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TRACTS
OF THE
AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY.

General Series.



VOL. VI.

PRINTED BY THE
AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY,
150 NASSAU-STREET, NEW YORK.

T O P A R E N T S .

ALLOW me, reader, to hold converse with you, for a little while, on the subject of educating the rising generation. If you are a parent, it is a subject in which you have a deeper interest than any other, the question of your own personal salvation excepted; and even this may be much more affected by it than you are aware. If you are without "son or nephew," and never expect to have a child of Adam under your care, yet you are a man, and may not make yourself an alien to your fellow-men, nor withhold your efforts for the welfare of the generations who are to succeed you, without committing an outrage on the best feelings of human nature.

Two points relative to religious education I beg to press upon your deepest attention—its importance, and the best method of conducting it.

ITS IMPORTANCE. It is the opinion of some, who wish to be accounted philosophers rather than Christians, that human nature, in infancy, is a material which may, by education, be manufactured into almost any thing; that it is like a sheet of white paper, on which you may write good or evil; and of consequence, every corrupt bias of the *man* is the fruit of some impure taint, communicated during the process of his education. As to your own opinion, reader, I shall not here dispute with you about its correctness: if it is that above expressed, I perfectly agree with you in two inferences which no doubt you deduce from it. They are inferences of very great importance.

1. That great care ought to be taken of the human offspring, in their progress from infancy to adult years, to protect them from that corrupt influence to which they are astonishingly susceptible; and,

2. That there is great necessity for an *improved* system of education; since the moral condition of man, in every age and country, demonstrates a lamentable deficiency in every system hitherto pursued.

But allow me to remark, that the great objection to the opinion above expressed, as a practical doctrine, is, that it falls utterly short of offering that excitement to arduous diligence, which is essential to success in the great business of education. The Christian doctrine is, that human nature is "shapen in iniquity;" inclined to evil; predisposed to what is wrong. Now, from this doctrine the very same inferences follow as those just mentioned; only with this addition, that the power of corruption being to be combated in every stage of education, an increased solicitude and diligence of effort are required accordingly. But it also follows, further, from this Christian doctrine, that the assistance of almighty power is requisite, coöperating with human means, to render education successful to the full extent that is needed. And this coöperating grace the Christian is abundantly warranted to expect from that almighty Being who has revealed himself as the bearer of prayer, and has promised, "I will pour my Spirit on thy seed, and my blessing on thine offspring, and they shall grow up as among the grass, and as willows by the water-courses."

You perceive, then, that there is no difference between the Christian and the philosophic unbeliever, on the subject of the *importance* of education, to make man what he ought to be. But, on the side of Christianity, there is this immense advantage, that the Christian is compelled by his creed to a *far higher exertion* in the case, and has besides the animating encouragement of *divine assistance*, to render his labor not in vain, which the other rejects.

It may be well, before we proceed farther, to inquire, *what degree of success* may reasonably be expected, when early training is conducted with the wisdom, diligence, and perseverance, which is within the reach of human ability,

under the influence of divine grace. On this subject I will not assert that education, so conducted, will never fail of the desired success. Yet ordinarily, I believe, when young people of common faculties grow up to mature age, remarkably ignorant of their duty, or remarkably deficient in the outward performance of it, a radical defect will be found to have existed in their early *education*; for which those who were charged with it are answerable.

There are a great variety of causes, all involving criminal short-coming, which operate to defeat even good people in the successful training of their children; as,

1. Want of knowledge how the business should be conducted. Few undertakings require a greater amount of skill than that of properly training a young family; and no man ought to put himself in the highly responsible station of the head of a family, who is not well instructed how to fill it. The first question which a person proposing to enter the social state should ask himself, is, not whether he is able to support a family, but whether he is duly qualified to educate one.

2. Want of the firmness, self-denial, self-control, and of the vigorous diligence which the arduous nature of the duty calls for.

