

## RELIGIOUS TEACHING IN THE HOME.<sup>1</sup>

BY MISS DOUGLAS.

You may perhaps wonder why I should venture to speak about Home-teaching and not School-teaching. My excuses are that I belonged myself for many years to that most precious of all things, a good home; that I believe a school is good in so far as in many fundamental things it is like a good home; and also I have seen and known very many homes, and more than one generation of them. In this little paper I am not going to speak so much about Bible or Religious lessons given in the home, as about the practical outcome of that teaching. The religious lesson must be followed up by trying to provide the atmosphere and discipline which will encourage the development of the religious character. Nowhere can this be done more naturally and more fruitfully than in a good home. I have set myself a very difficult task, but I remember that sometimes help comes from saying as simply as possible what life has seemed to teach oneself. Many good people want their children to know their Bibles and Prayer Books, and yet they do not seem always quite to face what this must involve in life if it means anything at all.

Deep down in the mind and heart of every thinking human being there is the necessity for a religion, for something to bind and tie him to his best self, for some strong principles on which to build up his life. The people of different races and different ages have had different conceptions of what religion means to them, but nobody in a healthy frame of mind and heart can feel satisfied without some sort of religion, and by this I mean something that belongs to the vital part of him. There cannot be real religion of any kind without faith in it. Religion binds you, doesn't it, to that in which you have faith? If you cease to have faith in your religion, you cease to have that religion, you may come to believe in another religion, but you can't have anything to live by and die by without

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some degree of faith in it. Those that believe that the Christian religion holds in it the truth contained in every other form of religion, and that it transcends them all in the pattern of human life it sets before us, in the illuminating comfort it sheds upon life, even the darkest portion of it, and in the fruitfulness of the lives of the best of its followers—we who believe that there are utterly baffling mysteries of sin and suffering which we shall never understand with the intellect, yet that Christianity offers a solution which we can understand somewhat with the heart and the spirit, we, I say, who believe that Christianity is the best religion we have ever heard of, or could ever have conceived—we want to give this to our children. Why? Because we want it to be the very rock beneath their feet.

We ought to be extremely anxious to see our children becoming religious, that is, becoming what the Christian religion teaches us we all ought to be. In the interpretation of life which we get from Christianity there are, for instance, characteristics which stand out as foremost marks of the religion of Christ, which we must therefore want our children to have, if we want them to be Christians. Such things are Love and Humility, Courage, and many others. First let us look at Love or Unselfishness. I prefer to call this virtue Love, as being the active positive virtue which reaches out towards all that is good and beautiful, and adds to the things which are good and beautiful, so giving more happiness and hope and encouragement to others. The reproductiveness of love and sympathy is one of the wonders of this most wonderful thing which we call Love. Unselfishness is a rather cold and negative term, and, if we

think of it, an untrue term altogether, for a selfish person is one whose life is narrow, uninteresting, stunted, unhappy and dwindling, and if we were truly our best selves we should ever be growing rich with all that makes life worth living at all. Now, though we know this perfectly well, though we see every day of our lives the happiness of those who are unselfish, in the ordinary use of the term, and the discontent of those who are selfish—the difference is visible even on the face of a baby—yet how many watch and pray, and think and plan to help their children to be happily unselfish? I am not so much pleading that they may be led

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to do bits of needlework and save their pennies to help the poor, though that is good in a measure, but I mean a great deal more than that. We should watch the tendencies in our children, and see whither the trend of their character is leading them. In little children greediness, jealousy, laziness, dawdling, ingratitude are the kind of faults that make straight for a selfish character and should not be let slip. I don't believe in much preaching, but I believe in cheerfully insisting on the right things being said and done. In the confidential talks about being good, which should, I imagine, be rather rare occurrences, the fact that it is *hard* to be good and that a fight has to be faced, might be more fruitfully dwelt upon than the fact that it is *nice* or *beautiful* to be good. You see it is so desperately hard for any of us to be good!—to act up to the best we know, and we must brace our children, therefore, for a fight, and we must not let them off when the moment comes.

Then Humility has undoubtedly a foremost place in the teaching of Christ and in the teaching of the Church, which should reflect the teaching of Christ. And life teaches us the attractiveness of sincere humility—good manners are of the essence of it. The bumptious, pushing person is certainly unattractive, and possibly he may be cruel. Genuine humility we see to be attractive, but it is terribly hard to acquire. Why, therefore, do some children seem to be taught the contrary, namely, self-importance? And signs of pride instead of being checked are almost admired? Humility is in no wise akin to timidity or cowardice. The bully at school is a coward, but is he humble? And the brave man is most attractive when he is most gentle. And now lastly with regard to Courage. This is a heathen and a Christian grace, the whole field of civilized ethics places the worth and desirableness of true courage high. Then why are children ever spoiled? Those who spoil them destroy their courage, and if one thinks of it, this is the cruellest thing to do. Life is going to be hard—let them practise courage when they are young. Do not let us make things too easy for them. We naturally long to save them from all pain and disappointment and trial when they are young, but a truer deeper love makes us long for them to bear small troubles bravely, and not to make too much of

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little disappointments, so that they may gradually be braced to meet the greater troubles which will surely come. We cannot save them from these however much we long to do so, but we can help them to get ready to face them in that brave spirit which will carry them through the hardest times. So it appears that Religious teaching in the home must be of a two-fold nature. There must be the Bible lesson, the Religious instruction, and thought about the spending of Sunday, for there must be time and attention given to the spiritual side of life. But if these things are to be of any use, there must be the facing of the practical result of the teaching, or else we get that most fatal of all things—cant. If people teach their children the Bible and the various things which are good for them to do and to be, and yet do not help them to carry the

teaching out in their lives, they had far better leave the whole thing alone. An insincere Christian life is what does most harm to true religion all over the world. There must be this facing of the practical result of the religious teaching, there must be the watching for it, the longing for it, the earnest desire for the children to be sincerely religious. We must lead and help the children to grow into the fulness of really living this wonderful, interesting life. Then alone will they truly and fully live, and be capable in their turn of contributing their share to all that makes for true life and progress.

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