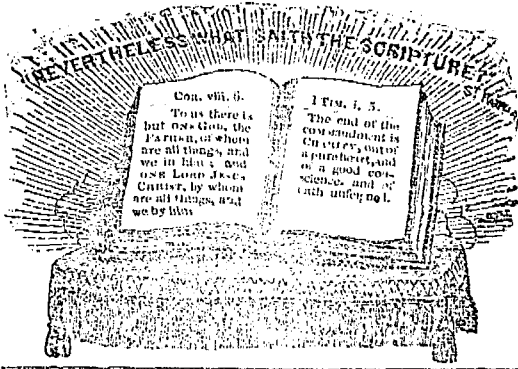


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## THE TRUE EDUCATION.

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The true education is the religious education.

It is this which acts upon the mind with reference to the direct object for which God created it. It is this which will lead the mind to the true happiness of life,—to the happiness of virtue, which is superior to outward misfortunes. It is this which best fits the individual for society, and will enable him to do good among his fellow-creatures. It is this which will prepare him both for the life which now is and that which is to come.

The true education, then, is the religious education; and every other kind of education should have reference to this, and act through and upon it. Others are good in their respective places, but this is good in all places; and its true value, and its beneficial influence upon the various faculties of the mind, are not yet fully understood.

The religious principle should guide and govern the intellect. The religious principle should be the first developed; for it will quicken the mental powers, check the passions, and keep the proper balance of character, without which a mind is ever liable to be misled.

The religious education, then, should be looked upon as the most important, by every parent and teacher. With it, all other education is good; without it, all is empty.

But it may be asked, What is religious education?—what do we mean by it? It is giving a just sense of duty. It is opening the eyes of the soul to the great purpose of life. It is awakening a love for truth. It is teaching a child to govern his mind aright, and search for the good. It is not giving him words so much as thoughts; not mere maxims, but living principles; not teaching him to be honest because honesty is the best policy, but to be honest because to be honest is right. It is teaching him to love the good, for the sake of the good; to be virtuous in his actions, because he is so in his heart; to have a supreme love for God, not from fear, but from the love of his perfect character.

We have thus seen, that the true education is the religious, and that the religious education is that which teaches purity, love, and devotion.

Now, are children capable of receiving such instruction? Are they prepared for it?

I believe they are. I believe that children may possess a true Christian spirit, that they may live true Christian lives, and that they may feel the force of great Christian truths. In order to see whether this be so, let us look at the nature of the child, and the nature of religion, and see how far they correspond. What is necessary to make a Christian? Love, Faith, and Spirituality.

Now let us look into the mind of a child, and see if it have these elements of character. I believe it has, in a greater degree than the adult. I say the elements. They are not, it is true, yet formed into any systematic character; but the elements of Love, and Faith, and Spirituality are, it seems to me, among the peculiar characteristics of childhood.

Certainly love dwells in the mind of a child. All children love, and love to be loved,—and their love is ever active. We do not say that the child loves alone what is good; it is sufficient to say that it loves, and that it is capable of loving good,—and if it does not always do so,

there is the more necessity of proper instruction. It can love, and does love, and misanthropy in a child was never heard of. Love is the prime element of its nature,—the very life of its infant being; and in this we have one of the most necessary elements of religion.

Faith grows out of love; and a child has as much faith as it has love. A child never mistrusts till disappointment and deception have taught it to do so. A child does not naturally doubt. Credulity is proverbial in children. It is for men to be skeptics; children never are. Gain a child's love, and you will see his faith; and here is another element of the Christian character.

But further. A child not only has love and faith, but has also, in a remarkable degree, the elements of the spiritual. It has a love for the unseen, and a faith in it. Children are always, or almost always, fond of the supernatural. Who can read fairy tales like a child? Who can believe the tales of the Arabian Nights like a child? Who can tremble at a ghost-story like a child? Who can conjure up spirits in the dark like a child? And all these show that it has the elements of the spiritual; for the love of the marvellous arises in the child from that part of its nature, which, wisely directed, would lead to the spiritual. It has a love for the unseen, and a belief in the unknown. There is a spirit within the child which craves something superior to the senses. There is a sublime spiritual instinct, which God has implanted in its very nature. Perhaps no child, of itself, ever doubted that Daniel was preserved in the lion's den, or that the waters of the Red Sea were divided by the rod of Moses. A child feels that there is an unseen and omnipotent power always at work. The unfolding of a leaf is a marvel; in it the wonderful workmanship of God is visible, and through it His presence is felt. He feels that God could cause Lazarus to rise from the dead, as easily as he causes a tree to blossom in spring. The elements of the spiritual nature are within him, and he has spiritual faith. Here, then, we see that the elements of love, faith, and spirituality,—the elements of mind necessary to form a religious character,—exist in the child.

It may be asked,—But can they understand? Perhaps they cannot; and perhaps an adult cannot. It is one thing to understand, and another to have a rational faith. We cannot comprehend limitless space, but we may believe in it; and it is easier to believe in it than not to believe in it. We can believe in the spiritual, the mysterious and the infinite, as firmly and as rationally as if we could grasp them with the understanding. We have a consciousness within which makes us more than understand;—we know. We believe, because we cannot help believing. The sun may be reflected in a drop of dew; so within the child may shine the image of the Eternal, and his young mind may comprehend, though in a less degree, the same truths which are cherished by the archangels.

