

*Special Papers.*

## THE TEACHING OF MORALS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

WHAT AND HOW?

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THE highest bodily development is that which cares for each and every part in its proper proportion. If a single organ is omitted the whole body suffers. Going one step higher, we consider it supreme folly to care for the body and neglect the mind; to train that which is only animal at the expense of the intellectual. But the supremest folly must ever be that which caring for body and mind both, neglects that which is spiritual and eternal. A rude block of marble may be chiseled never so skilfully into some matchless human form and it will be marble still, cold and lifeless. So with each one of us, mind and body may be developed, but it will be the external shaping; we need to have that which is immortal within us awakened and kindled into new life and vigor before any of us can really be said to live. It is equally clear that in childhood and youth this moral training should be commenced. This is the formative period in which foundations for the whole future are being laid. As you can train the sapling into almost any shape, making the tree either graceful or unsightly, so you can mould a child into a saint or a demon. Lord Shaftsbury gives as the result of his observation that all crime commences between eight and sixteen, and if the child lives a correct life to the age of twenty, the chances of his continuing to do so are as forty-nine to one. This, however, is too elementary for such an audience. But I fear sometimes that we do not recognize how important a factor that part of the young life which is spent in school is in its moral influence upon many of our children. We all know what some of the homes are from which these children come. Unholiness and impurity are there, expressing itself in word and act. With whole families crowded together into one or two rooms, many of these children know nothing of what we call the proprieties of life. Must I not say that many of them know only that which is indecent?

I visited a primary school recently, situated in a neighbourhood with homes similar to those which I have just described, and the vile pictures and words upon the outbuildings told all too plainly what the homes were from which these children came. Unless they have some training in school of another kind they will grow up in ignorance of all that which is purest, and sweetest, and noblest. The education which the state gives in such cases only increases the power to do evil, if we have quickened their intellects without touching their moral natures. When I was a lad we were accustomed to play the game of "Follow Your Leader." Whatever the first boy did, however grotesque, each boy who followed after must do likewise. I have thought often, lately, that life was a great game of follow your leader. Silently, yet steadily, we follow another. The boy imitates the father; he talks, he even walks like him. The girl imitates the mother, and, this is the part of the truth we are emphasizing to-day, *the scholar, the teacher*. It is just because of this truth that the wise framers of our Massachusetts laws have said: "It shall be the duty of the teachers to use their best endeavours to impress upon the minds of the youth committed to their care and instruction the principles of piety, justice, and a sacred regard to truth, love to their country, humanity and universal benevolence, sobriety, industry, frugality, chastity, moderation, temperance, and those other virtues which are the ornament of human society and the basis upon which a republican constitution is founded."

It is the same truth that has led the schools in twenty states to give moral instruction, and in nine more, both moral and religious. From these general truths, is it not proper to say specifically, in answer to the "What," that every teacher ought, therefore, to try:

1. *To inspire all his scholars with some noble purpose in life.* Many of our young people get nowhere in particular, for they are aiming at nothing in particular. They do not care, and it is impossible to steer a ship in a calm. We need to give our youth a worthy impulse and help them to keep it steadily in view. We need, in this supremely worldly age, to inspire them with the thought

that the great thing to strive for is not money or fame, but character. "It is not what a man has, but what he is, that makes the man." Try to lead them not only above their appetites and passions, but above all selfishness and meanness as well. Who wants to live in the cellar in the darkness, when he can dwell in the sunshine? Teach them not to be willing to live in the basement of their animal natures, but to come up where God's truth is supreme. Not to play life, but to live for something noble.

2. *Teach them Fidelity, and that whatever they do shall be done thoroughly and faithfully.* Let them have some conscience in all they do, and never allow themselves to be shiftless. Teach them to work so they can have self-respect and never be eye servants. Teach them to be true to themselves, for if they are not they will find their own consciences very troublesome travelling companions all through the journey. Endeavour to get out of their heads the foolish notion that manual labor is not as honorable as some other kinds. So many of our young men want work that is clean and nice and refined, and many a good mechanic is spoiled to make a poor clerk. A faithful mechanic is in as honorable a position as any man, and far more so than a shiftless, indifferent clerk. Teach that there is not the slightest chance in the world for the boy or girl who wants a "soft job," and whose principal thought is to get the most pay for the least work. Such scholars should be made to see that the softest spot, while they hold these ideas, is under their hats!

