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If a stranger to this country were asked to name what he considered to be the salient and more apparent characteristic of the youth of this continent, he would in all probability answer, "a want of reverence." It is a tempting word of which to attempt a definition; but it is a difficult one. We shall for the present merely endeavor to point out in outline the sources of this characteristic.

Its cradle is the family. In the manner of treatment and general up-bringing of children by their parents does it find its birth. It is afterwards nurtured and matured by all those influences inseparable from certain forms of democracy.

Families upon this side of the Atlantic are, as a rule, leaving out of consideration for the present the very lowest classes, as also the French element, proverbially small. This is indisputable. The result is children are not early accustomed to that restraint which must necessarily obtain where many minds and bodies have to be governed and provided for by two individuals and, in many cases, a limited income. Self-control, and the suppression of selfishness are not inculcated and enforced with that rigor which in different circumstances we find to be so beneficial a training. As a consequence, the authority of the parent is not as strictly upheld as in older countries and in larger families it is upheld. They are less looked up to, less respected, less frequently taken into confidence, and still less frequently applied to for sympathy or advice. In a word, their superiority is not recognized to its full extent.

Brought up in this manner, children are not amenable to governance. Since home rule was lax, they deem all other rule must be likewise; and only when it is too late to remedy the tendency, do they discover that much is lost and little, if anything, gained by the free assertion of their own will in defiance of that of their guiders and instructors.

Many causes operate in the same direction. Of these, virtual disregard of class distinctions is one of the most powerful. It tends to level individuals. It eliminates superiority, intellectual as much as social; and without superiority reverence cannot exist. It is essential to a reverential spirit, that we should perceive in the object of our reverence—whether that object be a person, a work, or a period of time,—a certain quality which is above us and which we do not possess. All that tends to keep this out of view is prejudicial to that recognition of the amenability of the inferior to the superior, which is of the essence of a reverential and submissive frame of mind.

True, an extreme of one is as much to be deprecated as an extreme of the other. But few will hesitate to allow that we are upon this continent far from preserving the happy mean between arrogance and obsequiousness. We are, of course, speaking generally. It needs but to have been brought in contact with the boys and girls of different nations, or of any one nation separated from us by the ocean, to see that a decided difference there really exists, and to see also that our boys and girls have passed beyond the right and proper mean. Nor need we go even thus far. Our reading will easily give us numerous examples of such difference—a topic which it would be highly interesting to pursue.

Some sort of precocity—whether advantageous or otherwise—has often been pointed out as distinguishing the cis-Atlantic youth from that of the Old World. It is difficult to determine whether this is a cause or a result of that want of reverence which they equally prominently possess. It is probably the latter. But whether or not such be the case, the fact that such precocity is accustomed to be fostered rather than frowned upon, is no small factor in adding appreciably to the sum total of assurance which so decidedly marks the child of the New World.

Having, then, imbibed these principles at home, and meeting with nothing that tends to soften or eliminate them, it is not to be wondered at that children conspicuously give vent to them in the school room. Irreverence here shows itself under various disguises. Flippancy, heedlessness, forwardness, restiveness under restraint, presumption, insubordination. It is in these disguises that the teacher has to cope with it, and perhaps here he finds his hardest task. It seems inbred. It is intangible; not to be openly opposed. It rarely reveals its own self. It appears in the shape of general demeanor oftener than in the shape of specific and punishable faults.

How properly to oppose it is no easy question to which to find a full and satisfactory answer. It must be dealt with as it arises, and according to the form it then takes on. Above all, the teacher first must show himself worthy of the reverence which he is trying to evoke, and secondly by the cultivation of this in himself, set an example to those in whom he is attempting to instil such a spirit. If he himself is incapable of it, he cannot expect those under him to possess it. This is perhaps true of all teaching; it is especially true of the teaching we are now discussing.

But suppose the master himself is one of those in whom pernicious home training flattered precocity, and crude democracy

have left their taint! Can he free himself in later years from its effects? We think, yes. Growing years show us more and more that there are all around us persons, objects, periods, before which it is impossible to assume any attitude but that of veneration and respect. Whatever be our literary, social, political, or religious principles, we can ever find that which to follow and admire. And perceiving this, it is in our power to foster and encourage this spirit, and to endeavor to do the same with the children under our guidance and control.

If, however, we have once ourselves thoroughly imbibed a truly reverential spirit, we shall be far better able to inspire them with the same, even if the decided want of this in our pupils is consequently more acutely felt. And is it not a duty we owe to them? one of the chief of the duties we owe to them? It is the basis of many a virtue, as the want of it is the basis of many a vice. Its existence or non-existence is often an index to character, from the very fact, perhaps, that it underlies so many qualities. Its effects, when it exists, are lasting; not easily eradicated or blunted. It is stronger in the truly superior than it is in those of smaller mental calibre. It may be taken as a criterion of worth, both intellectual and moral. It is a measure of excellence.

These facts can gradually be taught. Put before children high ideals; show them their own inferiority, and the immeasurable distance that lies between them and such ideals, and we shall have achieved much—indeed, we may confidently hope that in process of time we shall succeed in eradicating the ill effects of previous training and influences, and shall truly inspire them with a love of all that is beautiful and good, both in great men and in their creations.

And will not this tend to bring about a change in the character of our youth? a change decidedly for the better? It should do so; it cannot but do so. And not only in the character of our youth, but in that of the nation at large.

Why should we not look forward confidently to such a consummation? It is by no means too vast and lofty an end at which to aim. It is surely within our powers. Teachers have not, perhaps, yet recognized the importance of their functions in the community. This inculcation of reverence is one part of those functions than which few are of more vital import.

We will hope that these few words will not be thrown away in the effort to spur teachers to paying attention to this part also of their functions.