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The Doctrines of the Great Educators

Chapter II

Quintilian¹

Plato details for us the education of the philosopher, Quintilian that of the orator²; the former the education for speculative life, the latter for practical life. The difference is typical of the national genius of the two peoples, Greek and Roman³.

¹ Born *c.* A.D. 35 – date of death unknown, but it was before A.D. 100. For life see F. H. Colson, *M. Fabii Quintiliani Institutiones Oratoriae*, Liber I (Cambridge University Press, 1924), pp. ix-xx; or C. E. Little, *The Institutio Oratoria of Marcus Fabius Quintilianus with an English Summary and Concordance* (Bureau of Publications, George Peabody College for Teachers, U.S.A. 1951), vol. ii, ch. I – “His twenty years of teaching extended from about 70 or 71 to 90 or 91” (*ibid.*), p. 16; W. M. Smail, *Quintilian on Education* (Oxford University Press, 1938).

² The Loeb Classical Library supplies text and translations: *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian* with an English translation by H. E. Butler, 4 vols. (London, William Heinemann. New York. G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1921). All references in this chapter not otherwise indicated are to the *Institutio Oratoria*.

³ For Roman education see A. S. Wilkins, *Roman Education* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1905); A. Gwynn, *Roman Education from Cicero to Quintilian* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1926).

This antithesis would nevertheless be rejected by Quintilian; the philosopher, he would admit, had become unpractical – and by philosopher he evidently intends the sophist⁴ – but the ideal orator⁵, for whose education he prescribes, cannot be regarded as unspeculative or unphilosophical. Plato's philosopher was also ruler or king; Quintilian's orator is sage as well as statesman. Both described the perfect man and the training which was to produce such.

Quintilian characterises his ideal as follows⁶: “The perfect orator must be a man of integrity, the good man, otherwise he cannot pretend to that character; and we therefore not only require in him a consummate talent for speaking, but all the virtuous endowments of the mind. For an upright and an honest life cannot be restricted to philosophers alone; because the man who acts in a real civic capacity, who has talents for the administration of public and private concerns, who can govern cities by his counsels, maintain them by his laws, and meliorate them by his judgments, cannot, indeed, be anything but the orator... Let therefore the orator be as the real sage, not only perfect in morals, but also in science, and in all the requisites and powers of elocution”. For brevity Quintilian would adopt the definition of the orator given by Cato, “a good man skilled in the art of speaking⁷”; with emphasis on the goodness, however, for he adds, “not only that the orator ought to be a good man; but that he cannot be an orator unless such”.

Others had written of the training of an orator, but they had usually dealt with the teaching of eloquence to those whose education was otherwise completed. Quintilian, however, says⁸ “for my part, being of opinion that nothing is foreign to the art of oratory... should the training up of an orator be committed to me, I would begin to form his studies from his infancy”. By reason of this, Quintilian's *Institutes of the Orator* is something more than a treatise on rhetoric; it has become an educational classic.

⁴ Cf. Quintilian's reference to “the only professors of wisdom,” a characterisation of the sophist employed by Plato in the *Laches*, § 186.

⁵ Bk. I, x, 4: “I am not describing any orator who actually exists or has existed, but have in my mind's eye an ideal orator, perfect down to the smallest detail”.

⁶ Bk. I, Int., §§ 9-18.

⁷ Bk. XII, ch. i., § i. Cf. Bk. ii, xv, i. Quintilian restricts the name of orators and the art itself to those who are good. Also Bk. II, xv, 33.

⁸ Bk. I, Int., § 1.

No training can produce the perfect orator unless a certain standard of natural endowment is presupposed; nature as well as nurture must be taken into account. Thus Quintilian remarks⁹: "It must be acknowledged that precepts and arts are of no efficacy unless assisted by nature. The person therefore that lacks a faculty will reap as little benefit from these writings as barren soils from precepts of agriculture. There are other natural qualifications, as a clear, articulate, and audible voice; strong lungs, good health, sound constitution, and a graceful aspect; which, though indifferent, may be improved by observation and industry, but are somewhat wanting in so great a degree as to vitiate all the accomplishments of wit and study".

