon the bough,

As they fell, a May-time snow-storm, thick as fall the apples now.
Oh the wonder of the orchard, cool and fragrant with the fruit—
This is Arcady in Summer, and the world's alarms are mute.

Far away the City thunders, and Life surges like a stream;
Here are afternoons of rapture, silence and a golden dream.
I am coming when they call me—Summer and my Summer maid—
Oh the wonder of the orchard, full of shadows and of shade.

I am going to the glory of the quiet orchard aisles,
Where the burning sun is vanquished—there is sun in her bright smiles:
We shall gather fruit and wisdom for the cheerless Winter days;
As we loiter in the orchard with its dim mysterious ways.

CHARLES HANSON TOWNE.