

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

SOME MISTAKES IN TRAINING CHILDREN.—II.

BY REV. J. A. WILSON, D.D.

The mistakes made in training children are very numerous, but we do not intend dealing with them all—only with a few of those of such broad and striking character as are open to the eyes of all observers. In addition to those already referred to, we would instance another:

THE NOT CHECKING AND CORRECTING EXTRA-VAGANT SPEECH.

Jean Paul Richter speaks like a philosopher on the "truthfulness" of children. He says, after speaking in the strongest way possible of "lying, that devouring cancer of the inner man": "During the first five years they say neither what is true nor what is false—they merely talk. Their talking is thinking aloud; and since the one-half of thought is frequently a yes, and the other a no, and both escape them (though not us), they seem to lie when they are merely talking to themselves. Further: At first they find pleasure in exercising their new art of speech, and so they often talk nonsense only for the sake of hearing their acquisitions in language. They frequently do not understand some word that you have said; little children, for instance, often confuse to-day, to-morrow, yesterday, as well as numbers and degrees of comparison, and so give rather a mistaken than a false reply. Again, they use their tongues more in sport than earnest, as may be seen in the long discussions they hold with their puppets, as a minister or an author does with his; and they easily apply this sportive talking to living people."

No doubt there is much truth in all this—much clear insight. But are they to be permitted to go on without being helped to see the correctness of what they utter? Surely not. Jean Paul's correction is exceedingly judicious, though we venture to think he does not go far enough. He says:

"In all these cases, where the form of a lie is not to be shewn in any dark glass, say merely, 'Don't talk nonsense; speak seriously.' It is not well rashly to criminate the children, to pronounce against them when much may be questionable; it is well always to give them the benefit of the doubt, lest they be hardened to evil. But often, knowingly, purposely, they speak aside from the truth, reporting facts incorrectly, with intention to deceive—and between such times and others, parents must distinguish—and when they do, they must be corrected with all the wisdom at command."

Dr. Samuel Johnson, on one occasion when the education of children was alluded to, said: "Accustom your children constantly to this [strict attention to truth, even in minute particulars], if a thing happened at one window, and they, when relating it, say that it happened at another, do not let it pass, but instantly check them. You do not know where deviation from truth will end."

Boswell: "It may come to the door, and when once an account is at all varied in one circumstance, it may by degrees be varied so as to be totally different from what really happened."

Our lively hostess, whose fancy was impatient of the rein, fidgeted at this, and ventured to say, "Nay, this is too much. If Mr. Johnson should forbid me to drink tea, I would comply, as I should feel the restraint only twice a day; but little variations in narrative must happen a thousand times a day, if one is not perpetually watching."

Johnson: "Well, madam, and you ought to be perpetually watching. It is more from carelessness about truth than intentional lying, that there is so much falsehood in the world."

This course pointed out by Dr. Johnson is the safest one for all interested to pursue. It leaves no treacherous exceptions open. It is a direct dealing with the evil. Another mistake is:

NOT MEETING THE NEED OF THEIR MINDS.

Christian culture demands necessarily the exclusion of much, but it admits more than it excludes. It banishes the bad, it brings in the good. This fact cannot be too distinctly recognized and acted upon, that the growing nature of the child is ever crying out for food. It must be fed. It is not sufficient, therefore, merely to take away the harmful; we must put

in its place the healthful. When the mother sees her babe playing with the scissors, or the fork, or any dangerous thing, what does she do? She does not rudely pluck it out of the babe's hand; no, that would only the more endanger the child. She holds out an orange or a peach, and, almost unconsciously, the dangerous thing is dropped and the more delightful object seized. What provision, then, shall be made for the growing nature of the child? In a letter of Charles Kingsley's, full of sage advice, he says—to whom is not very clear, but evidently to a boy:

"If you wish to be like a little child, study what a little child could understand—nature; and to do what a little child could do—love. Use your senses much, and your mind little. Feed on nature, and do not try to understand it. It will digest itself. It did so when you were a baby the first time! Look around you much."

This is excellent; and no doubt, under the guidance of Mr. Kingsley, ample provision would be made for the mind's need. And may not all who have charge of children do the same? There is published a series of Science Primers that place the grand outlines boldly and clearly before the mind, so that, with a little study, great treasures of knowledge might be opened to the children—treasures in which they would revel, and in their joy enrich themselves for all time to come. There are Science Primers on Botany, by I. D. Hooker; Chemistry, by Prof. H. E. Roscoe; Physical Geography, by A. Geikie; Physiology, by M. Foster; Astronomy, by I. N. Lockyer; Physics, by Prof. S. Ballour; Geology, by A. Geikie. The facts found in these, the incentives they give to further study, the wholesome, healthy influence they would exert on the minds, even of the youngest, are beyond calculation. Another book may be mentioned as giving answers to many questions children ask, namely, Dr. Brewer's "Science in Familiar Things." That is, in itself, an invaluable repository.

Another mistake is:

NOT CULTIVATING IN THEM THE SENSE OF GOD'S OVERSHADOWING PRESENCE AND LOVE.