The training of the orator falls into three stages: the early home education up to seven years of age; the general "grammar" school education; and the specific training in rhetoric.

With the early home education Quintilian would take as much care and exercise as much supervision as Plato devoted to the early education of the citizens and rulers of his ideal state. Recognising, like Plato, the great part which suggestion and imitation play in the early education of the child, Quintilian demands for his future orator that his parents – not his father only – should be cultured¹⁰, that his nurse should have a proper accent, that the boys in whose company he is to be educated should also serve as good patterns, and that his tutors should be skilful or know their own limitations; the person who imagines himself learned when he is not really so is not to be tolerated. When such conditions do not exist, Quintilian suggests that an experienced master of language should be secured to give constant attention and instantly correct any word which is improperly pronounced in his pupil's hearing in order that he may not be suffered to contract a habit of it. And he adds¹¹ : "If I seem to require too much, let it be considered how hard a matter it is to form an orator".

Quintilian discusses¹² whether children under seven years of age should be made to learn, and, although he admits that little will be effected before that age, he nevertheless concludes that we should not neglect these early years, the chief reason – now regarded as invalid – being that the elements of learning depend upon memory, which most

⁹ Bk. I, Int.

¹⁰ Typically Roman and in striking contrast with Greek Sentiment.

¹¹ Bk. I, ch. i, § 2.

¹² § 4.

commonly is not only very ripe, but also very retentive in children¹³. He warns us, however, that great care must be taken lest the child who cannot yet love study, should come to hate it, and, after the manner of Plato, he declares that study ought to be made a diversion. The instruction at this early age is to include reading, and exercises in speech training which consist of repetition of rhymes containing difficult combinations of sounds; writing is also to be taught, the letters being graven on a plate so that the stylus may follow along the grooves therein, a procedure depending on practice in motor-adjustment and recently revived in principle by Montessori.

Before proceeding to consider the second stage of education, Quintilian discusses the question whether public or private tuition is the better for children. Aristotle had maintained¹⁴ that education should be public and not private; but the early Roman education had been domestic, and it was only under Greek influences that schools came to be founded in Rome. Aristotle's standpoint was political, whereas that of Quintilian is practical and educational¹⁵.

Two objections were currently urged against public education, the first being the risk to a child's morals from his intercourse with other pupils of the same age, and the second the difficulty experienced by a tutor in giving the same attention to many as to one. Were the first objection valid, that schools are serviceable to learning but prejudicial to morals, Quintilian would rather recommend the training of a child in uprightness than in eloquent speaking. But he maintains that, though schools are sometimes a nursery of vice, a parent's house may likewise be the same; – there are many instances of innocence lost and preserved in both places – and children may bring the infection into schools rather than receive it from them. In answer to the second objection Quintilian relies on the inspiration of numbers causing a master to give of his best : “A master who has but one pupil to instruct, can never give to his words that energy, spirit, and fire, which he would if animated by a number of pupils”. “I would not, however”, he adds, “advise the sending of a child to a school where he is likely to be neglected; neither ought a good master to burden himself with more

¹³ In his chapter on Memory, Bk. XI, ch. 2, some of Quintilian's statements are surprisingly in accordance with recent experimental results.

¹⁴ *Politics*, viii, ch. 2. Cf. Burnet's *Aristotle on Education*, p. 97.

¹⁵ Bk. I, ch. ii.

pupils than he is well able to teach ... But if crowded schools are to be avoided, it does not follow that all schools are to be equally avoided, as there is a wide difference between avoiding entirely and making a proper choice”.

Having disposed of the objection to public education, Quintilian enumerates the positive advantages. At home the pupil can learn only what he is himself taught; but in school he can learn what is taught to others. At school he has others to emulate and to serve as patterns for imitation; he also has the opportunities of contracting friendships. How, Quintilian asks, shall the pupil learn what we call “common sense” when he sequesters himself from society? And for the orator who must appear in the most solemn assemblies and have the eyes of a whole state fixed upon him, public education has the special advantage of enabling the pupil early to accustom himself to face an audience.