3. Grievous obstacles to success are often multiplied to parents by their own imprudence; as the injudicious choice of a partner, who proves a hinderance, rather than a *helpmeet*; too much society with the graceless; conformity to the world; over-ardent pursuit of business or study, which interferes with faithfulness to the family; and the deceitfulness of riches.

It is no argument against the ordinary success of correct training, that two children of the same parent, who have received the same management, turn out very differently; since different dispositions call for very different treatment. Giving in substance the same treatment, may have been the capital mistake.

If training children in the way in which they should go,

is a duty of God's appointment, and if he has warranted us to look to him both for *assistance* and *success*, we ought certainly to ascribe our failure of success to ourselves, rather than to him. When is God wanting to his people, if they are not wanting to themselves? In truth, the success that is found ordinarily to attend education, even in the very defective manner in which it is usually conducted, is itself a sufficient evidence that, if it were what, through grace, it might be, there would very seldom be a failure.

A careful attention cannot fail to discover, that the whole process of education, as it is at present too generally conducted, is exceedingly defective; and nothing is more wanted, for the welfare of society, and especially for the success of the Gospel, than a thorough reformation in this respect. Can we hope, that the millennial state of the church, so long expected and prayed for, will ever come, until this reformation takes place? Shall "the earth be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the seas," and improved education not have an essential instrumentality in producing it? Make education what, through grace, it may be made—make it universal, and, through the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, which will not be withheld when duly sought, the millennium will have commenced as soon as the rebel race of full-grown sinners, who are doomed, for their unbelief, to perish, shall have passed away.

There is another idea worthy of attentive consideration. It is, *the degree of improvement* to which human nature, in body and soul, is capable of being brought, in the course of a number of generations, by education. There is no doubt that the human body, in point of health and vigor, might be raised to a degree that would fit it for continuing in life much longer than is at present the ordinary lot of man; while the human soul might undergo an enlargement of all its faculties in the same measure. Every body knows how much debility and disease, both of body and mind, are inherited. Every species of vice has its direct effect in

wasting the energies of the human system. And this is one way especially, in which the law of the divine government, "visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children," takes effect. Not only the vices of the parents are transmitted to their offspring, but the debility and disease generated by these vices are imparted; so that the children live on suffering, and die prematurely, in consequence of that state of bodily constitution under which they have been born.

Let mankind be trained up generally to a high degree of wisdom, to a full command of their appetites and passions, to sobriety, to temperance, to chastity, and discreet and correct living in all respects; and, in the course of a few generations, human nature would necessarily undergo a vast improvement: we are unable to say to how great an extent. A general diffusion through society of the wisdom and morality of the Gospel; banishing intemperance, dishonesty, blasphemy, war, and every other baleful, corrupting, and deteriorating influence, and binding mankind together in the bonds of love to God and love to one another, would increase the comfort of living in society a hundred fold; and if so, would doubtless greatly add to the health and the duration of human life.

And if the corporeal energies are thus capable of being invigorated in such a high degree, obviously the mental faculties are susceptible of an enlargement in proportion. And what may be expected to be the inventions and improvements, to benefit and beautify the world, which will thence result! Thus, laying futurity out of the question—escape from hell with all its horrors; meetness for, and admission to heaven, with all its eternal weight of glory—there are considerations belonging to the life that now is, abundantly sufficient to rouse us to every effort in training up the young to wisdom and goodness.

When to these considerations we add those which belong to our eternal destinies; when we recollect that this life constitutes the preparative to the life to come—that on *what*

we are, and *how* we act our part here, depend what we shall be hereafter ; when we consider that we came into the world in a lost state, outcasts from God, and exposed to everlasting perdition, unless recovered from the ruin which sin has brought upon us : in a word, when we reflect that, without a reconciliation to God, through the mediation of his Son Jesus Christ, restoration to his image, and a conscientious submission to his authority, which enjoins supreme love to himself, and love to our neighbor as ourselves, exclusion from the holiness and happiness of heaven, and consignment to the misery of hell for ever and ever, must be the inevitable consequence ; I say, when we consider these things, and recollect that education is the all-essential means of bringing the young to know and make these attainments, then it follows, that words cannot express half the importance that ought to be attached to good education ; words cannot express half the guilt they incur, who fail to train up those committed to their care in a way that will qualify them to act well their part here, and meet with acceptance, at last, from Him who will judge the world in righteousness, and render to every one according to the deeds done in the body, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

