

EDUCATION AS AN ART

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THE HUMAN SKULL (Adapted from Lessons with Grade 10)

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To-day let us think especially about the human skull.

We have already considered the head in relation to the organism as a whole. We have seen how different it is structurally from the limbs; how it is raised into a position of comparative freedom from the rest of the organism; how it is more or less self-enclosed; how it is receptive in character, receiving through the portals of the senses impressions from the world around; how everything that streams towards it is brought to rest within it, so that, from within the silence of the head, there arise the answering thoughts.

Yet, though the head, in relation to the whole organism, represents one pole of human life and expression, viewed alone, it is remarkably complete. You may, perhaps, have seen, either in a picture or in sculpture, a headless human figure. However expressive the pose of the body or the silent gestures of the limbs, such a figure leaves one with a sense of disappointment and regret - we want the whole man. Yet it is quite common to see pictures or busts of the human head alone, and there is not the same feeling at all of missing the rest of the body.

Looking at a bust of Beethoven, we may commune with it and feel that we have before us all that the heart desires. Leonardo's Head of Christ is wonderfully perfect and complete.

Why is this? It is because in the human countenance we have indeed before us a whole man: thought, feeling, and will are all there, and in the balance of these three, in the detailed cast of feature, in the animation or dullness that pervades the face, in the lightness or Exity of expression, something of the underlying character shines through to us, - we behold and we know the man.

How much of this 'wholeness' is revealed in the skull? Again with regard to the whole organism we may say, the underlying skeleton gives us the general structural plan, while in the boundary surface of the skin there are traced out for us the subtle delineations that mark out the particular man. Here, too, the skull differs from the rest of the skeleton. The bones of one man may be long and thin, those of another shorter and more compact, but the essential features are exactly the same; we know exactly what we are to look for, where each muscle finds its attachment, where the blood vessels enter, and so on. This is true of the skull also, but the skulls of human beings, unlike the other bones, show marked individual differences. Phrenologists speak of special bumps and they try to deduce from these bumps something of the character of the individual man. I do not think they are altogether right, but these individual differences are certainly there, and, whereas the skeleton as a whole can teach us secrets about man in general, the skull does contain secrets that apply to the individual.

Why do I think that phrenologists are not altogether right? They are not right if they try to judge a man from his bumps. Man is always something more, far more, than the eye can see. A man may have a so-called 'musical bump' but it does not follow therefore that he will become a famous musician, or that he will become a musician at all.

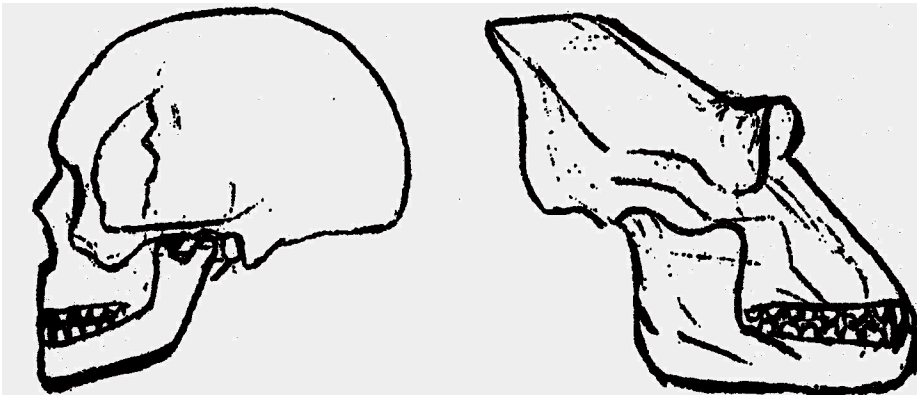
Another may have only the slightest indication of a 'musical bump' but patience and determination and hard work may carry him a good way further than his bump would lead us to suppose. And if this is true of the musical bump, it is equally true of any other bump or outer sign.

