

THE EDUCATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF OBERLIN—THE FOUNDER OF THE FIRST NURSERY SCHOOL

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EDUCATION, since the earliest times, has been concerned with the mental, moral, and physical well-being of the individual, yet it has rarely, in practice, been able fully to adjust itself to man's threefold nature. To divide the attention equally between a training of man's mind, body, and morals, and to realise, in the words of the Athanasian creed, that "none is afore or after other—none is greater or less than another", would seem to present an ideal of educational theory and practice that is wholly unattainable. In consequence, as we become only too painfully aware when studying the evolution of educational consciousness, different countries in different centuries have tended to exalt those aspects of man's development that have particularly interested them, and often to stress them unduly.

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There is little doubt, for example, that the cathedral and monastic schools of the Middle Ages concerned themselves primarily with morals and intellect. Thus a training of the body was rarely emphasised because the flesh was held as of no account and the material world as straw compared with the heavenly mysteries. Similarly, certain modern civilisations, less concerned with morals and intellect, have tended both to exalt the human body at the expense of the mind and contemptuously to pervert historical evidence.

Perhaps something is to be gained, therefore, from a reconsideration of the life and work of Jean Frédéric Oberlin (1740-1826) who, though tucked away in an obscure corner of France, made what must surely be reckoned one of the boldest attempts to view education in its threefold character.

Before examining Oberlin's work in some detail, however, it is perhaps advisable to remind ourselves of the times in which he lived. In 1762, it will be recalled, Rousseau published *Émile*—a so-called novel that sought deliberately not merely to remind its readers that Nature was the first and most important of all preceptors, but like-