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Christian Education

N. Beverley Tucker

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attended with any remarkable success. Indeed, there is often found a prejudice against religion, which seems to have grown up with them, and is eradicated with the more difficulty, because it has sprung up and rooted itself in a soil cleared from the rank weeds of vicious indulgence, and prepared to receive the seed of the spirit of God. This seed the enemy snatches away, and scatters the tares of enmity and rebellion in the place of it. They spring up in the night. They grow in darkness, shaded by the pall of a staid demeanor and assumed sobriety of deportment.

The promise is nevertheless often fulfilled in a remarkable manner, long after the anxious parent has gone to his rest, and the child, grown up to manhood, has taken his station among his fellows, in the affairs of life. Then it is, that the recollections of his youth, of the discipline and habits of his childhood come upon him, like a confused and troubled dream. Softened by time, as by distance, objects lose their asperities; any harshness which had once estranged him is forgotten, and he now comes to dwell, with sad and self-reproachful feelings, on his departure from the example of strictness, sobriety and gravity, which he had once renounced:—

“How gladly would the *man* recall to life
The *boy's* neglected sire, whose sternest frown
Was but the graver countenance of love.”

Under the influence of such feelings, he often turns back into the path from which he strayed. But how much better never to have left it! How many sorrows has he in the mean time brought upon himself, by vicious self-indulgence! How much matter of repentance has he provided for his future life! How many has he led astray by evil counsels and evil example, who are still wandering in the mazy wilderness of sin, and may never recover the way that leads to heaven!

It is surely well to consider, whether there is no remedy for these evils. Every man is a priest in his own house, and is not only charged with the care of the souls of his children; but is bound also, as far as possible, to make them instruments of good to others. What should we say to him who should make his house a menagerie of ravenous and destructive beasts, to be turned out as they grow up to prey upon the flocks and herds of his neighbors? And what better is he who carefully adorns and accomplishes the persons and minds of his children, with all the graces of manners, intelligence and address, which give them so much power over the principles and conduct, and happiness, of their associates, without guarding against the abuse of this power, by impressing their hearts with the love of religion and virtue, and a sense of the value of the souls of others? They go forth as fiends of darkness, in the garb of angels of light, and contamination, and misery, and death, are the fruits of their intercourse with the children of men.

Of this fault, it is not pretended that christian parents are willingly guilty. They are not even careful in many instances, to impart the ornamental parts of education, which so much enhance the power of seduction, but they innocently supply an instrument hardly less powerful, in the familiarity with the language of the Bible, which is often acquired by those who have no taste for its doctrines. When the devil cannot robe himself in the rainbow garment of Ithuriel, he can, at

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CHRISTIAN EDUCATION.

It is a grand desideratum in all the affairs of life, to hold fast what we get. The business of evangelizing the world, is like the stone of Sisyphus, continually recoiling upon each successive generation. We want something like what the sailors call a Paul to the Capstan,—a sort of Ratchet. This is the business of Christian Education, and the problem is to devise such a system of religious training and instruction, as shall be best adapted to that end.

It must be admitted that hitherto but little has been done, notwithstanding that the blessings of the gospel are promised to believers and to their children also. It is not found that the care of pious parents, to infuse religious sentiments into the hearts of their children, is

least, "quote scripture for his purpose," and many a heart has been corrupted, and many a mind confounded by scraps and ends of texts, torn from their connexion, and uttered in derision by those who have been taught to get verses by rote—but not, as the good old phrase is, *by heart*. O! ever while we live, let us make our children learn the Bible *BY HEART*, or not at all, that when they speak its language, they may speak as one whose "mouth speaketh out of the fulness of his own HEART."