3. *Try to guide them in their Reading.* It is a passion with most of our young people to read, and the passion can be a great blessing if only guided aright. Their minds are like the prepared plate of the photographer, ready to seize and hold every impression, and it is possible to guide them. Not long since a young lad went to our public library, saying to the young lady in charge that he had just read "Robert Elsmere," and thought it was the driest thing he had ever read, and that he wanted now a real "blood and thunder novel!" But the lady dissuaded him from it, and led him to take a book on history, which he reported in a few days he had read with great pleasure. To show the necessity of this watchfulness a friend showed me a paper which was being distributed at five o'clock in the afternoon, on one of the principal thoroughfares of Boston. The title had rather a semi-religious look, and he put it innocently into his pocket, and laid it on the table when he reached home. Providentially, however, before his boy had seen more than the title he looked it over himself and found it a vile, indecent sheet. A young lady riding in the cars was offered, by a young man, a book which, when she told the title to her friends, they advised her that it was one of the vilest ever written. The devil is busy circulating such literature. Let us not permit him to conquer because of our silence. Fill a measure full of wheat and there will be no room for chaff. There is an old fable, that Satan, seeking for victims, saw one summer's day, a beautiful girl seated in the open door of a cottage, and he said, "I will creep into her mind and defile her." But as he silently drew near, he heard her singing a beautiful hymn. With a howl of rage, he hurried away, saying, "That place is all occupied." Encourage the young to read, from the first, only that which is good, and there will be no place in their hearts for the evil.

4. *Put them on their guard with regard to their companionships.* Mrs. Browning once said to Charles Kingsley, "What is the secret of your life? Tell me, that I may make mine beautiful, too." After a moment's pause, he replied, "I had a friend." It is impossible to overestimate the importance of these friends. I have seen young men lifted and inspired to the noblest things because they have chosen for their intimate associates, those who were pure and good; and I have seen young men ruined who began the downward road by making false choices of companionships. Warn those in whom you are interested, to refuse to keep company with those who tell the questionable story and who speak slightly of that which is pure and innocent. Teach them to avoid such companions as they would the pestilence. As a chemist can tell you, from one drop of blood, that there is poison in the veins; as a chip will tell the current of a stream, so show them that in such associates there are the beginnings of evil which will destroy any life.

5. *Teach them to be temperate and pure.* In the last few years there has been so much interest taken in temperance that hardly any young person can have failed to have had some knowledge of the awful peril in the use of alcohol. It is a poison and ought to be marked with a skull and cross-bones like other poisons. But the perils of impurity are not so often emphasized. I do not think we should hesitate to be plain and direct. When I was in the English High school, under Thomas Sherwin, he did not hesitate to warn us against secret sin. Why should we let the devil do all the plain teaching,—and a little thought will show us how this may be done. It is said of General Grant, that seated one day among a number of officers, a general of high rank rushed in, saying, "Boys, I've got such a good story to tell you! There are no ladies present I believe?" "No, but there are gentlemen present," was the curt reply of Grant, and the story was not told. The world is full of such facts and incidents, which can be used, if the teacher desires to do it, to press home this truth. Teach them to avoid looking at the indecent pictures which sometimes appear in our comic papers and certainly line the theatre boards posted in our streets. Show them that it is the most manly and womanly thing to "turn away from evil," and never try to "face it down." Let them beware of harboring impure thoughts, for they are like the spark in the hold of a ship, it will work its way right and left until there is a bed of fire under one's feet, and destruction is at hand.

II. With regard to the second part of the question, "How," I have but little to say in the presence of expert teachers. But I remember asking a boy once about a certain study and he replied: "The time spent on that does not amount to much, for the teachers do not care anything about it." This leads me to say, that in the subject before us, of all others, it should be urged with *hearty earnestness* or it will make no impression. A teacher must make his words a part of his own being in order to make them tell for good. Why does one man succeed and another of equal talent fail utterly? Because one is thoroughly in earnest and the other is not. The Indians nicknamed General Sheridan, a few years ago, as "The little man that means business." The late Doctor Bellows, of New York, had a great power over an audience. One day, after an address was ended, a gentleman said to him: "O Doctor, I wish I had your inspiration!" "Inspiration," he replied, "it isn't inspiration at all, it is perspiration." It is the teacher who puts his whole soul into his teaching always that writes his own enthusiastic words upon and into the lives of those who gather around him. But this, I think, is especially true in teaching morals, and where the scholar must be made to feel that the teaching is not perfunctory, but out of the heart. The teacher of history, for instance, can easily, if he will, show how the nation that does righteousness is sure to prosper, and when it becomes corrupt it is weakened and perishes. How can one teach history and leave God out? you leave out the chief factor. Those who have heard Henry A. Clapp lecture on Shakespeare, remember how clearly he points out that the great dramatist, in all his plays, encourages virtue and brings disgrace upon vice, bringing out so clearly that the sin of all sins is to do evil and then make light of it. All such, I am sure, will see how easily one can teach history and morality together if he is only in earnest about it.

Finally, may I say, with all frankness, that no one can teach morals who is himself conscious of any immorality of his own. You can never teach another what you do not know thoroughly yourself. An old farmer, who had been driving people about for two months during the summer vacation, had often seen them point to the sunset painted on the western sky and say: "Oh, how beautiful!" Finally he was heard to exclaim, "They have been talking this way all summer about nothing but one of our pink-and-yaller sunsets!" If we see no beauty in that which is pure and holy and sweet ourselves, be very sure we cannot make any one else see any.

I feel more at liberty to say this, because of the high character of most of the gentlemen who are masters and principals in our various schools. But it is a good thought, of which we may all be frequently reminded, that if we want to have the fullest respect of those committed to our care, it must come, not because of any authority we may have in virtue of our office, but because of what we are.