

## Special Papers.

## THE TEACHERS' DUTIES BY NEGATION.

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LIFE is a skein we all are winding; "our mortal coil," the poet says of it. To some of us, the winding is a smooth and easy task; to others the tangle is the ordinary, and the smooth the event. When called to wind, the duty of disentanglement is negatively imposed. The tangled knots are made worse by our undue haste, natural impatience, and lack of skill, and we are fain to throw down our task in despair. It is not, however, in a self-willed separation from common duties that men grow up to their full stature." The commonplaces of life form part of the plan. History makes clear to us that so-called "Holy men" who withdrew from the world of common things, into a sanctified solitude, lived to themselves, and died, dwarfed in the beautiful virtues fostered by friction with humanity, leaving no mark on the world's life. In our task as teachers, we find many unexpected knots in the thread. Many times we have to turn back. Many times we suffer loss of courage. Our thread is now fine, now coarse, now rough, and formed of many strands, here a tangle, there a snarl, and now it seems to break altogether. Do not forget that the Great Weaver of the thread, "the brittle thread," is to use the skein you wind to form the tapestry of Heaven.

In illustration of the meaning of the subject of this paper, let me tell an anecdote of a boy who had hired himself out to learn farming in Canada. He was a very obedient boy, always did as he was told, and that promptly. But he had one fault, he did simply what he was told and no more. For example:—"John, the cattle are in the wheat, let down the bars, and drive them out." The boy returns, "Well, did you let them out?" "Yes, sir." "But you have not put up the fence again." "No, sir, you did not tell me to do that." This was a sample of his work. Now, as teachers, we are often told what to do, and we do it well, but behind, and consequent from, these positive duties come by negation other duties fully as needful to the right accomplishment of our task of training the children placed in our care. We are not to think of them as mere organizations to be trained to perfect mechanism of conduct, calculation, memorization, or quotation. Their nature is three-fold, which nature must be treated in its divisions and in its entirety. Our programme of studies states our general duties to the mental powers of the pupils. These studies enumerated we are supposed to have mastered ourselves, and to have found the best means of imparting to our pupils. But this division of our work is poorly performed, if we have treated our pupils as vessels to be filled; not as strange receptacles, with some peculiar, mental, chemical power of increasing and changing the scanty material placed in them; from which receptacles more can be drawn than has been put in them by mortal hand. I have been astonished, when weary of my apparently useless task, to find the growth of ideas, the hundred-fold increase of my poor little sowing in the mind of some child. Wonderful indeed is man's nature? It is worth the study of the wisest.

It is a duty imposed by negation that positive information be not given always to children. State the converse, and let them form their own deductions from it. Give liberty to the various minds, do not force each and all into the mould of one. Authors of school books, and of examination papers, should have practical knowledge of the varieties of the mental development of children, when they begin their work of teaching and examining.

But our duties do not all lie in the one direction of filling up and drawing out. As much is there need of studying the influence of silent, unconscious teaching as there is of studying lessons from books. If the latter were the be-all and end-all of a school teacher's work, the opinion of our farming friends that school-teaching is a "nice, easy job" would be true enough. The trial of will with will, the tests of temper, differences of disposition, faults of training, the workings of influence for good or ill, these are the hills of difficulty in our onward path. To surmount these we must have order and government in ourselves, a fixed inward law working out.

Ecob remarks of Dr. Arnold, of Rugby, "He was himself a great, living, reverent, believing soul, and that which was life to him was impacted *solidly* into the very body of all his teaching." Can a teacher, who does not govern his temper expect peace and gentle conduct in the school-room, or on the play ground? Can a lady, who uses unlovely words, or a gentleman, who is sometimes forgetful of the fact, and is occasionally coarse, expect elegance and purity from pupils? What lecture against tobacco avails, when the teacher looks so manly and stylish with his cigar? We are not called on by programme or contract of agreement to notice these matters, but none the less binding are they upon us.

The body receives but little attention from the perfunctory teacher. The heathen of old recognized an intimate connection between body and soul. Christianity, to-day, in all its teachings, calls the body the temple in which dwells the God-head. We find by study that the body affects the mind, and even the soul. Men, sometimes, when weary and ill, have fancied themselves sinners beyond redemption, as witness Cowper. We should notice that neglect of attention to the bodily comfort of our pupils causes many of the ills of a teacher's lot. Try it yourselves. Sit in a cold church for two hours, stand at a shop counter an hour, write steadily and quietly with cold fingers, keep from the fire when you earnestly desire to be warm, refrain from taking a drink of water when you are parched with thirst. Do these acts voluntarily, then sympathize with those who do them, when they see *no reason* for it. Much of the failure we hear of arises from this cause. Common humanity calls for attention to wet feet, frosted fingers, and other ills which attend the present and future cold weather. There is no need of pampering or petting by the teacher; an older scholar may attend to the wants of the little ones who require assistance. It is also a teacher's duty to cultivate a feeling of sympathy and kindness among the pupils, that the stronger should help the weaker. Another duty is to cultivate a habit of work. Laziness is said to be a product of our schools. Some parents tell us they get little good of a boy after he has received an education. We deny this to be a natural result of education, it is the result of natural propensities, or of some wrong method employed by his parents or teachers in his training. Bob Burdette, the humorist, speaks seriously: "My son, you have to work. Whether you handle a pick or a pen, a wheelbarrow or a set of books, digging ditches or editing a paper, ringing an auction bell or writing funny things, *you must work*. Don't be afraid of killing yourself with work. Find out what you want to be and do, my son, and take off your coat and make a dust in the world. The *busier* you are, the less harm you will be apt to get into, the sweeter will be your sleep, the brighter and happier your holidays, and the better satisfied will the world be with you." Laziness extends to manners, speech, gestures, and actions. Let us cultivate in our pupils strong good sense, in the words of Goldsmith:—