This is the great point to be accomplished. How is it to be effected? The answer is plain. By addressing the gospel to the HEART. By the same means which a judicious and affectionate parent uses to infuse into the bosom of his child, the spirit of cheerful and willing obedience to himself. Let him carefully show both himself and his Maker to the infant's mind, as the personification of love. While he anxiously contrives to make him feel that to the love of his earthly parent, he owes all the benefits that he receives, let him point his attention also to that Father who is in heaven, and from whom he himself derives all the means of ministering to the wants and pleasures of the child. When he gives a bit of bread to the hungry urchin, and asking if it is good, receives an answer which shows that the little fellow's heart is full of grateful love, let him tell him what it is made of, and while he shows him the green blade from which, by a wonderful and mysterious contrivance, the grain is to be elaborated, and marks the half-incredulous wonder with which the information is received, let him tell him that this is the work of God, who causes the rain to fall, and the sun to shine, and matures the fruits of the earth for the benefit of his children. Such occasions of calling the attention of a child to the goodness, and bounty, and love of God, are continually recurring. He is never too young to receive impressions of love. Before he knows the meaning of the word, he takes them from his experience of the care and fondness of his mother; and long after he has begun to prattle, this feeling thus early implanted, continues to flourish alone, and affords the only sanction of parental authority. How happy is he, and how sweet to behold his happiness, while in the pursuit of his little foolish joys, the "todlin wee thing" needs no restraint from mischief, but the playful look, half-smile, half-frown, and the admonishing voice which warns without alarming. Well might our Saviour say, "that of such is the kingdom of heaven," where love is the only law, and love the only duty, and love the only sanction. Under this sweet engaging discipline, love becomes the habit of his mind, and long before he is capable of comprehending any but the simplest ideas, the foundation is laid in his heart, of those affections, by means of which he is to be formed to virtue, honor and happiness. What idea (next after those derived from things present, to the senses,)—what idea is more simple, more easily apprehended, than this; that while he receives all good things from the hands of his parents, they are sent to him by a friend he has never seen, whose name is God. What occasion for telling him who God is, or where he dwells, or any thing more than that he is good, and loves good boys, and will continue to love him and send him good things as long as he is good? Is it not easy to impress his mind with the same feeling which is cherished towards his dear Aunt

or kind Grandmama, of whom he is reminded every morning, when he drinks his milk out of a pretty cup, on which he is taught to read, "a present for my dear boy?" There is no time lost. The idea of the spiritual nature of God cannot be communicated until the mind is ready to receive it, and then it is uttered in one word, and comprehended in one moment. The vanity of a parent may be mortified, that his child does not know any thing of these high mysteries, at an age when other children of whom we read in good books, have been found disputing with the doctors about the trinity and the compound nature of the Redeemer. But this vanity, like many other human errors, needs the restraint of reason. For if it be asked, how long should this state of things be kept up? I would answer, as long as possible. If man is never to enter into the kingdom of heaven but as a little child, I would gladly keep him as a little child to the day of his death. But as this is not possible, I would apply my answer to the actual state of facts, and say that the discipline of love should be continued as long as love continues to supply the necessary motives to necessary restraint.

I would therefore venture to recommend the imposition of no restraints, and no tasks, but such as are necessary; and if possible, I would impose only such upon an infant as are obviously necessary, and, on an older child, such as he can be clearly made to see the necessity of. Such a system not only prolongs the reign, and confirms the habit of love, but prepares the mind to acquiesce with entire confidence in the wisdom and discretion of the parent. Let care therefore supply, as much as possible, the place of authority. Let the mother's eye be on her child, and then, instead of turning him loose with a code of unexplained laws upon his back, she will have it in her power to draw his attention from unlawful to lawful objects, and to lead him away unconsciously from forbidden places. The beautiful story of the mother who bared her bosom to draw away her child from the edge of the cliff, illustrates this idea.

I would say then to christian parents, prolong as much as possible the season of childhood—the empire of endearment and love; prolong that season when the hearts of your children are all your own, and divide them with God. Let their heads alone. No one ever teaches a child to talk. He learns it of himself more readily and more perfectly, than he can ever afterwards acquire a new language under the most skilful instructor. He has enough to do in acquiring those ideas which are necessary to him, and are suggested by the objects around him. He learns a great deal, and it is easy to help him to learn, without giving him lessons. He may have nothing of what we would dignify by the names of *knowledge* and *wisdom*, but he will acquire a great deal of *sense*, and may have very just notions of what it is to be a good boy, without having his mind perplexed with definitions of sin. The spirit of imitation will keep him busy. Teach him to love you, and he will need no command to make him try to do what he sees you do. Let him crawl. He will not long be content to go on all fours, when he sees his beloved and honored father walking erect. Curiosity will make him eager enough to know the meaning of letters, and he will esteem it a privilege to be allowed to look at round O, and crooked S, and to be taught to read for

himself in the pretty picture books, out of which his dear mother is in the habit of reading entertaining stories to him. Keep bad examples from before his eyes, and the opportunities of mischief out of his way, and keep his heart alive to a sense of the love of his parents and the love of God, until his mind has time to settle into a HABIT of love, obedience and virtue.

