

EDUCATION.

School Discipline: Its Objects and Methods.

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF INSTRUCTION, BY HOSEA H. LINCOLN, PRINCIPAL OF THE LYMAN-SCHOOL, BOSTON, MASS.

Mr. President, and Ladies, and Gentlemen,—

Having accepted an invitation from the Board of Directors of the American Institute to open the discussion of the theme, "School Discipline: its Objects and Methods," by a paper occupying only thirty minutes, I must be brief in the presentation of my ideas, passing rapidly over those points wherein all agree, in order to argue those features of the subject about which great diversity of opinion exists.

The object of school discipline is to train up children in the way in which they should go; in other words, to make them good men and women; to so train their minds, educate their hearts, and discipline all the faculties of their natures, that they will become, in after years, blessings to themselves and to society. The object of all teachers should be to educate the moral nature of their pupils, as well as to develop their intellectual powers; and, in their efforts to manufacture human character out of human nature, to imitate as far as possible the divine government.

The methods of school discipline are numberless. After a quarter of a century's experience upon different plans and methods, I feel myself a learner still. I am always adding to my magazine of expedients. A lifetime of study, observation, and experience cannot exhaust the possibilities of this subject. When we consider a single child, his hereditary nature, his home education,—received, it may be, under antagonistic parental influences,—his propensities, faculties, disposition, tastes, habits, will, his out-door surroundings; then multiply these by a hundred or a thousand, bring them together into a school; their wills begin to cross, their disposition to clash, their propensities to project—what complexity is here! Who can bring order out of this chaos? who can so mould and guide and govern and direct that these wills shall be rightly disciplined, these dispositions harmonized, and these propensities turned in the right direction? Where is the pilot that can steer his barque safely and surely through all these conflicting waves and cross seas, when he is liable at any moment to have a parental flow strike him aback, or the popular breeze fail him in his hour of need? Under the most auspicious circumstances, is not the teacher's task a difficult one? What methods shall he adopt to round off the projections and irregularities of his pupils' natures, and make all things move smoothly and harmoniously? His action upon them must be as constant, as gentle, as forcible, as unyielding, as the action of the water upon the rocks and pebbles of the sea-shore.

A teacher's character, his self-possession, watchfulness, general bearing, expression of the eye, tone of the voice, his sympathy, patience, cheerfulness, charity, are all effective instruments of discipline. He should be just; if possible, pre-eminently just; reasonable in all requirements; never arbitrary, but always decided; gentle, but unyielding; firm but mild: in short the more of the Christian virtues he can embody, the better disciplinarian he becomes.

Love should be the main element in the discipline of every school. A teacher who cannot secure the affections of a very large majority of his pupils, is unworthy, in my estimation, of his position. There always will be some, however, in particular localities, who cannot in a limited time, under the adverse influences of the home and the street, be brought into subjection to the law of love. Many children in our midst are taught by their parents to smoke, chew, and drink; to lie, steal, swear, and bear false witness. An ancient philosopher, on being told that a

notoriously bad individual had been speaking well of him, asked, "What *ill* have I done?" evidently considering praise from such a source censure, and censure praise. When you find the vicious and morally depraved, as a class, praising their teacher, be assured that he is neglecting his duty towards them. When rowdies love policemen, culprits prisons, when evil good, and Satan Christ;—then will the vicious, self-willed youth, love the restraints of the school-room. Yet I have known teachers blamed for not securing at once the affections of all of this class. They cannot do this without compromising the truth and their own consciences. How, then, are these malicious, self-willed children to be governed in a school? Must the divine law of love in their case be suspended? By no means. Let us rather imitate it, if we can, and not ignore the element of *force* inherent in it. If we make the way of transgressors easy, we are not co-workers with God. While I fully believe in the force of love, I do not believe in the love of force for its own sake. Government implies law; law implies penalty for its violation.

Witness the operation of the divine law, whose maker, God, is love. Every law that He has made,—physical, mental, moral or spiritual,—if violated, brings its appropriate penalty; until by repeated suffering, for continued violation, we are forced, or, if you please, forcibly drawn into obedience. Some appear not to recognize any element of coercion in love; yet this principle in the divine economy is ever present, ever active. Love, rightly understood, is the only method requisite in the discipline of a school. All the inhabitants of the globe are at school; this earth is our school-house, and God our teacher. He disciplines us all in love! But what are its elements?—wisdom, justice, judgment, mercy, power,—all the attributes of the Deity are concentrated in his love. His affection for his offspring never degenerates into mere fondness. He always keeps in view the highest good of his children. He sees the future in the present; the end from the beginning. His love is always wise; his wisdom always loving. He is just, as well as merciful; even when he afflicts with trials, physical pain, and mental suffering, his love is ever active. "Whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." Physical pain brought back the prodigal to his father's arms, and Christ himself was made "perfect through sufferings."

Some, and they seem at this time to be many, do not appear to see any of the principle of love in the chastisement of refractory pupils.

As all parents and teachers agree that kindness, persuasion, affection are the most effective elements in school discipline, but differ in regard to compulsion, let me, in the time remaining, confine myself mainly to the discussion of the topic,—*The necessity of physical force as a method of discipline in our schools.*

The very life of our nation has been so recently saved by force, that all, it would seem, should recognize its importance in a government; if in the government of a *nation* or *state*, why not in a *school*? For are not all our schools miniature republics? Should not rebels in schools, if they cannot be otherwise subdued, be forced to obey? Would the community long permit wild impulses, untamed passions, and undisciplined wills, to be let out upon society, when, by the exercise of a little judicious force, these impulses could be tamed, these passions checked, and these wills guided?

Why is it that so many parents permit "the expedition of their violent love to outrun the pauser reason" upon this subject? Three causes might be mentioned:—

- 1st. An unwise fondness for their children.
- 2d. A lack of confidence in teachers.
- 3d. Ignorance of the trials and perplexities to which teachers are subjected.

I contend that none but teachers are competent to decide whether physical coercion can be wholly dispensed with in their schools. The power and right to use it should always be in their hands; having this power and right, the necessity for its use is often prevented. Experience is a powerful educator. Let