

Special Papers.

*THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTER BY ORDINARY SCHOOL EXERCISES.

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COMENIUS has said: "The end of all education is the development of character." Many teachers take exception to this proposition, but see no objection to the more commonly stated one: "Education is the harmonious development of the whole man, physical, intellectual and moral." This latter expression of a great truth is taught in every book on the principles of education, in every training school for teachers, in every educational paper, at every teachers' meeting, until all teachers assent to it, and few believe it. For mark you, these two propositions are identical. Character is what a man is, character is the whole man; hence when you assent to the common definition, "Education is the development of the whole man," you virtually assent to that stated by Comenius, "The end of all education is the development of character." You assent to it, but do you believe it? I should like to feel that the members of this body, representing the foremost teachers in the Province, do believe (by live—live by) this great principle. I should like to feel that you keep constantly before your minds, day by day, that the end, the one great purpose, of all your work in school is the development of the character of your pupils. If you have that single purpose you ought to love one another very dearly; it ought to be a very strong bond of union; for you are probably about the only ones in Ontario. You ought to form a society for the dissemination of your doctrine. Listen: If you really have that conception of your work, you have the noblest calling entrusted to a human being. No minister of the Gospel has such opportunities for doing good as a teacher with this high, consecrated ideal of his work.

It has often occurred to me that with many teachers the end of all education is the passing of examinations. In our Public schools, the end, the one purpose kept constantly in view by teachers and diligent pupils, is the promotion examinations from grade to grade; in the fourth class the end is the High school entrance examination; in the High school the end is the examination for teachers' certificates or university matriculation; in the College, with some professors and not a few students, the end is graduation. Now, do not suppose I quarrel with examinations, they are necessary; but unless they can be made to measure power developed, they should not be the end of our work.

Character, the sum of all the elements and qualities that make up the man. How is it developed? Look at yonder tree; of what does it consist? One says, "Of roots, and stem, and leaves." Another says, "So many pounds of carbon, so many pounds of oxygen, so many of hydrogen, so many of nitrogen," etc., etc. But yet another who has looked deeper, says, "That tree, as it now stands, is the resultant of every particle of soil taken up by its roots, of every drop of rain and dew that has ever fallen upon it, of every particle of air taken in by its lungs, of every ray of light and heat that has come in contact with it; nay, more, the strength of its fibre partakes of the strength of every breeze that has ever blown upon it." That is the tree as we now see it. Nothing has ever been lost. Just so with a man. He is not only the resultant of every particle of food and drink taken into the body under right conditions, of every breath of air, warm and light, or dark and cold, but there is in him now the resultant of every action performed, nay, more than that, of every thought conceived by his mind. Nothing has ever been lost in the formation of that character. Listen: Heaven has no recording angel, has no need of one. Man writes the record of his life in minutest detail upon his character, his soul, and that is always an open book to the all-seeing eye of the Father.

Granting that children are born with inherent tendencies, and that when they come to school these tendencies, good or bad, are much strengthened, you will all, I think, acknowledge the value of training in the formation of character. In many old orchards in Western Ontario all the trees incline toward the east, because they have been subject to a prevailing

west wind. Farmers and fruit growers now plant trees leaning toward the west so that the continual influence of the wind may only make them erect. So with young character, if there seems a natural inclination to evil, it requires a prevailing wind of good training to correct it. But some teachers say we have not time for moral training; we must leave that to the home, the Church and the Sabbath school. Listen: You can't help it if you try. Character of some kind is being formed every moment whether you will or not. Every action (not automatic) is preceded by a thought. Thoughts lead to actions, actions repeated become habits, and the sum of all our habits is our character. There are just two ways for a teacher to get away from the responsibility of developing the character of his pupils—make them lunatics or kill them. Every moment that a human being lives and thinks, his character is growing.

The question for the teacher to decide is, what are the elements of a good character and how can these be developed? It would take much space to name all, but we shall probably agree that obedience, kindness, love of truth and honesty, industry and temperance, are among the essential elements of a good character. I shall not pretend to treat the training of these in any order of importance, because on that point there is much room for differences of opinion.

Obedience—what a beautiful characteristic is this. Flowers, those voiceless angels grown to earth, are not half so sweet to me as dutiful children. And yet the principle of the development of this quality is as simple as possible. Children learn to obey by obeying, and to disobey by disobeying. There is no exception to this law. The teacher who values this quality in character will always (not sometimes, when in an exacting mood), will always insist upon obedience. Certainly it requires tact and judgment to insure willing, cheerful obedience, but repeated day by day obedience becomes easy, and finally becomes a fixed habit of the character. Then the spirit that has bent to the will of the teacher and the parent, will, with increased knowledge, bend to the will of the great Teacher and the Father in Heaven.