For reasons of the same sort, I would refrain from presenting in the second stage of education, any views of religion tint to the literal and unpractised mind of a child, *might seem* at variance with his earlier conceptions of the divine character. I am very sure that any doctrines *actually* at variance with them must be false; and though I believe that none such may be entertained by any sincere and intelligent christian, yet it has somehow so happened, that many modes of expression have obtained currency in the world, which a novice would be startled at. I should therefore be careful, not to go beyond the plain letter of scripture in explaining to him religious truth.

The well digested form of sound doctrine as it is there set forth, would be almost my sole reliance. I would be careful to accompany this with appeals to his own experience and observation for the truth, that, as a general rule, it is our own fault if we are not happy. That occasionally, indeed, we receive injury at the hands of others, and that therefore it is that we are so often led to fall into pits of our own digging, that we may be not so fond of digging them in future. I would endeavor thus to familiarize him with a sense of the necessity of punishment, as the preventive of evil, and to enable him to comprehend to what lengths of mischief the simple principle of self-love would impel the best imaginable finite being, if he could feel perfectly sure that no manner of harm to himself could possibly arise from the indulgence of any desire. This idea, as it seems to me, is capable of being placed in plain colloquial language, in so clear a light, that any ingenuous mind would be readily brought to acquiesce in the necessity of God's moral government of the moral universe, in the necessity of punishing sin in order to prevent it, and the true benevolence of resolutely inflicting the necessary punishment, as the preventive of the far greater sum of suffering which the impurity of sin would produce. I should not fear that a mind habituated throughout to cherish the sentiments of gratitude and love, would be slow to understand, or reluctant to believe a plan of comprehensive and *general utility* devised by the spirit of universal benevolence for the *greatest possible good* of the whole, or impatient to endure such portion of evil, as, in the execution of such a plan, it might be called to bear.

I should anxiously endeavor to make my pupil sensible, that a plan of coercion, intended to procure a cheerful, affectionate and happy obedience, (and no other obedience can be happy,) must be understood by those who are made subject to it, to be so intended, and to explain to him the decisive proof of such intention which is afforded, when the ruler himself condescends to endure a portion of the punishment due to the sins of his people, and graciously pardons all whom this exhibition of his goodness brings to sincere repentance.

With these suggestions, gently insinuated from time to time, and containing as I verily believe the pure milk of the word, the best aliment for youthful minds, I should

content myself, and leave him to seek the confirmation of these ideas in the Bible; nor would I suffer him, until on the verge of manhood, to puzzle his understanding and *afflict his spirit* with the perusal of works of theology.

In confirmation of the ideas I have suggested, let me beg the reader to observe how much more readily, and more frequently, the principles of religion take root in female minds, than in those of men. How many examples do we see among them of the most tender and fervent piety, and how seldom do we find it incumbered with the heavy lumber of theological learning, or frittered down into nice and shadowy distinctions. Yet are they wise unto salvation, possessing that faith by which the *heart* believeth unto righteousness, though perhaps unable to give any other reason for their faith, than that God is love, and in proof of his love gave himself to die for the sins of the world. Whence comes this tendency among them to imbibe this simple and saving faith, unless it be from the peculiarities of their education? The discipline of infancy is prolonged with them. They are kept under the eye of the mother, whose unsuspected vigilance supplies the place of commands, imposes an unperceived restraint, and renders the habits of decorum, propriety, meekness and obedience, a sort of second nature. Restrained only by the silken cord of love, whose weight they feel not, they never strain against it, nor try to throw it off. Their minds and tempers are formed rather by habit than precept, and their obedience is secured, not by punishment or the fear of it, but by prevention. They are accustomed to do right, because they have no opportunities of doing wrong, without violating that instinct of propriety, which makes it painful to do what we feel to be wrong in the presence of those we love. When left to themselves, they do what is right, because they have been long accustomed to do it; and they know it to be right, because thus acting, they have always lived in the enjoyment of those peaceable fruits which an upright conduct can alone produce.

It will be seen that many of my remarks on the subject of instruction, apply also to that of discipline. I have already shown that the discipline, whose purpose is to prepare the child for his duties to his parents, should be modified by a proper regard to his duties to God. In like manner, that which may be called religious discipline, should be so regulated as not to counteract what has been already done. *Parental* training, if I may so distinguish it, should be so managed as to cultivate the love of the child for his parents; *religious* training, so as to cultivate his love for God. It would be strangely inconsistent, that we should be careful not to offend and estrange a child by imposing on him, of our own authority, any harsh, unexplained and inexplicable commands, and at the same time load him, by the alleged command of God, with burthens grievous to be borne. Duties which he is not old enough to understand the nature of, are not his duties. There is no more violation of God's law in a child of a certain age playing on the Sabbath, than in the sports of a puppy. Yet long before he is old enough to be capable of a violation of this law, it is a matter of great importance that he should be gradually and carefully trained, and prepared to obey it. In this training, I would carefully avoid any thing like austerity. I would familiarize his

