

“OURSELVES.”

In the preface to *Ourselves* (a series of talks to boys and girls) on the subject of that nature which they possess in common with the rest of mankind, viz., *human* nature, the authoress says, “in using this book with quite young children, mothers should make their own of so much as they wish to give of such teaching and speak it, a little at a time, by way of Sunday talks—with older children, read it with or to them.” The object of this paper (written by one who has studied the book in school, week by week, with the children), is to show what practical use they make of it, and what a beautiful effect it has upon their daily lives.

We sometimes puzzle ourselves by wondering how it is that the children of religious and godly people are often the very reverse of what we should expect, while those of unbelievers are good, sweet, well-mannered and charming. Is it not that in some cases the believers forget (see preface) “that our relations with God embrace the *whole* of our lives (ourselves, our souls and bodies), and not only the spiritual part.” There is an old adage which says, “God helps those who help themselves.” We want to grow a plant to perfection, but should we be able to do this if we relied solely on what we might call the equivalent to spiritual training, in the natural world—the sunshine and the rain. What about the careful selection of the seed, the preparation of the soil, the transplanting, the weeding, the watering, the careful watch against blight or insects, the protection from scorching heat and wilting cold? And in the formation of character it is these last things which the spiritually minded people *sometimes* overlook, and then the world wonders how it is that the plant of child-life has not come to perfection. (Far be it for the writer of this paper to undervalue spiritual teaching, which in the present case takes the proportion of five lessons to one against the moral.)

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect,” spake the Great Teacher, and it is to make for this perfection or wholeness, in the lives of His

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“little ones,” that the author has written this book. Let us approach *Ourselves* therefore, not carelessly, but as a work that is written for the service of the children and let it be only after earnest, prayerful preparation that we study it with them.

Hunger. We had been taking the chapter on “Esquire Hunger,” (p. 12) “directly a person begins to feed upon dainties, like pastry, rich cake, too many sweets, Hunger goes; or rather, he changes his character and becomes Gluttony.” A few days after this at lunch, B said, “May I have some more stew?” “Why of course you may, if you want it.” “No that’s just it, I *don’t want* any more, I’ve had plenty, only it’s so good.” Then, another day, “Take care C, Mr. Gluttony’s trying to get hold of you!”

Thirst (p. 15). “All little children like water, but bigger boys and girls sometimes like various things, such as lemon juice, in their water to give it a flavour. Though there is no harm in this, it is rather a pity, *because they lose the taste for water* itself.” “It is well to keep one’s taste for cold water, and to know how delicious it is.” This made a great impression; the children had been used to drinking lemonade every day. “What shall we do?” they said in a body, “leave it off?” We talked it over and they themselves

decided to drink water one day, lemonade the next. One small boy of eight, said wistfully, "I *wish* I had known all about these things when I was a *little* boy, it would have made such a difference."

Chapter V., The Five Senses, we made into a series of games, the children keeping their eyes shut and guessing what were the objects put into their hands by the taste, smell, feel and sound. And we cultivated sight by a sort of challenge as to who could describe most things in mother's drawing-room, etc. (p. 29). "Let me ask you one or two questions, if you can answer them, we shall call you Eyes." A little while after one of them said, "I can find all my books in the dark, I know the feel of them."

Literature. It is pretty to hear quite young children talking about Literature, and to realize that they know what they are talking about (p. 40). "How to recognise Literature." "Observe, there is a poor place close at hand, where pictures [p 129]

are painted for you and where people are introduced; but you cannot see the pictures with your eyes shut, and the people do not live and act in your thoughts. To apply another test, Intellect must keep his Beauty Sense always by his side. Keep your eye upon words and wait to feel their force and beauty; and when words are so fit that no other words can be put into their places, so few that none could be left out without spoiling the sense, and so fresh and musical that they delight you, then you may be sure that you are reading Literature, whether Prose or Poetry. Literature gives you a sense of delight in the *words alone.*" When asked in a very difficult bit of Bible story, whether they would rather it were told to them. "No, no, we like the Bible words best, they are *much* more beautiful."

