

THE BROKEN PEN-KNIFE.

ONE of the earliest propensities of children is graphically and affectingly described by the Psalmist, when he says of the wicked, "They go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies." That this saying is true respecting children generally, is too apparent to require any further proof than that which a close and attentive observation will supply. The cause of this almost universal proneness to depart from truth, may not only be resolved into the depraved nature which is the sad inheritance of our race, but to criminal inattention on the one hand, and an improper course of treatment on the other. Some persons, to whom the important trust of training children is committed, evince so much indifference to their moral developments, as almost to lead to the conclusion that their own perceptions of right and wrong are fearfully obtuse. They will detect a child in a downright falsehood, and yet make no effort to enlighten the judgment, or cultivate the conscience. Nay, the vapid reproof which they administer promotes the growth of, instead of eradicating the evil. Just as Eli, when the enormity of his wicked sons had convulsed the nation, both in its civil and ecclesiastical relations, calmly said, "Why ye do such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people; nay, my sons, for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress." How ineffectual this tame remonstrance was, and the light in which it was received by the Divine Being, the subsequent history discloses.

Of all the noxious weeds which grow in the heart, lying is the rankest, strikes its root the deepest, is the most fructuous, lurks in the corrupt soil longest, and is the most fatal in its influences and consequences; and yet, by multitudes who sustain the parental relation, the earliest symptoms of this evil are unheeded. Falsehood and cunning are sometimes nurtured by an approving smile, because they display a quickness of parts and a precocity of wit. This the child observes with delight, and it serves as food for the unfledged vulture which already begins to prey upon its vitals.

But one of the most ordinary provocatives to this evil will be found perhaps in the severe and indiscriminate reproof and punishment with which all faults or inadvertences in childhood are visited. It is a difficult matter for persons who have not made the mind a subject of close study and investigation, to distinguish between a vicious and a thoughtless action; and a child, by such persons, is likely to be punished for a misfortune as for a crime. Where children are treated harshly alike for misfortunes or crimes, evasion or direct falsehood will readily suggest its end to secure them from future punishment. Success in the first instance will embolden the young practitioner to proceed, till lying, which appeared at first the act of necessity, will be formed into a habit, and character destroyed.

Exaggeration of real facts and disproportionate chastisement will be attended with the like fatal results. There are some good, but unwise parents, who hope to prevent the repetition of a fault in their children by exhausting their vocabulary of strong terms to describe its ill qualities, and of course to prepare the delinquent for commensurate punishment and disgrace. The tendency of this treatment is to destroy, in the mind of a child, every just notion of the degrees of crime, which must be the most disastrous in its results. If, for instance, a painter should make the same disposition of his colours and shades when he would represent to our view the passing storm of summer, and the black, vaporous mountains which shot forth their sulphureous streams on devoted Egypt in the infliction of one of her most furious plagues, what should we think either of his skill or his judgment?

Suspicion may not improperly be ranked amongst

the provocatives to the vice of lying in children. An unsullied reputation is one of the strongest safeguards of virtue; whereas, a defect in the former will not unfrequently prove fatal to the latter. If you injure the sensibilities of a child by suspecting the integrity of his character, you inflict an irreparable injury upon him for life. He feels that he stands before you, and in his own sight, a degraded creature; and whether for the future he speaks truth or falsehood, is a matter of comparative indifference to him. He may even choose falsehood, as a weapon by which he may avenge the insult which he has received. A child should always be treated with confidence, and be believed in the absence of direct evidence to convict him of falsehood. And even when circumstances may create a suspicion, it should never be displayed, till the facts are obtained which will render conviction certain. This generous course of conduct would exhibit lying in its true character, and impress the youthful mind with proper feelings of disgust.

Extreme sensibility and self-esteem may in many cases conduce to the vice of lying, and, wherever developed, requires the most careful and judicious treatment. A desire to maintain its hold on the affections of beloved parents may induce a child of acute sensibility to shrink from making known an action which it fears will shake their confidence if not impair their love; and in this struggle between duty and fear evasion too often proffers its specious services, and, alas! is but too often employed. In such cases parents should be very careful that they do not foster a morbid sensibility, by dwelling too much, in the presence of such a child, upon disappointed hopes, wicked children, and broken-hearted mothers, &c., which may do well in some cases, but not in this. They should rather describe, in touching and affecting language, the confidence which should be maintained between parents and children, the pleasure which parents feel when they are treated frankly by their children, that this frankness (whatever be the character of the disclosure) tends rather to increase than diminish their respect, affection, &c. Such treatment, it is presumed, would save many interesting and promising children from ruin.

The above reflections were suggested by an accident which has furnished this paper with a title. The writer was visiting a friend, when his little son, a sweet and interesting child, about two years old, threw himself into his father's arms, and said, "Pa, I have broken your pen-knife." It would be worth, to a mother's heart, a thousand volumes written on parental obligations, if the writer possessed those graphic powers enjoyed by some highly gifted persons, who can make their pictures breathe and speak. It was a scene never to be forgotten. How often has the mind reverted to it with sensations much easier conceived than described! The father was seated in his chair, his intelligent countenance lighted up with satisfaction and gratitude—the little boy in his arms, and his dark, expressive eyes beaming confidence, yet sorrow. "I have broken your pen-knife, Pa," repeated the child; and then, with touching simplicity, told how the accident occurred. It was an accident, the father so understood it, and so treated it. This was right. It strengthened the confidence of the child, whilst his candour drew him nearer to his father's heart. Now, had his parent, like many unthinking individuals, scolded and severely punished his child, he would not only have committed an act of gross injustice, but in all probability have seriously injured his child. Making some observations upon that which so deeply interested me, I found that the father's conduct was not an accident; it was part of a well digested plan of government which he had long and successfully pursued.

It is to be hoped that the few hints furnished by this paper will awaken the attention of parents to the in-

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