

MORAL INSTRUCTION, DIRECT & INDIRECT.¹

BY THE EDITOR.

POSSIBLY we fail to give “effective moral training based upon Christian principles” to young people because our teaching is scrappy, and rests mainly upon appeals to the emotions through tale and song. Inspiring as these are, we may not depend upon them entirely, because emotional response is short-lived, and the appeal is deadened by repetition: the response of the intellect to coherent and consecutive teaching appears, on the contrary, to be continuous and enduring. Boys and girls have as much capacity to apprehend what is presented to their minds as have their elders; and, like their elders, they take great pleasure and interest in an appeal to their understanding which discovers to them the ground plan of human nature—a common possession.

The point of view it seems well to take is, that all beautiful and noble possibilities are present in varying degrees in every one; but that each person is subject to assault and hindrance in various ways of which he should be aware. Hortatory teaching is apt to bore both children and their elders; but an ordered presentation of the possibilities that lie in human nature, and of the risks that attend these possibilities, can hardly fail to have an enlightening and stimulating effect. An appeal to young people to make the most of themselves, because of the vast possibilities that are in them and of the love of God which constrains them is not likely to be without effect.

The labour of the instructor in morals is made easier, I believe, by the fact that two, or rather three, feelings are common to all thoughtful boys and girls in their “teens.” They all feel that life is a great and serious matter and that they themselves are responsible persons with an important part to play. They want to know the rules of the game,

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and they pick up hints, often enough misleading hints, here and there. They think, even the most conceited of them, that they are poor things after all; but also they know that somewhere within them there is greatness of mind and goodness of heart—quite a mine of wealth, if only they could produce it!

Let us tell them that these three feelings are dependable guides. *We are poor things, we have great possibilities, and we are dreadfully in need of guidance.*

We, whose chief business it is to teach somehow or other the art of living to the young, often make mistakes because we do not envisage the conditions. Let us begin with our pupils upon common ground. Let us say to them in effect, “This baffling human nature of ours, which we cannot understand, is, after all, *human nature*, and what we want to see is a sort of panorama of human nature. Such a panorama should help us to realize that our dreams fall short of the truth, that each of us has indeed a great and beautiful person within him, only waiting to be produced to the world; but, that this beautiful person has many enemies, also within. St. George and the dragon is a fable which each of us is called to enact.”

It is convenient to approach this difficult subject of moral instruction by using a classification with which every child is familiar; if we treat of the House of Body, the House of Mind, the House of Heart and the House of Soul, we open the door to thought and supply ordered knowledge of a kind which appeals particularly to young people. If it be said that this is

merely a popular classification, even so, it is better to know that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, than not to think of the matter at all.

When we consider the House of Body, we treat of hunger and gluttony, thirst and drunkenness, activity and restlessness, rest and sloth, chastity and uncleanness, taste, to be cultivated but not pampered; smell, to serve on the Board of Health and as a means of joy; touch, as a means of knowledge and a help to the practice of patience; sight, a source of joy—“eyes and no eyes”; hearing, also a source of joy, the more we listen the more we hear.

In treating of the HOUSE OF MIND, we consider Intellect and its handmaid, Imagination, opening to us vast and joyous

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regions of Science, History, Mathematics, Philosophy, Literature, Art; we glance at the joys of the intellectual life and its foes,—Inertia, which will not begin, and Habit, which always goes over the same ground. We dwell on the delights of the magnanimous mind.

We discover to children the wealth they have in Imagination, the joy of mental pictures, the world possessed by the cultivated imagination; pictures in which self is the centre, unlawful; another danger—mental pictures of sin, unclean imaginings; mental pictures of horrors; things to be avoided by the watchful and those who lead an active life. Children should know, too, that they have an endowment in the Sense of Beauty: they should be led to reflect upon the action of Reason; how we reason; Reason an advocate—sometimes takes sides; to consider how the good man’s reason works, how the bad man’s; to consider Reason’s part in good works and great inventions; they should know what is meant by Common Sense; should know that the decisions of Reason are not infallible; good and sensible persons come to opposite conclusions from the same premises; Reason works out a notion received by the will and does not begin it; children should have practice in reasoning.