infant ear to the name of *Sunday*, and accustom him to regard it as a day of privileges. Put on his best clothes, caress him, praise him, warn him to keep himself sweet and clean, make him take notice that every body else is so, and that nobody is made to do any work, and all because it is Sunday; make him observe the staid and quiet behavior of every body about the house, and see how soon he will get his little stool, and set up with his hands before him, and try to *behave pretty* too. When this is done, enough is done for the beginning. When he is tired of imitating the grave demeanor of others, let him go. The spirit of imitation will return again and again; the habits it induces will make a deeper and deeper impression, and if he is carefully imbued with a love for his parents, and a love for God, without being taught to dread and hate the Sabbath, he will be thus well prepared to submit cheerfully to its restraints, by the time he is old enough to know the reason of them. Let him see that you too, submit to them cheerfully. Let him miss nothing of your accustomed kindness or amenity of manner on that day. Do not let him learn to think of it as "a day for a man to afflict his soul, and hang down his head like a bull-rush," a day of fault-finding, and formal observance, and Judaical austerity. In short, let him see that you esteem the Sabbath as a day of privilege, and leave the rest as much as possible to the spirit of affectionate imitation.

I would say the same of other religious duties. Do not force the little drowsy urchin to sit up to family prayers. When he happens to do so, let him hear you thank God in simple terms for the privilege of being permitted to pray to him, and implore of him blessings whose value he feels and knows. If you find occasion to preach in your prayers, (a bad practice by the way,) do not preach about matters which none but a Doctor of Divinity can be expected to understand.

On the interesting subject of fashionable amusements, as they are called, I own I feel more difficulty. It chiefly arises from the consideration that the youth who is old enough to take an interest in such amusements, is at a more unmanageable age than formerly. It is not so easy to restrain him, without letting him be conscious of the restraint. It is not so easy to draw him off from a pernicious pursuit, to one less dangerous. He is no longer to be satisfied with those cheap equivalents for forbidden gratifications, which made it easy to command his obedience, without estranging his affections. The whole business of education at this stage, is a difficult and delicate operation. I cannot imagine any general rule for a class of cases as various as all the infinite varieties of the human character. Let us suppose some of them.

If, in spite of all the care that had been taken to soften and subdue his heart, and beguile him from self-love to the love of his friends, and of God his best friend, if in spite of all this he continued obdurate, wilful and rebellious, I am conscious that I should be at my wit's end. I do not know but that in such a case, it would be the part of wisdom to yield to those feelings which a parent would naturally experience, and, acting as in obedience to the unerring instincts of nature, to resort to severity instead of tenderness, and endeavor to bring down his heart with sorrow. As a part of such a system, it would be a matter of course, to deny him this indulgence.

A different case would be that of a youth of mercurial temper, and warm feelings, who had grown up in habitual love and reverence for his parents and his Maker, and whose buoyant spirit and restless temper, and keen appetite for enjoyment, might render him impatient of such restraint. Even in this case I should not too readily relax it. I should endeavor if possible to ascertain whether it might be enforced without impairing those tender and reverential sentiments. If so, I should enforce it. If not, I would yield with undissembled reluctance, but without reproach. I should endeavor to draw him into a contest of generosity, with a hope that he would not long consent to be outdone. But in no case would I surrender the end for the means, and do violence to the best, and kindest, and holiest affections of the human heart, and run the risk of destroying them, by restraining a youth from things not evil in themselves, but only evil in their tendencies. The only antidote to the love of pleasure, is the love of God. In truth the great evil of the love of pleasure, is that it is an antidote to the love of God, and when the authority of God is used to force one away from a much coveted enjoyment, there is danger that it may but make him love God less, and pleasure more. But it is the saying of a wise man, that where an appetite for any thing actually exists, the best security against excess, is in a regulated indulgence; and to this indulgence I would resort with an humble hope that my pupil might find wisdom to add this too to the list of blessings experienced at the hands of his Maker, until the victory should at last result to him to whom it belongs.

For the remaining case of a young man having no taste for such pleasures, and content to spend his time in reading and meditation, I would prescribe nothing more than this; that he should not be encouraged to bless God that he was not as other men, but be kept on the alert by a warning that sin enters into the heart by more avenues than one.