"Teach him that states of native strength possess't  
Though very poor, may still be blest,  
That self-dependent power can time defy  
As rocks resist the billows and the sky."

Next in order is our mental responsibility to our pupils of which it is generally understood we are relieved when we get our pupils through their examinations successfully. This is a hard enough task usually. But the thoughtful are not satisfied with that. A certain divine remarked on one occasion, "I do not want my boy put through the school, I want the school put through him." Here is something very different from the usual manner of speaking. Teachers of city schools must promote a certain percentage of their class, or they are apt to lose their situations. The rural fraternity are judged by the number who pass the entrance, and the speed with which the juniors hasten to be seniors. We think Johnny or Maggie ought to stay in the same class a few months longer to review work imperfectly understood, but Johnny's ma. and Maggie's pa. think their children are not getting through the school fast enough, so on they go. There is a *judicious* haste, however, which is to be regulated by conditions of work and abilities and age of pupil. The wrong kind of haste is that which takes a pupil over the course in a given

time, regardless of the thoroughness of the work. Pope has a passage referring to this:—

"Since man from beasts by words is known,  
Words are man's province, words we teach  
alone."

This is the fault of the age, the age of high pressure and hurry. We are required to teach orthography, composition, grammar and kindred subjects, but of little avail will all our positive teaching be, if there be not the example of our deeds to suit our theory. We, the teachers, are said to eliminate vowels, to slur consonants, to speak ungrammatically, and to write regardless of punctuation, and this because of hurried work. We are required by negation to avoid *slovenliness in speech*, act, and thought. Some examples of the faults we are to avoid are habits of promising without performing, of beginning work and not ending it, of giving and taking half answers, of carelessness in dress, of untidiness in the matter of desk and floor. A picture is an educator, and the teacher's surroundings, manner, and dress are parts of a picture on which the pupils are constantly gazing. The work of education is going on silently, independent of spoken teaching. Let *thoroughness, neatness, and purity* characterize us in act, word, and thought. A learned divine has said "Simplicity and purity are the two wings, which lift a man above all earthly things."

Another duty imposed by negation is to "provoke not to wrath." This is what a child means when he says the teacher is "not cross." Homely and expressive, yet metaphorical. As one beam of wood crosses the other so the child's will crosses that of the teacher; as the grain of the one is against the grain of the other, so the inclinations of the child are opposed to those of the teacher; both are turned in determined opposition. The teacher, with conscious power, may *force* the child's will parallel with his own, but there is seldom unanimity by such means. But you say the child has no right to be in opposition. Generally speaking you are right, but is it always the fault of the child? Let us examine the matter. Suppose you are annoyed, irritated, out of humor, and you enter a company of happy friends, who try to avoid *giving or taking* offence. How long will it be before you infect them with your ill-temper or *you catch their* happy spirit? Try the experiment with fifty children who have not the strength of mind to resist the evil influence. It will affect them *swiftly and surely*. With some children the sight of a peevish face is the signal to tease, and this is keen enjoyment as long as the culprit escapes detection. I remember a dark little fellow, who seemed dullness itself, who, one day, taught me, his teacher, a lesson. I had exhausted my energies in trying to fix a few monosyllables in his torpid mind, and at last I uttered a petulant "Oh, dear, dear, this is awful work!" For one moment only did I turn away, looking back at him almost instantly to see his little black eyes dancing with glee, and a smile of unspeakable delight on his hitherto sad-looking countenance. The former wooden calm fell on his face, as he caught my look of surprise. It gave me to know that it pleases some persons to get another person annoyed, and I try not to afford them the doubtful pleasure. If a teacher is in the habit of dealing out a word and a blow, the *blow first* usually, there will be what is worse than *mischievous*, there will be the shrinking glance and the crouching shoulders of the miserable little cowards who will do almost anything to escape the brewing storm. Let those who are in the habit of hastily striking children, stop and ask if the order so obtained be not too dearly bought. What price is paid for it? The teacher pays for it by losing the regard of his pupils who see him practice injustice and cruelty. The scholar pays for it by the loss of friendly companionship with the teacher, by the loss of candor, by the moral cowardice he feels, by the falsehood he learns to practise. Yes, the price is a large one! There is as much difference between our ideal discipline as Dr. Arnold realized it at Rugby, and such discipline, as there is between the systems of government practised in Great Britain and Russia. There is no need of *weakness*, positively there must not be weakness in dealing with persons of undeveloped reasoning powers. Your authority must be known, but let the velvet glove of kindness cover the iron hand of power. Do not wait till the child has committed