This becomes easy, if the course we have indicated be pursued for meeting the need of the child's mind. God can then be seen in His handiwork everywhere. As a living God, as a loving God, as an omnipotent God, as an omnipresent God, everything speaks of Him. Rightly instructed, every beautiful flower, every growing tree, every glancing river, every smiling field, every great mountain, every moving cloud, every peal of thunder and flash of lightning, every shower of rain, every human face, every individual thing, will call up the thought of God and give a new impression of His presence and character. Charles Kingsley, in the letter from which we have already quoted, says: "Read Geology—Buckland's 'Bridgewater Treatise'—and you will rise up awe-struck and cling to God." The sense of God's presence brooding over men is best imparted through His works. Afterwards, faith in His Word and a conscious realization of the promises strengthen this sense. In the case of grown men who have remained godless till late, this last mood comes first, but with rightly-trained children, last. From the works of God to the Word—especially through those intermediary passages descriptive of God's wonderful works, thereby sealing all that has been seen—is easy; God who has been seen *working* here, is heard *speaking* here; speaking only as He can speak, and how much to children of their life and duty? He regards the reality of their faith, the genuineness of their love, the sensitiveness of their souls to the highest and purest motives. He says to them, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour thy father and thy mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth." When this consciousness of God's presence in nature and in revelation is awakened, then is all the life hallowed. Every bush is like the bush Moses saw, aflame with God, and every occurrence and event under the guidance of His hand. He is the ruler over all. His presence overreaches and interpenetrates and upholds all things. By Him all things subsist.

The last mistake we shall mention is

A LACK OF CONSISTENCY.

This, to the sharp eyes of the child, is specially noticeable. If the precept is nullified by the example, the child feels it; through its very nature goes the jar of contradiction. This we conceive to be one of

the most awful mistakes that is made. It has a most tremendous neutralizing influence all along the line of instruction and prayer and hope. It falls like a blight on all. Nothing escapes its moral death. The parent, therefore, must walk ever thoughtfully and circumspectly, seeking to keep in close accord the word and the deed, the precept and the example; saying with David, in 1st. Ch. 2. "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart." Prof. W. G. Hoge, in his "Blind Bartimeus," has this apposite paragraph. "Professing parents often lay plans for their children directly opposed to the Spirit's work." Let one example illustrate my meaning: In your morning devotions you ask God to convert your children—even on the next Sabbath to send His word with power to their hearts. Surely you should pray so, and I will suppose you do. But, before the day is over, yielding to the tide of corrupt worldliness around you, or the pleadings of your unconverted children, you arrange for a dancing party the next week, and issue your invitations. "Only a children's dancing party, and only with the piano, you know," you say patronizingly and cheerfully to conscience, though somehow conscience looks a little blank at these nice distinctions, and does not return your smile. But let that pass. Suppose, however, God answers your prayer—the Sabbath, and one of these children weeps under the sermon, and comes home downcast and distressed; what will your condition be? To say the least, will you feel no embarrassment? No temptation to seem not to have observed it, until your scheme is carried out? No regret even, that these feelings should have come just then? How awkward that when you had meant your daughter to be so bright and beautiful in the dance on Monday, that she should be convinced of sin, and fleeing from God's wrath, and weeping so, on Sabbath! On the other hand, will you have no fear lest the excitement of the giddy scene shall quench the Spirit, and harden the heart forever? And, besides all this, would not these convictions take you by surprise, and send a guilty pang to your heart? Could you be, as you ought always to be, expecting—strong faith the answer of your prayers, and ready to bless God with a clear heart, and go in secret with this dear, anxious soul, and mingle your tears, and together beseech God for mercy?

This is a prime inconsistency, and perhaps in the bright white-light of it others may be seen more clearly, and henceforth avoided. We all know that ten-fold force, ay, an hundred-fold force, is given to teaching when it is supported and illustrated by example, while without example it is weak; but with an example in direct opposition to it, it is ruined utterly, and the credit of the teacher at the same time.

The strength and active energy of every word of the parent upon the heart of the child, lies in an example conformable with it. What a grand thing it is to be able to say, as Sir Matthew Hale does in his letters to his children: "I have been careful that my example might be a visible direction to you." That is the sure seal of all instruction.

SWEARING.

There is little doubt that irreverence is on the increase. Veneration for divine and holy things, never at any time a natural characteristic of our depraved human nature, seems to be losing its hold upon even those reared in an atmosphere of piety and devotion. Various influences have been and are at work that are too sadly favourable to this state of things. The reckless perjury in our courts of law, the pernicious discussions of infidel and liberal leagues heard in every household in our land by means of the too enterprising newspaper of the day, the noisy and flippancy, babbling, so-called popular preachers, the familiar, off-hand sentimentalism of revival hymns, and last, but not least, the holiday region of many camp-meetings and assemblies, all combine to undermine and gradually destroy the sense of the eternal fitness of that respect we owe as creatures to a merciful Creator. Even among Christian people the influence of the times is felt, and is manifesting itself not so much in habits of gross profanity, though that is by no means rare, as by a thoughtless, often reckless, use of words in conversation that are essentially vulgar, at times bordering closely on the profane. There is a very sad indifference also to blasphemous utterances on the part of those not Christians, and the