

Is not this a strange inconsistency in a land where by almost universal consent the formation of good character is placed above everything else as the great end of all school training. Is not all good character—regarding it from the point of view of conduct—the product of conscientiousness, under the guidance of intelligence? Is not the natural, the legitimate, the *only* way in which character can be trained, through the moral nature, the conscience? Is not this faculty which we call “conscience” just as capable of systematic training and development as the perceiving or the reasoning, or the reflecting power, or any other faculty of the soul which the skilful teacher makes it his business to draw out—strengthen by a careful process of use and exercise? No observant parent or teacher can for a moment doubt the capacity of the moral faculty for systematic development. The intelligent mother must have been often surprised to see the sensitiveness with which the tender conscience of the infant responds to a skilful touch at a very early age. She who knows how to make the proper appeal to the child’s sense of right and wrong in the tender years can produce effects which cannot be wrought by those so-called disciplinarians, who rely upon the rod and other severe methods at a much later age. The motive of physical fear can be relied on only in the presence of the one who inflicts it, or when there is a certain probability of detection. The inward monitor, once it has been thoroughly awakened, is alike faithful to trust, whether witnesses are present or absent. We have all seen the mother who is always on the watch to place the basket of fruit or the plate of cake or confections out of the reach of “mischievous” fingers of the little one. We have also seen, more rarely it is to be feared, the other mother whose child’s innate sense of right and wrong has been carefully appealed to from earliest infancy, and who, consequently, can at a very tender age be trusted to refrain implicitly in the presence of such forbidden fruits, no matter how easily within reach, until the desired permission is given. But want of space forbids enlargement. The position is just this. Nature (God) has implanted the faculty of conscience to be the director of conduct. It needs, in order to do its work effectively, constant and skilful training in two directions, viz., to increase its sensitiveness and to get it to apply a true criterion to distinguish right from wrong. A wise philosophy recognizes indications which point to the imperative need, in order to accomplish the best ends in schools, of a regular place set apart in the curriculum for the training of the moral faculty, as the first and chief requisite of every school system.

How can this be done? The fear of over-stepping

the bounds of seasonable space compels the writer to state his view didactically and in as few words as possible.

The teacher of morals finds himself with a certain allotted time in the presence of his class, for this special purpose. The material of his lesson will vary widely, from the most elementary questions upward, as far as time and the stage of development of the pupils may permit. It should, if practicable, eventually include such subjects as sociology, political economy, in short the most abstruse questions regarding the duties of man to man. In one respect the method will be the same from first to last. It will be always inductive, never didactic or authoritative. To this end there should be, especially in the public school stages, no text-book. The competency of the teacher is here assumed, though in practice hand-books for *his* guidance would no doubt be found desirable and necessary. There must be, of course, orderly, progressive work, beginning with the most elementary topics. There may be questions and answers, and patient discussions, always carefully within the capacity of the class and adapted to interest it. The most practical and effective method would be, probably, to give each day a carefully chosen problem, or series of problems, to be thought over, talked about, reasoned out and answered, preferably in writing, as the next lesson. The discussion of the answers would work for the lesson. The beneficial effects of such a course, upon both the thinking and the actions of the children, are too obvious to need pointing out. Not the least would be the habit of thinking about the right and wrong of things, making that, as it really should be, the first question in every case of contemplated action.

But, since there is to be no authoritative decision, not even from the Bible, the need at once presents itself of some principle or law which must commend itself to the judgment,—or shall we say moral intuition,—of every one, and be accepted by all as an infallible axiom to which every moral question may be brought for testing. The writer can here only say in a word, as he has before said elsewhere, that in his opinion such an axiom may be found in what is called the Golden Rule, “Whatsoever ye would that others should do to you, do you even so to them.” He suggests this, not because he thinks it would be proper in a public school to quote it as scripturally authoritative, but only as an ethical principle which must, in its very nature, commend itself to the moral judgment of every parent and guardian in the land. Is it not one that even the agnostic or the infidel would not reject?

In working out this method one of the requisites of the teacher would be a set of graded moral problems.