We all bring with us into life gifts in some directions and shortcomings in others but a man may fail in his gifts or he may conquer his shortcomings. We can never really assume anything from merely looking at the outside of a man. Nevertheless, the skull is unique in that it does certainly carry individual differences of form to a marked degree, and these differences must reflect something that belongs especially to the particular individual. This certainly adds to the feeling that when we are looking at a torso, a trunk, we see something that is more general, whereas in the head we see something that carries the general to particular completion.

The back of the head is rather like an egg, and it is as though out of this egg there were born the countenance. The back of the head is closed to us, it conceals something, whereas the countenance, by comparison, opens up to meet us. Can we ever imagine the face from looking at the back of the head? We cannot. The back of the head has untold possibilities, but the face is one single expression, one single possibility come to fulfillment. So we may say, the face we behold comes to meet us out of a past, a world that is hidden from us. Very much lies hidden in the countenance, too, - indeed much more than we can ever behold, but nevertheless, something of the hidden man is revealed to us, the hidden forces that have shaped the individual features flow out to us - the character of the man rests in no single feature but pervades them all. The countenance of a little child is hardly touched as yet by this hidden man, but, as the years go by, his writing becomes clearer.

But now, what are the essential characteristics of the human skull? How does it differ from any other skull? First we perceive the beautifully rounded dome of the upper head. When we look at the dome of St. Paul's, or at the dome of St. Peter's in Rome, what are we reminded of? Each is like a miniature heaven resting upon the solid masonry that rises up to meet it from the earth below. And so it is too with the human head. In all nature it is man alone that has this beautifully rounded dome as the crown of his upright, physical form.

It is hardly an earthly form at all. Looking at this dome of the human head, above all the frontal part which is the special seat of human thinking, we may have the feeling: each man carries his own replica of heaven within him. And man alone possesses this, and possessing this, he is able to develop an inner life that carries him beyond mere physical existence - he is able to unfold a life of ideas and ideals within him.



In sharp contrast to this, behold the rectangular jaw below. An entirely different form! The same forces that fashioned the smooth upper dome could not have built this form as well. Other forces must come into play here. The clearly accentuated vertical line expresses something of the individual will. In it is expressed the force that raises man up from the horizontal position of the typical animal. The tiny child first raises its head, then its trunk, and finally lifts itself up on to its feet. It is the same force that lifts us up each morning - the force that makes us individually awake, so that we can take hold of our lives. In this vertical line of the jaw we may see how man gathers together that which is of heaven above and leads it down and concentrates it in his own individual will. And, in the horizontal line, we go forward with this individual will to meet life, we advance forward into life to carry out the tasks that we have to do. Thus the upper part of the head is expressive of the free range of thought, the lower part mirrors the human will; these forms are by no means merely physical forms.

Between these two we have, -a most delicate structure, gently curved above and more articulated below, more head-like above, more limb-like below, expressing restfulness in the upper line and movement in the lower line, swelling forward into the cheekbone that swings upwards at the eye, tapering backwards and inwards towards the ear, a wonderful bridge between the above and the below. This middle structure underlies that part of the face where the feeling life finds natural expression, the feeling that holds in balance the thinking and the willing.

In these three forms, the spherical form above that leads us back to the enclosed character of the back of the head, the rectangular form below that leads us down to the earth and forward into life, and the middle intermediary form that lends itself to both these, we have the essential character of the human skull.

We have but to glance from this to the ape to see the immeasurable loss. The frontal part of the skull, the dome in man, actually appears hollowed out, the rectangular jaw has lost its clean and concise angle and has become quite physical, and the delicate middle member has coarsened into a thick band of bony tissue from which all subtlety is excluded.

The human head, even in the rigid structure of the skull, is a true mirror of the higher soul forces that make man a kingdom apart and that distinguish him from all natural creation. Properly speaking, it is man alone that possesses a head.

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