The grammar-school training is considered by Quintilian in its two aspects, the moral and the intellectual.

He recognises that children differ in respect of moral disposition, and that training must be adapted to such differences. But he desires for his future ideal orator the lad who is stimulated by praise, who is sensible of glory, and who weeps when worsted. “Let these noble sentiments work in him; a reproach will sting him to the quick; a sense of honour will rouse his spirit; in him sloth need never be apprehended”.

Children must be allowed relaxation, but, as in other particulars, a mean has to be kept; deny them play, they hate study; allow them too much recreation, they acquire a habit of idleness. Play also reveals their bent and moral character, and Quintilian observes that the boy who is gloomy, downcast and languid, and dead to the ardour of play affords no great expectations of a sprightly disposition for study.

The remarkable modernity of Quintilian's opinions is evident in his remarks on corporal punishment. “There is a thing”, he says, “I quite dislike, though authorised by custom – the whipping of children. This mode of chastisement seems to me mean, servile, and a gross affront on more advanced years. If a child is of so abject a disposition as not to correct himself when reprimanded, he will be as hardened against stripes as the vilest slave. In short, if a master constantly exacts from his pupil an account of his study, there will be no occasion to have recourse to this extremity. It is his neglect that most commonly causes the scholar's punishment”. Concluding, he asks, “if there be no other

way of correcting a child but whipping, what shall be done, when as a grown-up youth he is under no apprehension of such punishment and must learn greater and more difficult things?"

Having stated the disciplinary measures to be observed in moral training, Quintilian proceeds to consider the intellectual training which should be provided by the "grammar school"¹⁶. To our surprise the first question which Quintilian raises is whether the Roman youth should begin his grammar-school training with Greek or with Latin. Heine's remark that had it been necessary for the Romans to learn Latin, they would not have conquered the world, derives its force from our ignorance of Roman education, for even although the Roman youth had not to learn Latin, they had to learn Greek. It must nevertheless be recalled that Greek was then still a living language, that a knowledge of Greek was almost universal among the upper classes in Rome and that it was indeed the mother-tongue of many of the slaves in the Roman households¹⁷. Quintilian consequently remarks¹⁸ that it is a matter of no great moment whether the pupil begins with Latin or Greek, but in the early education he recommended the learning of Greek first, because Latin being in common use would be acquired unwittingly.

He would not have the boy even at the earliest stages speak only Greek, as in mediaeval schools boys were required to speak only Latin, for this he feared would affect his enunciation; consequently "the Latin must soon follow and both in a short time go together; so it will come to pass that, when we equally improve both languages, the one will not be hurtful to the other".

As music with Plato, so grammar with Quintilian comprises literature, especially poetry¹⁹. Grammar he divides into two parts: the knowledge of correct speaking and writing, and the interpretation of poetry. For good speaking, which must be correct, clear, and elegant, reason, antiquity, authority and use are to be the guiding principles. As a practical preparation for the later training in rhetoric Quintilian pro-

¹⁶ Bk. I, ch. iv.

¹⁷ See Wilkins' s *Roman Education*, p. 19 *et seq.*

¹⁸ Bk. I, ch. iv. Cf. Bk. I. ch. i.

¹⁹ Quintilian, Bk. II, i, 4, defines as "the science of letters". Colson, p. xxxiv: "Grammar was then a living study... It held in fact in the mental outlook of the student of the time much the same position as science does today".

poses that the pupils should learn to relate Aesop's fables in plain form, then to paraphrase them into more elegant style²⁰. In regard to correct writing or orthography “unless custom otherwise directs”, says Quintilian, “I would have every word written as pronounced; for the use and business of letters is to preserve sounds, and to present them faithfully to the eye of the reader, as a pledge committed to their charge. They ought therefore to express what we have to say”. This is a plea for “simplified spelling”.

