PAGES FROM THE SCHOOLBOOKS
OF OUR FATHERS

I. Caleb Bingham's The American Preceptor, 1816

(Editor's Note:—How much the character and quality of school textbooks have changed over the years is to be observed as one examines this reading lesson taken from a schoolbook popular with our forefathers. Long before the vogue of the McGuffey readers, Caleb Bingham's The American Preceptor was in wide use. "Being a New Selection of Lessons for Reading and Speaking. Designed for the Use of Schools." In 1816 it was then in its eighth edition; and it is from this edition that the following reading lesson is taken.

"For the conveniency of large classes," its compiler says in his preface, "the several pieces are divided into paragraphs of a moderate length; the utility of which, those conversant in the instruction of youth will readily discover. Instructors are assured, that the inconveniency arising from the frequent alterations in the different editions of schoolbooks will never be experienced in this."

"In the arrangement of pieces, the usual arrangement has not been observed," the compiler points out. "With design to render it more entertaining to children, dialogues, orations, historical anecdotes, &c. with the different kinds of readings in prose and verse, are variously interspersed through the whole work."

Here, then, is a reading lesson such as children were expected to find entertaining—the children who were going to school about the time when James Monroe was president of the United States.)

DIALOGUE BETWEEN MRS. CARELESS AND MRS. FRIENDLY, UPON FEMALE EDUCATION

MRS. CARELESS—Good morning, my dear Mrs. Friendly. I came to request your company in a walk; but I see you are engaged with a book; pray what is it?

MRS. FRIENDLY—It is a treatise on female education, which pleases me much; and will, with domestic avocations, deprive me of the pleasure of walking with you this morning.

MRS. CARELESS—And what have you to do with treatises on education? I seldom read anything, and never books of that kind. I should as soon think of plodding through a volume of old sermons.

MRS. FRIENDLY—I assure you, I consider the education of youth, females in particular, to be a matter of the first importance; and I take great pleasure in reading the observations of ingenious writers on the subject. I have children, in whose welfare, I need not tell you, I am deeply interested; and their happiness or misery, their honor or infamy, entirely depend, in my opinion, on the principles and habits they acquire in youth, whilst the mind is tender, and the voice of instruction sinks deep.

MRS. CARELESS—But cannot children be educated unless their parents read books on the subject?

MRS. FRIENDLY—Certainly they can, if the parents are themselves qualified for the task. But I find it a difficult and delicate business, and therefore I have recourse to the wise and experienced for assistance in conducting it.

MRS. CARELESS—The assistance of the dancing, music, and drawing masters, is all I require for my children. They shall indeed know something of reading, writing, and needlework; but to give them a polite education and make them accomplished is my aim.

MRS. FRIENDLY—I fear, my dear Mrs. Careless, you do not distinguish the advantages, which arise from a useful rather than a polite education; since you speak with so much indifference of the former, and with such raptures of the latter.

MRS. CARELESS—Pray what are the mighty advantages of educating children in what you style a useful manner? I never yet saw them.

MRS. FRIENDLY—Then you are no very strict observer. (I beg your pardon for speaking thus freely.) But surely each day brings instances of its advantages; and each day shows the mischief of a contrary mode. The kind of education I mention is that which tends to give females well regulated minds and agreeable manners; and render them beloved, esteemed, and admired. For it is by no means necessary in order to this, that a young lady should be mistress of all polite accomplishments. They often belong
to some of the most disgusting and insignificant of the sex. No, let parents form the growing mind to virtue, religion, and the calm pleasures of domestic life; at the same time endeavoring that cheerfulness play round the heart, and innocent gaiety enliven the behavior. Let the habit of self government be early produced; for all the world conspiring cannot make a woman happy who does not govern her passions. Let the first appearance of stubbornness in them be checked and resisted; and let them be taught cheerfully to deny themselves every object of desire, inconsistent with reason, prudence, or virtue. Thus cultured, their tempers will be sweet and placid, and their manners gentle and engaging. If they be put under the care of tutors abroad, they will not be unteachable and refractory; and the presence of their parents will not be necessary to make them behave with discretion and propriety.

Mrs. Careless—Well, after their minds are thus taken care of, how would you have them further accomplished?

Mrs. Friendly—They should be well versed in reading, writing, arithmetic, and English grammar. If their natural genius strongly led them to poetry, painting, or music, and easy fortune admitted, it should be indulged and cultivated; but by no means to such a degree as to interrupt or supersede domestic employments. For these require attention in a greater or less degree from every woman; and unless she understand and discharge them according to her circumstances, she is contemptible and useless.