Let us now turn our thoughts to THE BEST METHOD OF CONDUCTING education. But allow me first to remark,

That the whole process of education, to be rightly conducted, must have its origin in a deep sense of responsibility to God, and dependence upon him, in the mind of him who conducts it. Every parent, every person who has a child under his care, ought to feel that such child is God's, committed to him for the express purpose of being *trained up for God*—for the service and enjoyment of God, in time and eternity ; and at his hands will that child be required, if, through his neglect or mismanagement, it should perish eternally. This ought to be an every-day feeling ; and, under its deep impression, ought he to address himself to his every-day task, in humble but firm dependence, both for assistance and success, on that God who hath promised, “ I

will be your God, and the God of your seed." Thus will he be cheered with the animating hope, that he shall be the happy instrument of carrying forward his little charge to comfort and usefulness here, and happiness hereafter. Be assured, where the powerful excitement of such considerations is wanting, the performance of duty will infallibly be deficient.

To the first part of education belongs the *proper management of the body in infancy*, so as to give it the best advantages for health and vigor. This is important, not merely for the sake of the well-being of the body, but also on account of the soul, which is so much under the influence of the body. If the body be disordered, the mind is sure in some way to be affected by it. If you expect a sound mind, you must take care to have a sound body; and this will require, from early infancy, a proper management of aliment, of exercise, clothing, sleep, and every thing on which the well-being of the body depends. Essential mismanagement in these particulars often brings death, or entails debility through life; and what is still worse, not unfrequently subjects the soul to the demoralizing and darkening influence of deranged feelings and depraved appetites, which subsequent education will be scarcely able to overcome. It is thus that a foundation is often laid for a total miscarriage of education before any error is suspected. The proper rearing and management of infants, so as in the best possible manner to promote their bodily vigor, and influence the happy development of their intellectual and moral faculties, is a part of *female education* of vast consequence, which is yet in its infancy; and until it is properly cultivated, many of the human race must be the victims of much disaster, both temporal and eternal.

The first efforts with children, in their moral training, should go to the establishment of *complete parental authority over their minds*. This is a measure of such vital importance, that without it much success can scarcely be expected; and very much depends on the *early* establishment of this au-

thority : unless it is established early, it is hardly ever complete. By the time a child is two years of age, he ought to be in the habit of cheerful submission to whatever he knows to be the will of his parent. Be assured, if your child says to any of your requirements, "I wont," or sets up resistance in the way of crying and pouting, there is a radical error in your management, that threatens shipwreck to the whole business of education. Besides, a ready, cheerful obedience from the early dawn of reason, while it greatly facilitates every part of after-education, is of essential use to counteract the self-will, the obstinacy, and bad temper of a child, before they are confirmed and strengthened by indulgence. Every parent ought to be fully aware, that it is in the *early part* of childhood, more especially, that a corrective *can* be applied to those evil passions, whose dominion in manhood will be certain ruin. To obtain and maintain this subjection of the child, much severity is, ordinarily, not at all necessary. It requires, on the part of the parent or master, only reasonableness united with firmness, and at first a judicious use of the rod. Never require any thing of your child but what is reasonable ; and be firm in requiring it ; and let your government be, and appear to be, uniformly, the government of love. Any other government will assuredly defeat the purpose for which it ought to be exercised. He who tyrannizes in a passion, will be apt to destroy himself, with the victim of his misrule.

