

The Practical Relations of Observa- tion and Thought.

"The practical relations of Observation & Thought."

By the word observation we intend to include all means of gaining facts through the unaided senses. By the term thought, we mean to include all results of mental effort derived from the consideration of subject matter presented through the senses.

Any efforts of mind beyond this is the merest speculation and is unworthy of consideration.

Facts from which alone the mind can properly work may conveniently be divided into three classes corresponding with their reception by the mind.

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1st Facts obtained by the unaided senses.

2nd Facts arrived at by comparing a fact obtained directly by the senses with previously obtained knowledge of the subject, or from the co-working of observation and thought.

3rd Facts that result from mental consideration of two or more facts previously obtained and is purely a result of thought.

The first class of obtained facts is very abundant in childhood and among the unlearned. Indeed as the mind is powerless without impressions from the outer world the exercise of the faculty of thought is impossible until two or more impressions have been

received. Without such impressions there can be no comparison of impressions produced on the mind. The comparison of mental impressions by the mind constitutes the act of thinking is the exercise of thought. Hence it is necessary that the mind use impressions from without in thought as the tools for its work without which no work whatever can be done.

It therefore follows that in infancy we are employed principally in the receiving of impressions - in obtaining the facts with which the mind may work - the food for thought.

The actual exercise of the faculty of

thought being learned later. It does not however follow that the faculty of thought is not brought into exercise until manhood for the child will soon begin feebly at first perhaps to compare mental impressions received and by the continuance of the practice, the power of thought is gradually developed and goes on increasing in strength and vigor until

It follows from what has been said that there is with the man but few observations that may be said to be entirely free from the co-working of thought and the greater the mental vigor of the observer, the more will the impressions

produced through the senses be colored or changed in effect in effect upon the mental faculties by previous impressions, however or wherever obtained.

With the vigorous reasoner the impressions obtained by observation are all more or less tinged with his previous knowledge of the subject or by conjecture as to the meaning of what he saw. While the child or the adult who is not much given to mental activity will receive the impressions purely or more nearly pure as the unaided senses report it to the mind. In other

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words, if he see an Ice berg and have
seen Ice bergs often enough to have learn-
ed there appearance, he will report
simply having seen an ice berg. While
the man of vigorous thought will
perhaps report various other im-
pressions which have been re-
ceived together with the facts of
having seen and Ice berg by the co-
working of thought with observation.

If it be seen at a great distance
his mind may place such a barrier
against its being an iceberg from the
impossibility of such a thing being
seen in such a locality &c. that the
impressions actually received will

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be that it is something entirely different.

Now it becomes a very interesting question to determine which of two observers, the one a learned and vigorous reasoner, the other in possession of all his faculties but unlearned. Should be believed or which is entitled to the greatest credence in their report of any particular fact observed. There can be no doubt but that a theory drawn from any assemblage of facts by a learned man would be of the most value. Indeed any theory that might be conceived by a man of no learning would be utterly

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worthless.

In this age of the world however learned men and those with a usual amount of learning seem to desire the nearest thing possible to the naked facts on any subject that they may judge for themselves as far as they are able of the merits of any theories and conclusions that may be arrived at by the persons actually making observations and we must say that it seems to us that the nearer such reports represent the actual impression conveyed by the senses the more valuable they become
