

How swiftly life passes here below! The first quarter of it is gone before we know how to use it; the last quarter finds us incapable of enjoying life. At first we do not know how to live; and when we know how to live it is too late. In the interval between these two useless extremes we waste three-fourths of our time sleeping, working, sorrowing, enduring restraint and every kind of suffering. Life is short, not so much because of the short time it lasts, but because we are allowed scarcely any time to enjoy it. In vain is there a long interval between the hour of death and that of birth; life is still too short, if this interval is not well spent.

We are born, so to speak, twice over; born into existence, and born into life; born a human being, and born a man. [...] But, speaking generally, man is not meant to remain a child. He leaves childhood behind him at the time ordained by nature; and this critical moment, short enough in itself, has far-reaching consequences. As the roaring of the waves precedes the tempest, so the murmur of rising passions announces this tumultuous change; a suppressed excitement warns us of the approaching danger. A change of temper, frequent outbreaks of anger, a perpetual stirring of the mind, make the child almost ungovernable. He becomes deaf to the voice he used to obey; he is a lion in a fever; he distrusts his keeper and refuses to be controlled.

With the moral symptoms of a changing temper there are perceptible changes in appearance. His countenance develops and takes the stamp of his character; the soft and sparse down upon his cheeks becomes darker and stiffer. His voice grows hoarse or rather he loses it altogether. He is neither a child nor a man and cannot speak like either of them. His eyes, those organs of the soul which till now were dumb, find speech and meaning; a kindling fire illumines them, there is still a sacred innocence in their ever brightening glance, but they have lost their first meaningless expression; he is already aware that they can say too much; he is beginning to learn to lower his eyes and blush, he is becoming sensitive, though

he does not know what it is that he feels; he is uneasy without knowing why. All this may happen gradually and give you time enough; but if his keenness becomes impatience, his eagerness madness, if he is angry and sorry all in a moment, if he weeps without cause, if in the presence of objects which are beginning to be a source of danger his pulse quickens and his eyes sparkle, if he trembles when a woman's hand touches his, if he is troubled or timid in her presence, O Ulysses, wise Ulysses! have a care! The passages you closed with so much pains are open; the winds are unloosed; keep your hand upon the helm or all is lost.

[...]

Although modesty is natural to man, it is not natural to children. Modesty only begins with the knowledge of evil; and how should children without this knowledge of evil have the feeling which results from it? To give them lessons in modesty and good conduct is to teach them that there are things shameful and wicked, and to give them a secret wish to know what these things are. Sooner or later they will find out, and the first spark which touches the imagination will certainly hasten the awakening of the senses. Blushes are the sign of guilt; true innocence is ashamed of nothing. Children have not the same desires as men; but they are subject like them to the same disagreeable needs which offend the senses, and by this means they may receive the same lessons in propriety. Follow the mind of nature which has located in the same place the organs of secret pleasures and those of disgusting needs; she teaches us the same precautions at different ages, sometimes by means of one idea and sometimes by another; to the man through modesty, to the child through cleanliness.

[...]

Your children read; in the course of their reading they meet with things they would never have known without reading. Are they students, their imagination is stimulated and quickened in the silence of the study. Do

they move in the world of society, they hear a strange jargon, they see conduct which makes a great impression on them; they have been told so continually that they are men that in everything men do in their presence they at once try to find how that will suit themselves; the conduct of others must indeed serve as their pattern when the opinions of others are their law. Servants, dependent on them, and therefore anxious to please them, flatter them at the expense of their morals; giggling governesses say things to the four-year-old child which the most shameless woman would not dare to say to them at fifteen. They soon forget what they said, but the child has not forgotten what he heard. Loose conversation prepares the way for licentious conduct; the child is debauched by the cunning lacquey, and the secret of the one guarantees the secret of the other.

The child brought up in accordance with his age is alone. He knows no attachment but that of habit, he loves his sister like his watch, and his friend like his dog. He is unconscious of his sex and his species; men and women are alike unknown; he does not connect their sayings and doings with himself, he neither sees nor hears, or he pays no heed to them; he is no more concerned with their talk than their actions; he has nothing to do with it. This is no artificial error induced by our method, it is the ignorance of nature. The time is at hand when that same nature will take care to enlighten her pupil, and then only does she make him capable of profiting by the lessons without danger. This is our principle; the details of its rules are outside my subject; and the means I suggest with regard to other matters will still serve to illustrate this.