Comparing Milton's story of the Creation and the Bible one, they told their Daddy that they infinitely preferred to have it read out of the Bible. Then again, of a favourite story-book, "It is a nice book, but I'm afraid it's not *quite* Literature." And yet again, the language of any plays after those of Shakespeare, slightly palled on an older child.

The Beauty Sense. Our morning on "Beauty" was greatly enjoyed (p. 42). "The person who watches Nature closely and knows her well, like the poet Wordsworth, for instance, has his Beauty Sense always active, always bringing him joy." We took it in turns (only the children were so keen that order was difficult to maintain!), to describe something beautiful we had seen—first in Nature and then another day, in Art.

In *How to Exorcise the Dæmon of Self.* We enumerated all the delightful things we could find to think about (p. 51). "You will find so much that is delightful to think about, that you will hardly have time to think about yourself. Turn Self out the moment he intrudes upon any picture of the Imagination." "Oh, tell me about when you were little, quick. I want to forget I'm tired, said a little girl upon a very long walk."

The Desire of Approbation and the Dæmon of Vanity were brought clearly home to us by the foolish behaviour of some little friends, and we came to the conclusion that it didn't matter a bit whether we had better clothes or not than so and so, if they were what Mother and Daddy wished us to wear.

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And we also realized how nice it was to be able to go straight out of school and say to them, "I've got three sums right out of three and no mistakes in my dictation." (p. 67.) "The Desire of Approbation helps a child later to conquer a sum, to climb a hill, to bring home a good report. But when people show off, like a peacock spreading his tail, it is always in order that somebody, whose good opinion is not worth having, may think the better of them. Nice boys and girls, nice men and women, think well of us just for doing our best; we know this and we do not show off before them."

Love. The children liked this, about Love (p. 81). "Have you ever thrown a stone into the water and watched the circles about it spread? As a matter of fact, they spread to the very shores of the pond or lake or sea into which you have thrown the stone; they affect the land on the further side. But those distant circles become so faint that they are imperceptible, while those nearest the point where you have thrown the stone are clearly marked. So it is with our Love. It is as if in the first place, our home were the stone thrown in to move our being; and from that central point the circle of our love widens until it embraces all men." To an older child B said, "The boys were quarrelling this afternoon," and I said, "Don't you remember what we had in school." "Little children love one another?" They didn't take any notice, so I said it again, and then I began to quarrel too. I wish I hadn't now!

Pity (p. 87). "Many tender hearts have been and are so consumed with Pity that they give up their whole lives to the comfort and help of sufferers." Here they thought that Florence Nightingale should be included in the "Ladies of Pity."

Self-Pity (p. 90). "The surer way of guarding ourselves against Self-Pity is to think about *others*. Be quick to discern their pains and sufferings and be ready to help. We cannot be absorbed in two things at the same time, and if our minds are occupied with *others*—we shall have neither time nor inclination to think of ourselves." In studying the life of Christ and especially during the last few hours of His life, we were so much struck by the way in which, in all His great suffering, His thoughts were ever for the comfort of *others*.

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Kindness (p. 101). "The essence of acts of kindness is that they should be *unremembered*. Of course, we never mention a kindness we have done, whether to the person concerned or to other people." Great efforts were made this week to do kind things. "I did so and so for mother; Oh, but I forgot, it isn't kind when you tell anybody, is it?"

Courage of Serenity (p. 114). "Anxious fuss in the small emergencies of life, such as travelling, household mischances, pressure of work, is a form of panic fear, the fear that all may not go well, or that something may be forgotten or left undone. The best thing we can do is to see that one person keeps a serene mind in unusual or trying circumstances; then we shall be sure that one person is ready to be of use."

The Courage of our Affairs. "The form of fear that is inclined to fret or worry and become agitated under any slight stress of circumstances, darkens into anxiety in the face of some success we are striving after, some calamity we fear. If this noble Courage is possible in the face of coming grief, it is also possible, if we would believe it, in the face of lesser matters. 'Let not your heart be anxious' (R.V.), is the *command* of Christ."

These two passages made a great impression on the mind of one child and quite changed the life-aspect, changed it into one of calm serenity. This again helped two of the children.