After the establishment of authority over the infant mind, must commence the arduous effort of *storing it with knowledge*. "Wisdom," says Solomon, "is the principal thing ; therefore, get wisdom." It is, indeed, the principal thing ; as, without it, nothing really valuable can be acquired. It is wisdom that elevates man above the beasts of the field. It is wisdom that constitutes a leading item of the Divine resemblance. Let the impression dwell upon your heart, and stimulate your every-day's effort, that, in proportion as you make your child wise—wise in the possession of *every kind* of useful knowledge, but especially the knowledge of

“the living and true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent”—you bring within his reach the means of every kind of usefulness and comfort, here and hereafter; while, without it, there can be nothing but degradation and wretchedness in time, and, through eternity, everlasting perdition, from that God who hath pronounced on the people of “no understanding,” “that the God who made them will not have mercy on them; he that formed them will show them no favor.”

And remember, that the most unwearied diligence is to be used in communicating this instruction, especially as it regards religious knowledge. As God himself has commanded, “YE SHALL TEACH THEM YOUR CHILDREN, SPEAKING OF THEM WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE, AND WHEN THOU WALKEST BY THE WAY, WHEN THOU LIEST DOWN, AND WHEN THOU RISEST UP; AND THOU SHALT WRITE THEM UPON THE DOOR-POSTS OF THINE HOUSE, AND UPON THY GATES.” Let those who have failed in training up their children to wisdom and piety, inquire, whether their diligence has been, from the early dawn of reason, any thing like what is here enjoined.

In communicating religious knowledge, the *chief means ought to be the sacred Scriptures*. The plan of Eunice, which was so successful with her son Timothy, ought to be the plan of every mother and father. It is said that “from a child he knew the holy Scriptures;” which must have been the fruit of much reading of them. But take notice, that it is said, not simply that he *read* the holy Scriptures, but he *knew* them; which implies that he was instructed in their *meaning*. And this is best effected, by mingling much explanation, in the way of question and answer, with much reading. Those who find themselves ill qualified for this duty, will find good assistance in some of the excellent catechisms which are readily to be obtained. If a qualified minister of the Gospel, within your reach, conducts a Bible class, I beseech you, let your young people receive the benefit of it.

In storing the minds of the young, correct school education has a most important instrumentality. But, alas, the great deficiency that exists in this department, through our country generally, is one of the heavy calamities of society. You will agree with me, that the teacher to whom is confided the rising generation, ought to be a man of the best standing in society, for wisdom and piety; a man who, both by precept and example, will train the young "to fear God and keep his commandments," as well as instruct them in useful literature. It ought to be continually on the minds, both of the master and the scholars, that the whole process of literary education is a matter secondary to the formation of correct principles and moral habits. To the pollution of bad instruction, bad example, and bad society at school, many pious parents have to impute their failure in the religious education of their children. A fearful responsibility rests upon society generally, and on every individual in it, for the correction of this evil. It is hardly possible that education can be what it ought to be, until common schools are greatly reformed; and the proper corrective consists in giving adequate compensation and countenance to teachers duly qualified, and employing no other.

On the subject of *boarding-schools*, allow me to offer a word of advice. If you are really a praying, practical Christian parent, qualified in some good degree to watch over your offspring, and impart to them religious instruction, unless circumstances of absolute necessity require it, do not think of a boarding-school for common education. There is no human being who feels parental tenderness, prompting to ceaseless watchfulness over your child, equal to yourself. You cannot, therefore, find a substitute for the performance of those duties which the God of nature and the God of grace has made strongly your own. Besides, the very multitude usually at a common boarding-school must put it out of the power of its conductors to give to each the watchful attention which each requires. But, if you are not a praying, practical Christian, living in

communion with God, then, whether you profess religion or not, if there is a boarding-school within the reach of your means, under good reputation for its instruction, its discipline, its morality, but, above all, its religion, by all means send your children to it. Give it the preference to any plan of home education.