Like Plato, Quintilian recognises that children should be taught not only what is beautiful and eloquent, but in a greater degree what is good and honest. Homer and Virgil should consequently be read first, even although “to be sensible of their beauties is the business of riper judgment”. Tragedy and lyric poetry may likewise be employed, but Greek lyrics being written with somewhat too great freedom, and elegies that treat of love should not be put into children's hands. When morals run no risk, comedy may be a principal study. The general aim of reading at this stage is to make youths read such books as enlarge their minds and strengthen their genius; for erudition will come of itself in more advanced years. The study of grammar and love of reading should not, however, be confined to school-days, but rather extended to the last period of life.

Quintilian, after discussing grammar, proceeds to consider the other arts and sciences, a knowledge of which the future orator ought to acquire at the grammar school; and in justification of his selection he reiterates that he has in mind “the image of that perfect orator to whom nothing is wanting”²¹.

Music must be included in the training of the orator²², and Quintilian maintains that he might content himself with citing the authority of the ancients, and in this connection instances Plato, by whom grammar was even considered to fall under music. According to Quintilian, music has two rhythms: the one in the voice, the other in the body. The former treats of the proper selection and pronunciation of words, the tone of voice, those being suited to the nature of the cause pleaded²³: the latter deals with the gestures or action which should accompany and harmonise with the voice. But this falls to be dealt with in

²⁰ Bk. I, ch. vi.

²¹ Bk. I, ch. vii.

²² Bk. I, ch. viii.

²³ Bk. I, ch. X, and Bk. XI, ch. iii.

the school of rhetoric, and is considered at some length by Quintilian towards the conclusion of his work²⁴.

Geometry, which includes all mathematics, as in Plato's scheme, is included by Quintilian²⁵, but, unlike Plato in the *Republic*, Quintilian does not despise its practical advantages to the orator, who in a court might make an error in calculation or "make a motion with his fingers which disagrees with the number he calculates", and thus lead people to harbour an ill opinion of his ability; plane geometry is not less necessary as many lawsuits concern estates and boundaries. Plato made geometry a preparation for philosophy, and Quintilian recommends it as a training for eloquence. As order is necessary to geometry, so also, says Quintilian, is it essential to eloquence. Geometry lays down principles, draws conclusions from them, and proves uncertainties by certainties: does not oratory do the same? he asks. It is thus on the disciplinary value of geometry that Quintilian, following Plato, insists.

Quintilian would also have the pupil resort to a school of physical culture, there to acquire a graceful carriage.

Dancing, too, might be allowed while the pupil is still young, but should not be long continued; for it is an orator, not a dancer, that is to be formed. "This benefit, however, will accrue from it that without thinking, and imperceptibly, a secret grace will mingle with all our behaviour and continue with us through life".

Having determined the selection of subjects, Quintilian inquires whether they can be taught and learned concurrently, even supposing that they are necessary²⁶. The argument against this procedure is that many subjects of different tendency, if taught together, would bring confusion into the mind and distract the attention. It is also contended that neither the intellect, the physique nor the length of day suffice; and though more robust years might undergo the toil, it should be presumed that the delicate constitutions of children are equal to the same burden. But Quintilian replies that they who reason thus are not sufficiently acquainted with the nature of the human mind, which is so active, quick, and keeps such a multiplicity of points of view before it that it cannot restrict itself to one particular thing, but extends its powers to a great many, not only during the same day, but likewise at the same moment. What, then, he asks, should hinder us applying our

²⁴ Cf. Bk. XI, ch. iii.

²⁵ Bk. I, ch. ix.

²⁶ Bk. I, ch. xii.

minds to many subjects, having several hours for reflection, especially when variety refreshes and renovates the mind? It is the opposite course, namely, to persevere in one and the same study that is painful. To be restricted for a whole day to one master fatigues greatly, but changes may be recuperative. In support of his argument Quintilian adduces the analogy of farming, asking, "Why do we not advise our farmers not to cultivate at the same time their fields, vineyards, olive-grounds and shrubs?" Any of these occupations continued without interruption would prove very tiresome; in Quintilian's view, it is much easier to do many things than confine ourselves long to one.

The principle of the coordination of studies is also supported by Quintilian on the ground that no age is less liable to fatigue than childhood; but it would have been more scientific had he maintained that no age is more readily fatigued, hence the need for change. After concluding the survey of grammar-school education, Quintilian turns to consider that of the school of rhetoric, and at the outset complains of a certain overlapping in the work of the two types of schools, maintaining that it would be better if each confined itself to its own proper task²⁷.