The Courage of Our Capacity (p. 117)—“the Courage which assures us that we can do the particular work which comes in our way, and will not lend an ear to the craven fear which reminds us of failures in the past and unfitness in the present. It is intellectual Courage too, which enables us to grapple with tasks of the mind with a sense of adequacy. Intellectual panic is responsible for many failures.”

Gladness (p. 131). “There is gladness enough in the world for us all; or, to speak more exactly, there is a fountain of gladness in everybody’s heart only waiting to be unstopped. The fountain of gladness should rise within us always, and so it will if it be not hindered. It is *ourselves* that choke the spring. We are sad and not glad only when we are *sorry for ourselves*.” This has been an epoch-marking chapter in the moral life of the schoolroom. Somehow, we worked out the idea together that gladness was like a beautiful fountain, we

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drew a picture of a fountain on the blackboard, we drew two little taps, we marked one *Self*, the other *Others*. Surely, all that about Self-Pity on page 87 was helping us. We came to the conclusion that the way to make the fountain work was to turn off the *Self* tap and turn on the *Others* tap. This idea was uppermost in our minds for weeks. Out of it we took our two school mottoes. “*Others*,” printed at the top of the board in blue, the colour of the sky, and *Joy* printed in rose-colour. Two of our number were inclined to sulk. One sulky day, someone said, “Oh dear, the *Self* tap is turned on.” (Quick as thought the picture of the fountain and the taps was put on the board.) “Why, I believe it’s beginning to play again.” One dear little face was again wreathed in smiles and a little voice, “Why, I *do believe* I felt the splash!” Two more sulky days come especially into this story. On one of them, the poor little sufferer had been sent out into the garden to chase away “the black dog”; he came back with a set, determined look on his face, sat down at his desk, took up a piece of coloured chalk and in bold characters printed right across the wood, “*Others*.” Apparently, nobody took any notice, but to those who watch for the fruits of the Perfect Life, such acts as these are not trivial, especially when, after a long time of waiting, the fruit of gladness may be said to have begun to form in the little life.

On the second of these two days, it was the other child, and one of the children said, “May I draw something that will help B. Please give me a piece of paper.” And he drew the quaintest little demon, running as hard as he could, with flying hair, streaming eyes and pouting lips. Across him was written *Self*, and behind him *Joy*. “See, he’s running away from “*Joy*.”

Botticelli’s “Calumny,” of which picture we happened to have a copy, was much appreciated, especially (p. 152). “Truth, pure and beautiful, averting her eyes from the evil spectacle, and raising her hand to heaven, sure of a hearing there.”

Exaggeration (p. 158). “Exaggeration in speech, even when it is more foolish than mischievous, is a failure in Veracity.” It was encouraging after this to hear the

children pull themselves up in the middle of an exaggeration and carefully speak the exact truth.

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Causes of Lying and Cowardly Lies (p. 163). "Cowardice, again, makes for Falsehood. We have said or done a thing of which we are ashamed, and our first impulse is to deny it. But let us rally our forces and own up; our friends love us the better, in spite of our fault, if we will only say we have done it; they like our Courage and honour us."

"Dare to be true. Nothing can need a lie,
A fault which needs it most grows two thereby."

"Please give us each a strip of paper and let us write that down for a book-marker." And in their best (Mrs. Bridges') writing it was inscribed, the first letter of each word in a differently coloured chalk. It was a laborious task and took up most of the time for the lesson, but what did that matter, when after-events showed how indelibly it was printed on their minds. On the other side of the paper and on another day they wrote (p. 166), "Magna est Veritas et Prævalebit."

Justice in Action (p. 177). "Another point of Integrity is care for our neighbour's property. To love our neighbour as ourselves, means that we shall be at least as careful in the use of his property as in that of our own." A few days after this lesson, one of the children was crossing the hall with someone else. The servant had just been washing the floor and the child took long strides on tiptoe. When he reached his companion, who was thinking of something else and evidently looked puzzled, he said, in rather a shy way, "It was that lesson you know, about taking care of other people's property!" Another boy wiped his pen carefully, so that Daddy would be saved expense.

These are a few instances of the ways in which *Ourselves* helps the children, and that, through it, many more may be helped is the earnest wish of the writer of this little paper.