In training the young, much use is to be made of the ordinances of *public worship and the preaching of the Gospel on the Sabbath*. If you are destitute of these privileges, then you are without one main help for rightly educating your rising offspring; and for their sakes, as well as your own, every effort within your means ought to be made, to obtain the ministrations of a wise, practical, well-gifted minister of the Gospel. Possessing this privilege, make the due use of it, by habituating your young people to a regular, practical attention to it. Strictly and habitually inquire of them, *what* they have heard, and *how* they have heard; whether they have received the instruction of the Gospel into their understanding, and into their hearts. Let it be inculcated upon them, that one sermon, well heard, is much better than a hundred of which the sound only has passed through their ears. The practice of requiring young persons to put down upon paper, in the best order they can, the whole they are able to recollect of the sermon they have heard, has been found to be greatly beneficial.

Reading is another important means for storing the mind with knowledge. It is so important that, without much reading, any great amount of general knowledge is rarely acquired. Great care is therefore requisite, as early as possible, to form in the young mind a taste for reading; and happily, at this day, suitable books for early reading are within almost every person's reach, who will inquire after them. Every head of a family ought to make it a point, as much as possible, to furnish the young of his charge with a collection of good books; and at the same time to guard them from wasting their time and vitiating their minds, by reading books which inculcate any thing

hostile to truth and godliness. Religious periodical publications may be of vast benefit, in various respects; and no family should be without them. Great care, however, should be taken to select those which are distinguished for sound sense and sound evangelical doctrine.

Further, the whole business of education should be conducted with a view *to amend the heart, and direct the practice* in what is right. Mere knowledge, without this, constitutes a character allied to a demon. Make your children wise, simply that you may make them good. Teach them the knowledge of God, that they may love him, fear him, trust him, and obey him. Teach them to understand the principles of society, that they may love their neighbor as themselves, and live in the discharge of all those duties that grow out of love. This is the education that will qualify them for being useful here, and happy hereafter; and be assured, the education which does not result in this, will result in fearful disappointment. And if you would escape this disappointment, two things will be indispensably necessary on your part—your *prayers*, and your *example*.

Your prayers. Every good gift cometh down from the “Father of lights,” who hath said, “Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find.” And if this is so, to expect that God will give our children knowledge, and faith, and love, and fear, with an obedient heart, while we ask them not at his hand with an earnestness and importunity corresponding with their value, is certainly the height of presumption. But besides, the habit of praying is itself an all-important part of Christian education. The child who is not taught to pray—who is not trained up in the daily practice of prayer—wants that part of education, without which, there is the most imminent danger that all he has learned will be worse than useless.

To prayer, daily prayer in your house, “with and for your children,” must be added *your example*. Children, in the first instance, learn almost every thing by imitation.

It seems to be a law of their nature to do what they see others do. Hence the fact so universally observed, that children grow up to be like those with whom they are reared. Regard it, then, as essential to your success, that you should be, before your children, what you would have them to be. Teach them to be wise, by acting wisely in their presence. Teach them love, and faith, and humility, and godly fear, and other Christian graces, by habitually acting those graces before their eyes. Keeping your children much with yourself, carrying them daily to a throne of grace, and exemplifying, in simplicity and godly sincerity, the true Christian character before them, it will be marvellous indeed, if, in due time, you have not the unspeakable happiness of seeing "some good thing towards the Lord" found in them.

There is another point of vital importance in the education of the young, which is very far from being attended to as it ought. It is, training them to *habits of useful industry*; such useful industry as exercises the body, while it interests the mind. Active exertion is essential to health and comfort. Every physician will tell you so. Indolence begets disease, while it destroys enjoyment. The oil of gladness, says one, "glistens on the face of labor only." But not only so, idleness is positive vice, and of a very heinous kind. God has created every thing to be useful; and every faculty of body and mind is a talent conferred under the injunction, "Occupy till I come." He who arrives at manhood, without having acquired a habit of industry, lacks a most essential part of education.