In selecting a school of rhetoric for the youth, the parents' first concern must be the character of the master. Quintilian describes his ideal teacher thus: "Let him have towards his pupils the benevolent disposition of a parent, and assume the place of those by whom he has been entrusted with this charge. Let him be free from moral faults and not countenance such faults. Let him be severe but not harsh; affable but not lax, lest the former generate hatred and the second contempt. Let him speak frequently of what is honourable and good, for the oftener he admonishes the seldomer will he be obliged to punish. Not readily given to anger but not ignoring the faults requiring correction. Unaffected in his manner of teaching, persevering and firm rather than excessive in his demands. Let him reply readily to his pupils questions and stimulate those not inclined to put questions. In praising the recitations of his pupils he must neither be niggardly nor fulsome; the former will cause the work to be irksome, the latter will make the pupils negligent. In correcting faults he must not be sarcastic, ill less abusive, for the reproof which creates dislike will result in avoidance of work²⁸". The same high standard as in moral attainment is deemed

²⁷ Bk. II, ch. i.

²⁸ Bk. II, ch. ii. Probably the first rating scale for teachers. Cf. the modern

requisite for the intellectual qualifications of the master of the school of rhetoric.

He characterises as silly the opinion of those who, when their boys are fit for the school of rhetoric, do not consider it necessary to place them immediately under the care of the most eminent, but allow them to remain at schools of less repute; for the succeeding master will have the double burden of unteaching what is wrong as well as teaching what is right. Distinguished masters, it might be maintained, may think it beneath them or may not be able to descend to such small matters as the elements, but he who cannot, Quintilian retorts, should not be ranked in the catalogue of teachers, for it is not possible that he who excels in great, should be ignorant of little things. The plainest method, he adds, is always the best, and this the most learned possess in a greater degree than others.

Having discussed the type of school to which the pupil of rhetoric should be sent, Quintilian considers the subjects to be taught and the methods to be employed. The treatment of rhetoric extending from Book III to Book XII of the *Institutes* is of a highly technical nature and of little value or interest to the student of education, although it may be a profitable study for the writer who seeks to improve his style²⁹ or for the teacher of classics, as it includes, in addition to choice and arrangement of material and the principles of style, a review of Latin literature from the point of view of the orator³⁰.

As the education which Quintilian prescribes is that of an orator, he does not deal with the education of women. From his remark that both parents of the orator should be cultured, it might be inferred, however, that he expected women to receive some form of education. There is no direct evidence of the existence of coeducational establishments in Rome, but it appears that girls were taught the same subjects as boys, although the early age of marriage would doubtless exclude them from

version: "All that a teacher requires is a knowledge of his subject and a sense of humour". Quoted by J. Adams, *The Herbartian Psychology Applied to Education* (London, D:C. Heath & Co.), n.d.

²⁹ Cf. A. T. Quiller-Couch, *On the Art of Writing* (Cambridge University Press, 1916), pp. 138-9.

³⁰ Bk. X.

the higher education in rhetoric in which, for Quintilian, the early and grammar-school education culminate.

Quintilian's *Institutes* is the most comprehensive, if not the most systematic, treatise on oratory in existence³¹; it doubtless appeared too late to influence Roman education greatly, but it was regarded by the renaissance educators as the standard and authoritative work on education, and through them it assisted in fashioning educational training throughout Europe up to quite modern times³².

³¹ Cf. Colson, p. xxv: "Whole Quintilian's book is the representative of the rhetorical school of educational thought and indeed of ancient pedagogy in general, it must be remembered that it is not as a whole a treatise on education, not even indeed a treatise on how to *teach* rhetoric. The great part of it, Book II, 14-XI, is a treatise *on* rhetoric".

³² See Colson, ch. iv, "Knowledge and Use of Quintilian after 1416; also John F. Downes, "Quintilian Today", *School and Society*, LXXIII, March 1951, pp. 165-7.