

October 2017

Lesson on Beethoven

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Recommended Citation

"Lesson on Beethoven" (2017). *Published Materials by Anna J. Cooper*. 18.
http://dh.howard.edu/ajc_published/18

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Lesson on Beethoven.

Composer's Mathematics Held Up for Modern Comparison.

To the Editor of The Star:

All who are interested in the training of young people may well ponder your very significant editorial, "Beethoven Could Not Add," in which the last sentence particularly offers much food for thought in our post-war experimentation in school efficiency. The watchman on the tower certainly must have been dozing, or Beethoven would never have been able to "get by." Under our efficient system of tests and measurements a chap who has to put down 36 four times and add, even then coming out 100 off the mark, would be kept inexorably in the grade till he "mastered" his fundamentals; or, after a few semesters' bootless retardation, he would be resolutely thrown into the discard as a moron, if indeed he did not break out in some quite tangible form of rebellious cantankerousness unmistakably amenable to "discipline."

It may be lese majeste to imagine, even in secret, that one's late Victorian ideals are worth taking out of moth balls and brushing up for present-day service. The mechanics of school teaching, we'll tell the world, are at last on a scientific basis. Under stimulus of a magazine editor who complained a few years ago of the lack of organic standardization in American education, the whole Nation has "stepped on it," and, as in everything else, when we Americans take hold of an idea, we make it hum. At last we know! The measuring rod is accurately and scientifically notched to the fraction of a brain-watt; we can direct to our complete satisfaction the classification and separation by I. Q.'s, with exactness and dispatch, into "supermen," "morons" or just plain child, with large capacities for confusing and forgetting—the same variety that Pestalozzi revered with a grand salute, and a greater than Pestalozzi set in our midst as a pattern to be studied and followed.

Naturally, things creep in now and then that we don't like to talk about. Occasionally a teacher drops dead at her task, and pupils, more brittle perhaps, once in a while take the short cut out of it all. We confess it is a little disconcerting to pick up a paper telling a story all too commonplace nowadays in a six or seven line news item, no longer commented on: "Depressed because he was falling behind in his class work, So and So, 14, 15, 16 years old"—another instance, surely, where the operation is entirely successful but the patient dies of heart failure. Is it not barely possible that our measuring rods are too finely graduated or that those applying them may be a trifle overconfident of their own infallibility in weighing, with the assurance that classification and I. Q.'s are all that concern us?

Admit it or not, there is more going on in the modern child's cranium than is dreamed of in our philosophy, and not the most unpleasant of our jolts is when some urchin in childish frankness informs you that you have been talking ten minutes and your lower jaw has not moved once. Plainly, like

Queen Victoria, he is not amused, and his reaction is happily normal when he shows the buoyant optimism of the Western laddie who ducked from under his rescuer's arm and with a soulful grin pitched books and all that would remind of tests and measurements into the conflagration that was taking off forever the red schoolhouse.

One can only conjecture what may have been the more somber reactions when we see too late a tragedy stalk in where life by all odds seemed most promising and alluring.

However proficient a method may be in stimulating speed, when the finished product in any considerable percentage shows complete exhaustion of vital forces, that method should be rigidly and fearlessly called in question. The mental agility that can solve 50 unrelated problems in 40 minutes may be worth cultivating for some who have aptitudes for mere gymnastics. Speed has commercial value in much of modern business where mechanical dexterity rather than persistent logical thinking is required; but this is specializing that may be brought out by certain studies of the curriculum, while certain other subjects contribute rather to developing thought power, building character ideals or training in true citizenship. To gear up the whole curriculum to the same rate of speed, 48 seconds to each of 50 or 100 questions, giving the same sort of objective tests to a class studying with appreciation the *Archias* of Cicero or the *Epic of the Aeneid* is like taking a sonata of Beethoven for a five-finger exercise drill. "Etude de Velocite might be endured" if only it could be dissociated from the inevitable intelligence quotient. But after you have been put through a race that gives your brain the automation of a whirling dervish and should have handed a warm blanket and sympathetic "Good boy!" for your quivering nerves, you are given a percentage number and told that by rearrangement of groups you leave your old friends and trot along hereafter with repeaters and those whom the state does not deem worth educating in these "higher things." Is madness in any of its protean manifestations a surprising reaction? Is no one high enough and holy enough to proclaim the order "Cease firing!"?

The Master Teacher 19 centuries ago warned, "Whoso saith 'thou fool' is in danger." I hesitate to say of what, as that may be a matter of translation. But a well known writer in the *Atlantic* has this to say: "The whole faculty of one college is said to have submitted to such a test, with result that the president made the poorest showing, scarcely above the level of a moron."

Concluding, the same writer sums up: "Examinations properly used are a vital part of the educational process, but the art of using them to produce the best results is highly complex and difficult. They should therefore be entrusted to the mature teachers, who appreciate their value and have had experience in preparing them."

ANNA J. COOPER.