

the apostate, Ahab the reprobate, Judas the traitor, and Annanias the hypocrite, seem to compose their prerogative biographical instances; they appear to be altogether oblivious of the very obvious truth, that in the sacred picture-gallery a hundred virtues are personified for one vice—that for a single Baalim we have “the goodly fellowship of the Prophets;” for one Judas, “the glorious company of the Apostles;” and for a single Annanias, “the noble army of Martyrs;” and these “are set for our examples,” as “apples of gold in pictures of silver.”

From this cursory glance at the Drama, at Literature, and at some of our Educational doings, we cannot but acknowledge that much of the teaching from *life examples* is likely to be pernicious in its influence. The companionship chosen is vulgar and criminal, and the models are too commonly deformed, abnormal, and essentially bad. But it will be argued, that in the cases referred to these depraved examples were not intended as *models* at all; they are put forward merely as *contrasts*, and for purposes of *caution* and *warning*. Well, certainly there is some little truth in this, or the very naming of such vile specimens would be perfectly inexcusable. All that I fear is, that the black is rather too profusely laid on, and that so much “pomp and circumstance” enlisted on behalf of criminals is apt to convert the gallows into a monument; so that, instead of gibbeting them, we embalm them. Indeed, it may be fairly questioned as to whether there is not already somewhat more of the poetic and heroic element about these villainous lives than properly comports with lazy, worthless thieves, and cowardly cold-blooded murderers, and, without being censorious, one cannot help suspecting that some of these *contrasts*, or *cautions*, or *warnings*, are put forth for “powerful effects!” and “thrilling sensations!”

Besides, this negative teaching is in direct opposition to what is found to be successful in the teaching of every other subject. If I want a child to draw a cone, I do not distract his attention by showing him every other solid that is *not a cone*, just for the sake of *caution* or *contrast*. If I want a child to master the square of A B, + I do not make him commit to memory a hundred incorrect answers for the sake of *caution* or *contrast*; or if I wish to train a child to distinguish the niceties of tint and shade in the tertiary colours, I do not dazzle and confound his vision with large surfaces of red, yellow, or black. And is it not equally unphilosophical to strive to win the heart to love and imitate the beauty and symmetry of truth and virtue by the daily presentation of falsehood and vice?

I contend, then, that since children love *life-stories*, and since by means of them we may help them to good companions and good models, it becomes our duty as teachers to discard and discourage all biography tainted and impure, however stirring may be the incidents and exciting the details with which it may be interlarded. But “*Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, let them think on these things.*” Having decided to give the preference to the biography of men of good character, we might with propriety ask ourselves: What are the most useful aspirations for us to awaken in our children? Shall we stimulate the young imaginations to strive after eminence in poetry, or literature, or politics, or war? These are, without doubt, laudable objects of ambition, and ought not to be discouraged, especially among the “Upper Ten Thousand,” but with the children of mechanics and tradesmen before us, should not our efforts be principally directed to the exaltation of every homely virtue? Should we not aim to create an early love for godliness and true manliness, so that such rugged, prosy qualities as industry, thrift, benevolence, honesty, and truth might be esteemed by them as things without which they could not be happy? And what kind of lives should I call up before the children to excite such feelings as these? The lives of men who wore crowns, or coronets, or mitres? Men whose greatness was the result of some lucky chance, or the accident of birth? I think not; rather let me summon to my aid the life-story of some distinguished member of the lowly order. If Biography is to be my moral diagram, let it picture what I wish to teach, and let me tax my teaching power to invest the unromantic, unobtrusive pilgrimage of an earnest, pious, struggling, working man with some portion of that poetic interest which is so lavishly wasted upon worthless and undeserving objects. True, I can do but little towards raising my children to the pedestal of heroism, but may I not do something towards bringing heroism down to their daily labour and daily life?

