

## EDUCATION

## Moral Instruction in Common Schools.

(An extract from a Lecture delivered at Montreal, on the 26th January 1864, by the Rev. Canon Leach, D. O. L., Vice-Principal of the McGill University and a member of the Council of Public Instruction for L. O.)

The work of moral instruction ought to be commenced as systematically and carefully as any other subject taught, whenever the scholars are capable of reading well, and of giving, in their examinations, an account of what they read. With a suitable textbook, there is nothing to prevent them, even at an early age, say between ten and fourteen, any two years between these, from attaining distinct conceptions of the most important points in relation to rights of person, of property, of contracts, of marriage, of government. These, and the corresponding obligations, as far as it is useful practically, might unquestionably be made intelligible to them. I think it also unquestionable, that it is the duty of some to teach them these things. They surely ought to be told what actions are held to be offences and crimes, in what light they are regarded, and with what punishments visited. Not that this ought to be done with over-minuteness, but sufficiently to awaken reflection, and serve as so many cautions or warnings against law-breaking. I do not say that it is the result of any observation of my own, but I find it asserted that "judges and magistrates are sometimes compelled to punish offenders whom they believe *entirely ignorant* of the law they have violated." Of course, laws against crimes are always promulgated, but it does not follow that, in the remoter parts of the country especially, they are always known; and I think it extremely probable that many a sour and malignant nature would have been checked in his meditated crime, had he been previously made conscious of the detestation with which society regards it and fully acquainted with its consequences in regard to himself.

I fortify what has been said on this subject by the opinion of some of our most eminent judges and jurists.

The Hon. Mr. Justice McCord says as follows:

"I am *firmly convinced* that moral training in the Common Schools would greatly lessen crimes and offences."

The Hon. Mr. Justice Aylwin says:

"As to Common Schools without Moral Instruction, I conceive that it is robbery to the community, not to be thought of in any Christian land."

The Hon. Mr. Justice Badgley says:

"I think that early habits and impressions of the better kind, whatever they may be, are the most lasting, and the tender charities of home, the kindnesses of early life, which all in some degree have experienced, however small that degree may be, are the most ineffaceable, and even in the most desperate subjects exhibit their power—their moral power—in temporarily softening and toning down the most abandoned and depraved. Such feelings predispose for Moral Instruction, to commence upon in the young, and if there is a stand-point at all for any of them, cannot fail to be beneficial in their influence, if properly attended to, &c.

I am very much disposed to believe that criminals rarely turn to the consideration of how their offences may be regarded by the laws at the time of their commission. They know that the law, as regards them, is merely a means of punishment, and whatever may be their original motive for the commission of the crime, their great consideration in success, and it is only after that, that the avoidance of detection follows the fear of punishment."

The Hon. Mr. Justice Day expresses himself as follows:

"With respect to the ignorance of criminals, of the character of their acts, as viewed by the instructed and orderly classes of society, I have no doubt that, in frequent cases, it is very great, perhaps absolute among the children of the vicious. Trained in a course of vice, the moral sense becomes perverted, and the distinction between right and wrong rests chiefly upon the fear of detection and punishment.

I think it is exceptional, even among those whose childhood has not been passed in familiarity with crime and criminals, that they have a perception of the moral evil, the wrong-doing of their acts. They oftener regard themselves as in a state of natural warfare with the law and the more fortunate classes whom it pro-

by silence. Strange and almost unearthly sounds strike the ear of one benighted in the forests of Jamaica. Some of these are the voices of nocturnal birds, the rapid articulations of the nightjars, the monotonous hoot, or shriek, or wail of the owls, the loud impatient screams of the *Aramus*. But besides these, there are some which are produced by reptiles. The gecko creeps stealthy and cat-like from his hollow tree, and utters his harsh cackle; and others lizards are believed to add to the concert of squeaks and cries. And then there come from the depth of the forest-glooms sounds like the snoring of an oppressed sleeper, but louder; or like the groaning and working of a ship's timbers in a heavy gale at sea. These are produced by great tree-frogs, of uncouth form, which love to reside in the sheathing leaves of parasitic plants, always half full of cool water. These reptiles are rarely seen; but the abundance and universality of the sounds, in the lower mountain-woods, prove how numerous they must be. Occasionally I have heard other strange sounds, as, in particular, one lovely night in June, when lodging at a little lone cottage on a mountain-side, in the midst of the woods. About midnight, as I sat at the open window, there came up from every part of the moonlit forest below, with incessant pertinacity, a clear shrill note, so like the voice of a bird, and specially so like that of the solemn solitaire, that it might easily be mistaken for it, but for the inappropriate hour, and the locality. Like that charming bird-voice, it was beautifully trilled or shaken; and like it, the individual voices were not in the same key. Listening to the mingled sounds, I could distinguish two particularly prominent, which seemed to answer each other in quick but regular alternation; and between their notes, there was the difference of exactly a musical tone.

Darwin speaks of the nocturnal sounds at Rio Janeiro:—"After the hotter days, it was delicious to sit quietly in the garden, and watch the evening pass into night. Nature, in these climes, chooses her vocalists from more humble performers than in Europe. A small frog of the genus *Hyla* [*i. e.*, of the family *Hyladæ*, the tree-frogs already alluded to], sits on a blade of grass about an inch above the surface of the water, and sends forth a pleasing chirp; when several are together, they sing in harmony on different notes. . . . Various cicadae and crickets at the same time keep up a ceaseless shrill cry, but which, softened by the distance, is not unpleasant. Every evening, after dark, this great concert commenced; and often have I sat listening to it, until my attention has been drawn away by some curious passing insect."

Edwards, in his very interesting voyage up the Amazon, heard one night a bell-like note, which he eagerly concluded to be the voice of the famed bell-bird. But on asking his Indian attendants what it was that was "gritando," he was told that it was a toad,—"everything that sings by night is a toad!"

I doubt much whether the voice first referred to in the following extract ought not to be referred to the same reptilian agency:—

"During our ride home, [in Tobago,] I was startled by hearing what I fully imagined was the whistle of a steam-engine; but I was informed it was a noise caused by a beetle that is peculiar to Tobago. It is nearly the size of a man's hand, and fixing itself against a tree, it commences a kind of humming noise, which gradually quickens to a whistle, and at length increases in shrillness and intensity, till it almost equals a railroad-whistle. It was so loud that, when standing full twenty yards from the tree where it was in operation, the sound was so shrill, that you had to raise your voice considerably to address your neighbour. The entomological productions of the tropics struck me as being quite as astonishing in size and nature as the botanical or zoological wonders. There is another beetle, called the razor-grinder, that imitates the sound of a knife-grinding machine so exactly, that it is impossible to divest one's self of the belief that one is in reality listening to some 'needy knife-grinder,' who has wandered out to the tropical wilds on spec."

This latter was pretty certainly not a beetle proper, but a *Cicada*, an insect of another order; remarkable for its musical powers, even from the times of classical antiquity. These are doubtless sexual sounds; the serenades of the wooing cavaliers, as Mr Kirby humorously says,—

"Formosam resonare docent Amaryllida sylvas."

(To be continued.)