If you are rich, and feel no necessity for training up your children to daily industry, you have a most difficult task to perform; namely, to counteract their natural propensity to indolence, which belongs to the worst vices of human nature. Indolence leads to amusement, amusement to dissipation, and dissipation to ruin. One chief reason why it is so hard for the rich to enter into the kingdom of heaven, is, that being pressed by no necessity, it is so diffi-

cult a thing to compel themselves to the daily efforts of useful industry, which, next to grace, is the very best preservative against every kind of vice. "Pride, fulness of bread, and *abundance of idleness* in her, and in her daughters," were the chief means of sinking Sodom to the depths of her abominations, and ripening her for her terrible overthrow.

I have only one measure further to press upon your attention, as of vast importance to the success of Christian education. It is, extending your watchful care to *every youthful member of your household*. If you have apprentices, or servants, neglected and left to ignorance and vice, the sin is as great as if they were your own children. All souls are of equal value in God's sight; and they who are charged with their care, are under the same command to bring them up for God. And as every sin brings its proper punishment, so does the neglect of this duty. Very often even religious masters who, from indolence, or thoughtlessness of duty, or lust of gain, surrender their young domestics to irreligion, pay the forfeit of their crime in the perdition of their own children—ruined by the pollution contracted from the influence of these very domestics. If you harbor ignorance and immorality in your kitchen, or in your out-house, it is a plague of leprosy, that will certainly spread, and carry death in its progress.

Nay, farther; it is certainly hardly possible that education can be conducted with entire success, unless the whole community are the objects of it. Your children must mingle with your neighbors' children, and will certainly be influenced by them. Lot, in Sodom, lost his wife and all his children, from the filthy communication of the inhabitants of the place, and was himself scarcely saved. Just in proportion to the depravity of the society among whom they dwell, is the difficulty and danger in training up a family for God. And even where a man succeeds with the whole of his children, there is reason to fear there will be, of his grandchildren, some who will fall a prey to the cor-

ruption around them ; and the total apostasy of his whole posterity may be the result, in a few generations. The consequence is, that there is no certainty of success, permanent success, but in the religious training of the whole community ; and, Herculean as the task is, there is no alternative but to set about it. It is the task of duty, under the mandate of Him who hath bound society together, and given them an inseparable interest in *each other's* welfare, under one common law of their being—"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

Yes, if there is but one family in your vicinity untaught, whose rising progeny are growing up in sin, this family is a source of contagion that endangers the health of the whole community. The salvation of yourself, and of yours, for generations to come, calls upon you to do your utmost to stay the plague, by extending religious cultivation to the young of that family. You see, then, that to promote Sabbath-schools, and carry them to all the perfection of which they are capable, and to add to them every other means that goes to the same end, is not merely a measure of mercy to the poor children and youth who immediately receive the benefit ; it is a measure of safety to the children and grandchildren of the whole Christian community. It is adding to the facilities of every head of a family, to train up his posterity in the way in which they should go ; while it is adding to his hopes that, in generations to come, they will not apostatize from the good way in which they have been taught.

And now, beloved reader, before we part, let us look back and gather up the substance of what has been stated, and see what important results follow. It appears that every child, possessing the ordinary powers of body and mind, is capable, with the assistance of that grace which God has promised to bestow on the due use of means, of being trained to knowledge and the habits of religion and virtue. It appears that such training would have the happiest effect on the subject of it, in every respect ; on his

health, his comfort, his usefulness, his life here, and his everlasting happiness. And if the whole community were so trained, then a new order of things would commence; society would be regenerated; "all would know God, from the least unto the greatest," and "the earth be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the seas."

If these things are so, does it not follow that society has the deepest interest in the proper training of the young; and ought not every individual in the community to contribute, not his mite, but his vigorous efforts, towards an object so momentous? But what is the responsibility under which every father, every master of a household, acts? It is not merely the temporal and eternal welfare of the young committed to his care, in their successive generations, that is affected by his fidelity, but the whole of society. The introduction of the millennial glory is hastened or retarded, by his diligence or his negligence. Farewell; and may it be given to you and me to know our duty, and be faithful in its performance, "even unto death," that we "may receive the crown of life."