

THE NURTURE OF MORAL IMPULSES.

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A TEACHER said to me the other day: "I don't understand that boy. He is a strange mixture of good and evil. He is courteous, good-natured, and prepares his lessons well, yet I can feel that his influence is generally on the wrong side. Certain boys who trouble me when he is here are quiet and well-behaved when he is absent. He has his moods. There are some weeks when he is all right, and then there are others when he is all wrong."

In reply I said: "Have you ever studied him? I do not mean have you thought about him, but have you considered his traits as inherited, or as developed by his surroundings or by the vicious nature of his early training? Are you not taking too many things for granted as being bad in his tendencies and impulses? Motives are powerful, but the only way to destroy the influence of a bad motive is to supplant it by a better one. The impulses under which that boy acts may be due to the love of fun innate in every active child. You cannot whip it out of him. Perhaps that which seems to be a disposition to annoy you is simply a desire for the notoriety which comes from being counted a leader among his mates."

This is only a part of a conversation which lasted for an hour. When we parted I think each of us had a new line of thought opened up for investigation.

We are more the creatures of impulse than we are of habit. One child is obedient because his impulses lead him in that direction, and another is constantly disobedient for the same reason. The

larger part of children's attitudes toward any particular question is of that unhesitating, unquestioning kind which does not stop to analyze with a view to determining the right or wrong view of the matter in hand.

Impulses may be born with the child or they may be created by the environments of his earlier years. When hereditary, they should be encouraged if good, suppressed if bad, by careful, judicious nurture. I use the word nurture because it more nearly expresses our present needs than the usual formal term, training.

I grant that we have none too much moral training in our schools. Much of it is weak and ineffective, but, such as it is, much better than nothing. It is also undoubtedly true that most of the teachers in our schools are anxious to do the best work in this field which is possible under the circumstances. Formal ethics, lectures and talks calculated to lead the pupil up to a point at which he may discern the right from the wrong, every right motive and the all powerful influence of example, are brought to bear upon the child in attempts at moral training.

But we need on the part of parents and teachers much more of the spirit of moral nurture, of that inward culture, which by a hidden process shapes and forms the life. Only a true understanding of this will enable us to reach the living springs of action which lie in the recesses of the heart, and thus prevent the formation of habits of thought and action which are wrong, because based upon wrong