Many parents, and not a few teachers, think that some children cannot be made dutiful and obedient unless the will is broken. Error of errors! Did you ever see a creature with a broken will? I have, and I know of no more pitiful sight. It is a broken bow which the archer has cast away. Two or three years ago the steamer Alexandria, coming up the St. Lawrence, broke her main shaft. As I saw her towed up by a little tug, I thought, there is a creature with a broken will. Utterly powerless; completely at the mercy of a little, wilful thing one-tenth her size. Yes, I know a young lady with a broken will. Her mother, by adoption, bent it double round her own every day for years until it had lost nearly all its power to resist. Finally an enforced, hateful marriage completely broke the frail thing. Now I can scarcely think of her without a sigh. She is to me the very goddess of despair. A broken will, some say a broken heart, I shall not attempt to make the distinction.

The will—why it is the mainspring in a watch, it is the motive power, the *go* in a man. It is the source of all industry, application, push, pluck, perseverance. It is the only power by which we ever accomplish anything. You cannot have too strong a will. When a man's will, or a woman's will not, seems too strong it really is not so. The trouble is, some other faculty or quality is not strong enough. Perhaps it is sympathy or judgment. The remedy is not to weaken the stronger, but to strengthen the weaker.

Obedience and will power are essential to industry. This I regard as a very important stone, a corner stone in a good character. It has seemed to me that probably nine-tenths of the poverty and degradation and crime in civilized nations can be directly traced to habits of idleness, to laziness. And yet industry is essentially a habit. Did you ever know a little child that was lazy? Among the hundreds I have known quite intimately I cannot recall one lazy one. Where, then, do all the lazy men and women come from? I'll tell you and you need not make a secret of it. They are made lazy by a process of education. They are trained to be lazy and some one is responsible. Some one has trained the members of that group of young men loafing at the street corner, smoking, chewing,

swearing, plotting mischief, somebody trained them for just that kind of business.

Some one trained that young man for his career as a burglar. Some one is responsible that that man has no higher sense of the responsibility of life, no higher aim than to sell whiskey or tobacco. Some one trained that girl so that she prefers the most sensational novel to the most interesting chapters of history; or this young lady so that she can make most delicious taffies and creams, but could not broil a steak or bake a loaf to save her life. Some one is responsible that yonder idle woman has a nature so depraved that she prefers to fondle a miserable, brainless pug to a sweet infant smiling with its recollection of Heaven. Training! Training! What marvellous possibilities of human development can be worked out through training!

Oh, fellow teachers! did you ever stop to think, as your pupils sit before you idle, or at distasteful tasks that make them hate work, did you ever stop to think what kind of characters you are building?

Little children love to do, they enjoy exercising their faculties and we have but to direct them in suitable kinds of employment to strengthen that love, and to develop with it the love of accomplishment. Make it an absolute rule to allow no time for idleness. Better a half-hour of active, interesting work, and a half-hour in the play ground, than a whole hour spent over a half-hour's work. Better singing, marching, picture-making, any kind of interesting exercise, better beyond all comparison than idleness.

Again, if the work is distasteful to a child not already spoiled, there is something wrong with the kind of work, or the way it is presented. Generally a child likes to do what is suitable to its age and stage of advancement. All along the line of our school work we have been having too much verbal memorizing and guessing, and not enough *seeing* and *doing*. Little innocent children have been crammed with large doses of partially comprehended facts, until, in the course of nature, reason and judgment began to assert themselves, then the mental stomach refused the "Prepared Food for Infants." We fold our hands and wonder why children take a dislike to school and study.

With the child's love of activity there is a very strong love of change which we must restrain, and in its place develop the love of accomplishment. Thoroughness is not natural to childhood, but the germs generally exist. They need the warm sunshine of encouragement to develop them. You remember the pleasure you used to feel in a finished piece of work. You know the great satisfaction you now enjoy in an accomplished purpose. Until this becomes a habit it often requires a special effort of the will. With children the will of the parent or teacher must for a long time come in as an aid to that of the child. We must encourage, in every possible way, the finishing of that which is begun. We must accept no incomplete work. After a time thoroughness will become a fixed habit of the character, and will need little further attention.

Now, a love of accomplishment leads to the exercise of perseverance in the face of difficulty, that habit of stick-at-it-iveness so essential to success. I know a class of boys who selected for their motto, "We'll find a way or make it." The teacher arranged it on a large card and hung it before them. I cannot tell, perhaps I have no idea myself, how much some boys were helped by that simple device. Something more than a mere motto is needed, though. Boys and girls must be led to face difficulties and to overcome them. They must be backed up with all needed encouragement, but never, never, NEVER, lifted over them. It makes me sick to hear a class of children ten, twelve, or fourteen years of age say, "We can't do that, teacher never showed us that." My heart leaps with joy when one out of such a helpless crowd says, "Let us try it."

Akin to the habit of thoroughness is the habit of neatness. The motto of the graduating class of the Oswego Normal School this year was, "Not how much, but how well." While this covers all the ground, you see how beautifully it applies to all manual work. The teacher should accept no careless work. Commend every effort that shows care and painstaking. Above all lead your pupils to do their very best at all times. A boy will seldom say he has done his best when he has not, and if you really expect it you can get it. Watch

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