There are laws of nature, and laws of spirit. The one is seen, and the other is felt; and the one is as reasonable as the other; and the child knows this as well as the adult. Eternal truth and the eternal principle in the soul have a resemblance; and the great I AM, that dwells in the soul of the child, bears witness to the truth. For instance, there is no more important point in religion than the belief in the omnipresence of

God; and the child may feel this, as well as the philosopher, for every philosopher is imperfect, and may reason partly upon false premises, while the child goes to the truth at once. It has an innate consciousness given it by God himself,—which is the highest kind of reason, darting as it does from cause to effect, and leaping from finite to infinite. Perhaps the advanced Christian, in his devotion, does not feel the immediate presence of Deity more sensibly than a child; and we may all remember, when we repeat the Lord's prayer at our mother's knee, that our mother seemed scarce nearer to us than the Father of all.

We hear parents and others frequently remark, that it is difficult to talk with a child upon spiritual subjects. We cannot believe that the difficulty rests with the child. Let a person who would express his views on such subjects have spiritualized his own thoughts, and feel within himself what he wishes to express, and the child will soon sympathize with his views. The elements of a child's nature are similar to those of the adult; and it has this advantage,—it has not been long enough in the world to have formed so many material associations, and therefore it can feel more sympathy in the spiritual world than in distant countries of the material world. It will understand more about heaven, than it does about China or Japan; and feel the existence of angels as more probable than the existence of Hottentots. I believe that it is entirely a mistake, that children cannot feel an interest in spiritual things. The difficulty is that they are seldom talked to on such subjects, in a simple and spiritual way.

I will mention a little fact,—which is only one out of many I have gathered from intercourse with children. It will serve to illustrate the thoughts that naturally spring up in the minds of the young. Several weeks since, I saw two boys looking at the figure of a child with his hands and feet raised upwards. I asked them what they had been thinking of while they looked at it. At first they hung down their heads, and were silent; but when I asked them again, the oldest answered,—“I thought he wanted to go up, and could not.” I then asked the other; and he said,—“I thought he was looking up, and waiting for the angels to come down and take him.” An adult would probably have said, it was a stand to set a lamp on,—which was in fact the case.

With regard to religious feelings, I have known many children who have exhibited them in a great degree; who at the point of death have been willing to die, and have talked of heaven with delight, I knew one who requested that her companions might be gathered about her bed; and she there divided among them her playthings, and calmly told them of her trust in God, and her willingness to depart. I knew another little girl, whose parents were wretchedly poor, and whose father was intemperate and profane. One day, when he was swearing, the little girl went up to him with an imploring look, and said,—“O! don't speak such words; our Father in heaven won't love you if you do!” Another day, when he talked so, the little creature knelt silently down in a corner, and prayed.

It may now be asked,—If children have this turn of mind, and these elements of character, and are thus capable of religious knowledge, and religious feeling, why do they not show more of

it? I answer,—they are young; and while young, God has made them to be taught, and they are too generally taught wrong; their spiritual nature is neglected,—their religious character left for a future time, and there is too frequently a false system in their instruction.

Children are taught to act from low motives;—to fear punishment, rather than wrong; to love praise, rather than virtue; and thus rather to appear, than to be, good. They are injured both by precept and example; not intentionally, but through carelessness and thoughtlessness. A Christian visitor calls; and the first thing is to pamper the vanity of the child, and lead it to fix its mind on dress or outward show.

Children have quick perceptions. They often know what is going on in the mind of another. The father says,—“My boy, love your Bible,” and the boy sees the father read a newspaper with twice the avidity that he ever saw him read the word of God. What is the result? The example of the parent goes farther than the precept. The father says,—“My son, love prayer;” but he never sees the father at family worship; he never knows him to pray. What is the result? The example of the parent goes farther than his precept. The parent says,—“Pray with reverence;” but during the time of prayer, in the house of worship, he lounges thoughtlessly, and seems to feel little interest in that solemn service. What is the result? This example, like the others sinks deep,—and the example outweighs the precept.

Is it still asked,—If children have the elements of love, faith, and spirituality, and are capable of acquiring religious character, why do they not show more of it? I point to things as they are;—they will answer. I point even to Christian parents; they will show. Do they not generally treat the spiritual nature of the child with neglect? Do they not think more of its outward, than of its religious condition? Do they not think more how it will appear in the opinion of men, than in the opinion of God? Let these questions be fairly answered, and I think the whole matter will be explained. For my own part, considering the counteracting influences of society, I wonder that children are so spiritual as they are. In my intercourse with the children of the vicious poor, I have often seen an artlessness and purity of character, which has surprised me,—an artlessness, perhaps greater than among many children of better parents; and this has convinced me that there must be something wrong, at the very root of domestic religious instruction, in many Christian families. The truth is, a child learns both by seeing and hearing; and if the parent is not consistent, the inconsistency works in the heart of the child, till it doubts whether much of virtue is not mere talk. He fathoms the depth of their morality; and finds it shallow; and this shallowness serves to make him skeptical with regard to all morality,—and he thus becomes blind to the real beauty of holiness. The parent, then, should have a unity of character,—a singleness of purpose. His profession and his practice should never clash. The virtues which he wishes the child to acquire, should shine forth in his own example.

MORAL EVIL is the only thing in God's creation of which it is decreed that the more we are familiar with it, the less shall we know of it.—J. Martineau.