The Desires open a new sphere of thought; Mind must be fed,—we desire knowledge; we desire approbation—vanity, its debased form; emulation may degenerate into a greed of prizes and places to last through life; the desire of wealth,—danger of selfishness, desire of power,—danger of trying to manage people; the desire of society,—danger of becoming frivolous; duty of ordering our thoughts.

The HOUSE OF HEART. We consider LOVE in its various manifestations;—Pity, Benevolence, Sympathy, Kindness, Generosity, Gratitude, Courage, Loyalty, Humility, Gladness;—together with the particular danger that attends each such manifestation. Then will follow the consideration of JUSTICE, the possession of everyone; justice to the persons of others; persons hurt in mind suffer in body; justice to the characters of others,—implies Candour, Discernment; Truth, that is justice in word; spoken truth; fiction; essential truth; causes of lying; Integrity,—justice in action; Opinions,—the duty of justice in thought; Principles,—justice in motive; Self-ordering,—justice to ourselves.

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Some such scheme of teaching as I have attempted to indicate is exceedingly welcome to children between the ages of twelve and fifteen; and I have reason to know that they appropriate the knowledge thus given to them and become careful and conscientious in thought, word, and deed. I believe that teaching on such subjects as hygiene, temperance, purity, etc., best falls into place, in the scheme I have indicated, by way of statement rather than by way of exhortation. Moral instruction should be incidental, whether it fall under

teaching in Self-knowledge or come through reading. I am inclined to think that, in both cases, books, accompanied by the teacher's sympathy and occasional word of appreciation, are to be preferred to oral teaching; and of books, the best should be chosen. Plutarch's *Lives* read to the children, (a "Life" read all through with necessary omissions), are a great source of moral inspiration. "Oh, dear, I'm just like Julius Cæsar" said a young person of ten returning from the swimming-baths, "I never want to do a thing unless I am best in it." Shakespere, [sic] the *Waverley Novels*, afford moral teaching for any age; each play or novel should be read through, the children being left to appropriate what they want. The best poetry is very full of moral impulse, not offered with intent.

The first course of moral instruction should be concerned with SELF-KNOWLEDGE. The second course for young people from fifteen to eighteen should deal, I think, with SELF-DIRECTION. Conscience in the House of Body, Conscience in the House of Mind; the instructed Conscience, the function of Conscience; the Will,—not moral or immoral; Will and Wilfulness; the function of Will, Self-control, Self-denial, Purpose, Resolution.

Teaching about the HOUSE OF SOUL should treat, however imperfectly, of the capacities of the Soul, its disabilities; of the knowledge of God, prayer, faith. But "Self-direction" is too large a subject to be entered upon in detail in this short paper.

To conclude, I should like to enforce one or two points. Moral instruction is a very delicate matter, chiefly because, in attempting to give it, we are in danger of invading that liberty of the individual which every child is on the watch to

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safeguard. What we may offer is sanction, motive, knowledge, opportunity, the sense of power, and, by way of incidental stimuli, a wide range of reading in the "humanities." If we give a child a rudimentary knowledge of himself as a whole, the duty of sobriety should, for example, fall into its natural place as a part of justice to himself and to society. The danger of inculcating a strenuous morality, put on as a sort of moral-stays,—compression here causing protuberance there,—is extremely serious. A person is a whole, and must grow in all directions from impulses moving the whole.

" . . . that ye think clear, feel deep, bear fruit well,
The Friend of man desires."—(*Matthew Arnold*.)

And, let me add, that instruction as to conduct,—the bearing of fruit,—is of little avail unless young people have some knowledge of the laws which regulate the founts of feeling,—love and justice; unless they know, that is, what feeling is due from them on the various occasions of life, and that they have the feeling within them if they choose to use it. In order to "think clear," they should know something about the possibilities and hindrances of the mind. Bearing of fruit is the natural result of a secret growth and should not be overmuch ordered.

1 Notes of a paper prepared for the *International Moral Congress*, held in London, in September.