

## THE WORK OF EDUCATION.

IN explaining that part of the work of education which the Creator seems to have committed to the hands of men, I have been led thus far to speak of our duties as individuals, rather than of those social and civil duties which devolve upon us as neighbours, as citizens, and as constituent parts of the government.

The first glance at our social position reveals one of the most striking and significant facts in the arrangements of Providence; and, as a consequence of this fact, one of the clearest of our social duties. A parent, however vigilant and devoted he may be, prepares only a part of the influences which go to the education of his child. The community, and the State where he resides, prepare the rest. The united force of all makes up the positive education which the child receives. No person can now be situated as Adam and Eve were, when rearing the two elder members of their family. Without knowledge, and guided only by chance, or by their own uninstructed sagacity, they reared first a murderer, and then one who feared God. The first was what we call a spoiled child,—whether ruined by indulgence or severity, we know not, perhaps by both;—the second had the advantage of a little parental experience. But since their day, all children are subject to influences external to the parental household. No parent now can bring up his child in an exhausted receiver. And hence the necessity that each parent should look, not only to his own conduct, but to the conduct of the community in which he resides. That community must be moral and exemplary, in order that he may be safe. Here, therefore, even an enlightened selfishness coincides with benevolence. In order to our own highest good, we are bound to do good to others; for we cannot be wholly safe while they are wrong. How glorious the appointment of Providence, which thus reconciles self-love with love of the race; which, indeed, makes the former defeat its own ends, when it pursues them in contravention of the latter! The love of our own children, then, when duly enlightened, prompts us to regard the welfare of those of our neighbour.

Emphatically do some of the most important of all duties devolve upon us, as members of a State which is invested with the authority to legislate for itself. If we were governed by others, on their heads would be the crime of our misgovernment; but when we govern ourselves, and govern wrongly, we unite in our own persons, both the guilt and the calamities of misgovernment. In the present state of society, an education of a high character cannot be universally diffused, without a union of the forces of society, and a concert in its action. Co-operation and a unity of purpose will be found to increase the power of citizens in peace, as much as they do of soldiers in war. And hence the duty of combined action can never be effected to any useful purpose amongst a free people, without agreement, without compact, that is,—where the action of great numbers is concerned,—without law. Upon the lawgivers then, there fastens an obligation of inexpressible magnitude and sacredness; and utterly unworthy the honorable station of a lawgiver is he, who would elude this duty, or who unfaithfully discharges it, or who perverts it to any sinister purpose. And why should a legislator forever debase his character to that of a scourger, a prison-keeper, and an executioner? Why, wearing a gorgon's head, and carrying stripes in his hand, should he pass before the community as an avenger of evil only, and not as the promoter and rewarder of good? If terror and retribution are his highest attributes, then his post is no more honorable than that of the beadle who whips, or of the headsmen who decapitates. A legislator worthy of the name, should seek for honour and veneration, by moving through society as a minister of beneficence, rather than as a spectre of fear. He should reflect that new and better results in the condition of mankind are to be secured by new and wiser measures. We are not to ask Heaven for the annihilation of the present race, and the creation of a new one; but we are to ascertain and to use those means, for the renovation, the redemption of mankind, which have been given, or which the veracity of Heaven stands pledged to give, whenever, on our part, we perform the conditions preliminary to receiving them.

You will recollect, my friends, that memorable fire which befel the city of New York, in the year 1835. It took place in the heart of that great emporium,—a spot where

merchants, whose wealth was like that of princes, had gathered their treasures. In but few places on the surface of the globe was there accumulated such a mass of riches. From each continent and from all the islands of the sea, ships had brought thither their tributary offerings, until it seemed like a magazine of the nations,—the coffer of the world's wealth. It raged between two and three days. Above, the dome of the sky was filled with appalling blackness; below, the flames were of an unapproachable intensity of light and heat; and such were the inclemency of the season and the raging of the elements, that all human power and human art seemed as vanity and nothing. Yet, situated in the very midst of that conflagration, there was one building, upon which the storm of fire beat in vain. All around, from elevated points in the distance, from steeples and the roofs of houses, thousands of the trembling inhabitants gazed upon the awful scene; and thought,—as well they might,—that it was one of universal and undistinguishing havoc. But, as some swift cross-wind furrowed athwart that sea of flame, or a broad blast beat down its aspiring crests, there safe amidst ruin, erect amongst the falling, was seen that single edifice. And when, at last, the ravage ceased, and men again walked those streets in sorrow, which so lately they had walked in pride, there stood that that solitary edifice, unharmed amid surrounding desolation;—from the foundation to the cope-stone, unscathed;—and over the treasures which had been confided to its keeping, the smell of fire had not passed. There it stood, like an honest man in the streets of Sodom. Now, why was this? *It was built by a workman. IT WAS BUILT BY A WORKMAN.* The man who erected that surviving, victorious structure, *knew* the nature of the materials he used; he *knew* the element of fire; he *knew* the power of combustion. Fidelity seconded his knowledge. He did not put in stucco for granite, nor touchwood for iron. He was not satisfied with outside ornaments, with finical cornices and gingerbread work; but deep in all its hidden foundations,—in the interior of its walls and in all its secret joints,—where no human eye should ever see the compact masonry,—he consolidated, and cemented, and closed it in, until it became impregnable to fire,—insoluble in that volcano. And thus my hearers, must parents become workmen in the education of their children. They must know that, from the very nature and constitution of things, a lofty and enduring character cannot be formed by ignorance and chance. They must know that no skill or power of man can ever lay the imperishable foundations of virtue, by using the low motives of fear, and the pride of superiority, and the love of worldly wealth, any more than they can rear a material edifice, storm-proof and fire-proof, from bamboo and cane-brake!

Until, then, this subject of education is far more studied and far better understood than it has ever yet been, there can be no security for the formation of pure and noble minds, and though the child that is born to-day may turn out an Abel, yet we have no assurance that he will not be a Cain. Until parents will learn to train up children in the way they should go,—until they will learn what that way is,—the paths that lead down to the realms of destruction must continue to be thronged;—the doting father shall feel the pangs of a disobedient and profligate son, and the mother shall see the beautiful child whom she folds to her bosom, turn to a coiling serpent and sting the breast upon which it was cherished. Until the thousandth and the ten thousandth generation shall have passed away, the Deity may go on doing his part of the work, but unless we do our part also, the work will never be done,—and until it is done the river of parental tears must continue to flow. Unlike Rachel, parents shall weep for their children *because they are*, and not because they *are not*;—nor shall they be comforted, until they will learn, that God in His infinite wisdom has pervaded the universe with immutable laws,—laws which may be made productive of the highest forms of goodness and happiness;—and, in His infinite mercy, has provided the means by which those laws can be discovered and obeyed; but that he has left it to us to learn and to apply them, or to suffer the unutterable consequences of ignorance. But when we shall learn and shall obey these laws,—when the immortal nature of the child shall be brought within the action of those influences,—each at his appointed time,—which have been graciously prepared for training it up in the way it should go, then may we be sure that God will clothe its spirit in garments of *amianthus*, that it may not be corrupted, and of *asbestos*, that it may not be consumed, and that it will be able to walk