Mrs. Careless—Fine accomplishments, truly! a perfect skill in handling the broom and duster! Mrs. Friendly, if you educate your children in this way, they will be ruined; they will be strangers to the charms of dancing, dress and company. The graces will never condescend to adorn those who are accustomed to the kitchen.

Mrs. Friendly—My friend, I have no objection to dancing, dress and company, when they form not the chief object of solitude and attention, and are cultivated merely as the recreation and ornaments of life, and not as the business and end of it. Be assured, a well furnished mind, a well governed temper, love of domestic pleasures and an inclination and capacity to pursue domestic employments, are the first requisites in a woman, and the foundation of her respectability and enjoyment. Without these, though her graceful mien and dancing charm every eye, and her music be sweeter than the harp of Orpheus, she must be unhappy in herself, and a vexation and torment to her friends. Let us view a person educated in the school of dissipation, and furnished with merely polite accomplishments. Engrossed by the desire of leading a life of amusement before she can even spell a sentence, and unfurnished with just sentiments and industrious habits, she is sent to the dancing academy that her manners may become graceful. Here she sees gayer dresses than her own, which inflame with vanity and envy her giddy, unoccupied mind. She is determined to be outdone by none in elegance. She disputes with Mamma about fashion and fine clothes; and if her extravagant desires are not indulged, murmurs and repines at her cruel fate; becomes confirmed in the detestable habit of fretting; and knows not content but by the name. A fondness for those phantoms which lure to ruin, called pleasures, and a passion for show and parade, which perhaps through life she can never indulge, gain entire possession of her heart. All her joys are in gay parties and assemblies, where, like the butterfly of summer, she pleases by the brilliance of her colors only; which, however, is no sooner familiar to the eye, than it is beheld with indifference; yet alas! this is all the attraction which this child of vanity can boast. Maturer years steal on; her mind is so uncultivated that she is incapable of the rational pleasures of thinking and conversation; her love of dissipation and amusement grows with her growth; she sighs for new pleasures; but alas! she has so often trav-
eled the circle, that their novelty is destroyed. With all her apparent gaiety, she is probably more wretched than the miscreant, who begs the morsel that sustains his being. If she be ever placed at the head of a family, she disgusts her husband, neglects her children, and order, peace and industry are strangers in her house. Her company is ever uninteresting or disagreeable, her name is synonymous with folly, and her memory is lost with her life.

Mrs. Careless—What a picture, my dear Mrs. Friendly, have you drawn! I turn from it with horror, I assure you my chief care shall be to form my children to reflection, self-government, and industry; and they and I shall have reason to rejoice in the change you have made in my sentiments.

Mrs. Friendly—I rejoice to hear you express yourself in such a manner. Believe me, when I say, the best fortune which can be bestowed on a child is a good education. It secures her honor and happiness through life, whatever be her station; and it leads her to the exercise of those noble and virtuous dispositions which are an indispensable preparation for the enjoyments of the future state.

PROBLEMS OF LIBERTY

An excerpt from the Report of the President of Columbia University for 1937.

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HE development of civil, economic and political liberty and of the institutions built upon it, is raising new questions of grave importance throughout the world. Superficially, there would appear to be conflict of ambition and of policy, controversy and even threatened military war between a number of nations. Behind and underneath these appearances, however, lies something much deeper and of gravest importance. The institutions of liberty, operating at a time and in a world where man's growing control over the forces of nature has created a wholly new industrial and economic environment, are brought face to face with new problems of far-reaching importance, which moreover are abundant in danger to liberty itself.

The industrial era, now about a century old, has made men increasingly familiar with a kind and amount of efficiency which they had never before known. The habit has grown of measuring the success or the failure, the satisfaction or the disappointment, of government in terms of this efficiency. Since democracy, even at its best, must lack something of the efficiency which industry claims as its own, it is not difficult to turn the minds of men toward such changes in their institutional life as shall attempt to bring about in the field of government the type of efficiency which men find in industry. This leads straight to increasing regimentation of human conduct, whether individual or group, and to the increasing delegation of executive authority to a single administrative officer of government. This is the explanation of the rise in the twentieth century of a type of despotism which surpasses in severity and in cruelty the well-established despots of ages long gone by.

The argument from industry has also brought with it a new and violent attack upon the principles of liberty and the whole democratic system through its insistence upon there being, of necessity, a class war in the social and economic order. There is and can be no such war in a true democracy because there are and can be no such classes, save from a very superficial viewpoint, unless the principles of liberty and the ideals of democracy are to be abandoned forever. In a social, economic and political organization where classes are assumed to be at war, every essential fact of human life and human aspiration is contradicted. Instead of an individual being looked upon as a moral and intellectual unit and stimulated to exert himself to the utmost in order to reveal his natural powers and to serve his fellow men, through his control and direc-