Do you wish to establish law and order among the rising passions, prolong the period of their development, so that they may have time to find their proper place as they arise. Then they are controlled by nature herself, not by man; your task is merely to leave it in her hands. If your pupil were alone, you would have nothing to do; but everything about him enflames his imagination. He is swept along on the torrent of conventional ideas; to rescue him you must urge him in the opposite direction. Imagination must be curbed by feeling and reason must silence the voice of conventionality. Sensibility is the source of all the passions, imagination determines their course. Every creature who is aware of his

relations must be disturbed by changes in these relations and when he imagines or fancies he imagines others better adapted to his nature. It is the errors of the imagination which transmute into vices the passions of finite beings, of angels even, if indeed they have passions; for they must needs know the nature of every creature to realise what relations are best adapted to themselves.

[...]

A child sophisticated, polished, and civilised, who is only awaiting the power to put into practice the precocious instruction he has received, is never mistaken with regard to the time when this power is acquired. Far from awaiting it, he accelerates it; he stirs his blood to a premature ferment; he knows what should be the object of his desires long before those desires are experienced. It is not nature which stimulates him; it is he who forces the hand of nature; she has nothing to teach him when he becomes a man; he was a man in thought long before he was a man in reality. The true course of nature is slower and more gradual. Little by little the blood grows warmer, the faculties expand, the character is formed. The wise workman who directs the process is careful to perfect every tool before he puts it to use; the first desires are preceded by a long period of unrest, they are deceived by a prolonged ignorance, they know not what they want. The blood ferments and bubbles; overflowing vitality seeks to extend its sphere. The eye grows brighter and surveys others, we begin to be interested in those about us, we begin to feel that we are not meant to live alone; thus the heart is thrown open to human affection, and becomes capable of attachment.

I have always observed that young men, corrupted in early youth and addicted to women and debauchery, are inhuman and cruel; their passionate temperament makes them impatient, vindictive, and angry; their imagination fixed on one object only, refuses all others; mercy and pity are alike unknown to them; they would have sacrificed father, mother, the whole world, to the least of their pleasures. A young man, on the other hand, brought up in happy innocence, is drawn by the first stirrings of

nature to the tender and affectionate passions; his warm heart is touched by the sufferings of his fellow-creatures; he trembles with delight when he meets his comrade, his arms can embrace tenderly, his eyes can shed tears of pity; he learns to be sorry for offending others through his shame at causing annoyance. If the eager warmth of his blood makes him quick, hasty, and passionate, a moment later you see all his natural kindness of heart in the eagerness of his repentance; he weeps, he groans over the wound he has given; he would atone for the blood he has shed with his own; his anger dies away, his pride abases itself before the consciousness of his wrong-doing. Is he the injured party, in the height of his fury an excuse, a word, disarms him; he forgives the wrongs of others as wholeheartedly as he repairs his own. Adolescence is not the age of hatred or vengeance; it is the age of pity, mercy, and generosity. Yes, I maintain, and I am not afraid of the testimony of experience, a youth of good birth, one who has preserved his innocence up to the age of twenty, is at that age the best, the most generous, the most loving, and the most lovable of men. You never heard such a thing; I can well believe that philosophers such as you, brought up among the corruption of the public schools, are unaware of it.

"an ordinary error placed me here"

in the serotonin corridors of my wilderness
in the neural nets are caught in the
mackerellight & ozone of my heart in the tense muscle of
a crocus olfactory bulb of my acre
prime sublingual rib lost
in the magnum opus of my
heart independent of
void most utterly devoid of song tiny
hummingbird of my eyes violet quarrel deep in the
forests verbage of my heart redundant of
crocus redundant of dogwood &
redbud as petals fall triumphant so
too I am at a loss & will blind the
cathedrals of my knowing with the
overabundant scripture of my heart
will salivate copiously & with abandon in the blue
gloaming I mean groaning of my
heart in the citadel the sap salty in the flexed
limbs the mist dripping off each leaf called to
each I call to each I say "leaf" I
say "violet" I say "mist" I say "dogtooth violet" I say "how can I
possibly bear whatever grief will
inevitably come towards me through all the corridors of
my life" I say "I will blind the cathedrals of my
knowing" I say "I will douse the careless peony" "I
will vvy earnestly & with moderate valor" "I will
curse fervently & gesticulate also" "I will try to not
drink so much" "I will strain the verb of my being
into the dim groaning" "as too I strain my sight
there" "I succumb henceforth &
wholeheartedly" "eventually I will get up from
wherever I have laid myself down"
the falcons too must eat in the endless
neurobiology of the forest
the delicate, the careless lichen
of my eyes I swallow the great creek of dusk
in me it calls up a surge in me it goes along
into the dark it goes along into the dark