Now, that the right sort of biographical teaching will conduce to this end in a very remarkable manner I feel most confident, and it will act in two important ways: first, as a direct means of

instruction in itself, and secondly, as a means by which to strengthen and illustrate other portions of instruction. A good life example is a powerful and impressive teacher, and it will always serve to furnish “*prerogative instances*” in support of particular truths.

Biography should be completed—not sketchy, anecdotal, and incidental. Let the story begin in childhood, be copiously elaborated in youth, and patiently followed on to the closing scene. By this means the children will come to consider their hero as their companion, and will presently conceive for him a strange and sublime sort of friendship; they will sympathise in all his changing fortunes, and watch out for and praise every good trait in his character. You will hear them say, with real concern: “What a good job it was he did this,” or “What a pity he didn’t know that;” and, with a very little care on the part of the teacher, important truths will be seized, understood, and remembered, and the children will appreciate the moral none the less for having discovered it and appropriated it themselves, without the assistance of copy-book homilies.

Several instances corroborative of these remarks have come under my own notice, and doubtless many teachers of greater experience have observed more fully the same results. I will conclude these remarks with an instance that occurred in a lesson a few months back.

I have commonly made it a practice to spend an hour in school, now and then, with a collective lesson upon biography, choosing for this purpose such lives as those of Franklin, Williams the Missionary and Martyr of Erromanga, Arkwright and Stephenson. It is to an incident that occurred in a lesson upon the last-named worthy that I beg now to refer.

By means of two or three previous lessons, the boys had become familiar with the principle points in the early life of George Stephenson—his father, mother, wife, and little son Bobby were among the people they knew—the particulars of his courtship, marriage, and his subsequent heavy affliction by the death of his wife, were matters fresh in their memory. As well as I can reproduce what occurred in the lesson, it ran thus:—

“You boys will remember that in our last lesson I told you about Stephenson’s visit to Scotland, when, for the first time in his life, he had to live and work among strangers. You remember, too, that he managed to steer clear of all the new temptations to which a new situation and strange shopmates were sure to subject him, and that, by dint of hard work and still harder saving, he found himself the owner of twenty eight pounds at the end of the year. You will also remember that his yearning after his little son, and his old father and mother, was so strong, that he left his situation and turned his face homeward. I dare say, too, that you have not forgotten how we tried to picture to ourselves his daily pilgrimage as he pursued his weary way across the desolate moors, equipped in the same heavy boots and coarse clothing, a little more patched and worn, as he had worn in his outward journey, with the same sturdy cudgel in his hand, and the same old kit strapped to his back. Well, now, I want you to come with me again in imagination, and we will overtake him before he reaches home. Here is our acquaintance just plodding his way up the last hill that hides the little village of Jolly’s Close—now he is at the top of the eminence, and stands leaning upon his stick looking eagerly about him. I wonder what he is thinking about? His poor dead Fanny, may be, and the happiness he buried with her in the grave; and then he remembers that in yonder little one-roomed cottage, by the brink of the babbling brook, are other dear ones for whom he may yet labour and save. Now he starts off eagerly down the Burn side, for his sharp eye has caught sight of a little curly-headed urchin playing by that same little cottage door, and something tells him ’tis his son. Now he has crossed the rude wooden bridge and is holding little Bobby in his arms. The news of Geordie’s return spreads like wildfire, and homely faces begrimed with coal-dust greet him on every side; while brothers, sisters, and neighbours crowd with anxious faces around him. But why is his welcome home so quiet and so very earnest? Where is all the noise and jollity that he anticipated? Why hangs such an ominous gloom upon every countenance? And why, as his bright eyes glance inquiringly from face to face, are moist eyes averted? Something is certainly wrong—what can have happened? Little Bobby is safe and sound, with his little arms entwined around his father’s neck. At length one of the neighbours ups and tells him: ‘That his poor old father was engaged cleaning out a boiler, and while he was inside it, a fellow-workman unwittingly turned on the steam; the scalding jet fell full upon the poor old man’s face; he was carried home frightfully scalded, and had since become totally and helplessly blind.’ We will not even *try* to picture the dread-