

MORAL TRAINING.

BY E. K.

“I beheld in my Dream ... a man whose name was Help.”

YOUNG and old alike we live in what Mrs. Gamp called “this Piljian’s Projiss of a mortal wale,” and our thoughts are thought, our conflicts fought, our lessons conned, for the most part, unknown to those nearest and dearest to us. It is well that it should be realised that as with their elders so with young people, and it is better so. Woe worth the day when they shall be encouraged to fight every moral and intellectual battle before an audience of even one! The battle then becomes the matter of moment, the sensations and emotions of the conflict, absorbing to the ousting of the issue, and the method of fighting of more account than the decision between right and wrong. This is the chief objection to the work of many second-rate novelists and to the productions of even historical novels at cinema shows. “You see it all, down to the last tear-drop on a girl’s cheek” is the “last word” said in praise of one of the best shows in London recently.

“The spirit bloweth where it listeth and thou canst not tell.” The Spirit is too delicate an organism to be laid bare to any human eye. Most young people are happily sheltered by a natural reserve that saves them from the prying eye of the too sympathetic, too conscientious, elder who thinks probing is necessary to see if growth be evident. Is it possible that we may come to wonder whether “the tolerant and corporeal theory of the last century was not preferable to the intolerant and unresting moral influence that has succeeded to it?”¹

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The war is teaching us many things. Discipline, obedience, have, after all, been found a welcome relief from the responsibility of, “I am free to do, to think, as I like.” Many a man has gone to the front with the high happiness of, “This one thing I do,”—a determination which solves many of the minor and all too prominent problems of life. As numbers day by day pass on to the larger life those left are finding their thoughts drawn more to it. A new standard of the relative values of things has been set up and men are able to take a wider view, to see what are the things that matter and what may be treated as passing phases. A young officer wrote recently to his mother from the trenches, that in spite of all the horrors it was a wonderful time for “he could see into the very souls of his men,” and men are learning in a few months some of the lessons of a life time. As Mr. Kipling puts it, they get

“... the lore of men that ha’ dealt with men.”

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“... the faith of men that ha’ brothered men
By more than easy breath,
And the eyes o’ men that ha’ read wi’ men
In the open books of death.”

It may be that some of the moral and intellectual problems in the education of children will emerge from the crucible to take their places in proportion instead of looming as the only consideration. One thing is to be remembered, as Walter Bagehot finely puts it:—

“The nature of man is not two things but one thing. We have not one set of affections, hopes, sensibilities, to be affected by the present world and a different to be affected by the invisible world ... We hunger after righteousness or we do not; our heart is dull or it is wakeful;

our soul is alive or it is dead . . . Deep under the surface of the intellect lies the stratum of the passions, of the intense peculiar, simple impulses, which constitute the heart of man; there is the eager essence, the primitive desiring being. What stirs this latent being we know. In general it is stirred by everything ... It is not important whether the object be in the visible or invisible world, whoso loves what he has seen will love what he has not seen; whoso hates what he has seen will hate what he has not seen. ... Everywhere the deep religious organisation has been deeply sensitive to this world ... In Jewish history the most tenderly religious character is the most sensitive to earth ... Along every lyric of the Psalmist thrills a deep spirit of human enjoyment; he was alive as a child to the simple aspects of the world; the very errors of his mingled career are but those to which the open enjoying character is most prone; its principle, so to speak, was a tremulous passion for that which he had seen, as well as that which he had not seen."

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Browning gives us an illustration of this in *The Epistle of Karshish*—Lazarus, to whose soul heaven has opened while he is yet on earth.

Young people have to face the problems of life and, as spiritual beings, cannot be sheltered from all evil, however much their environment may be sterilised; and there *was* once a man who was worse off after his room was swept and garnished than before! Even food with life-giving properties, such as milk, is apt to become harmful, if subjected to sterilisation, as recent experiment has shewn. It is no use waiting till the crisis comes. In the old days girls were brought up in an atmosphere of, "Thou shalt not know, or do." In these days this is not possible even if it were desirable, and we are more inclined to put our faith in the wisdom of the wise old Fathers of the Church who, studying the Divine Philosophy of the Gospels and knowing that "out of the heart proceedeth," prayed, "Incline our *hearts* to keep this law," thus indicating the motive power to act upon the "Thou shalt not."

So it is with the thoughts of the heart that men must concern themselves. These thoughts are nourished and sustained in the first place by the contemplation of the life of our Lord, in the words of an old Spanish martyr:—

"Where His feet have stood
Springs up along the way their tender food."

The author has laid down in detail in *Ourselves*² the principles that should help people to face the problems of life in themselves and in others. It is only in the hope that those who have not done so may study this book that these few thoughts are set down. In the preface the author says:

"Possibly we fail to give 'effective moral training based upon Christian principles' to young people because our teaching is scrappy, and rests mainly upon appeals to the emotions through tale and song. Inspiring as these are, we may not depend upon them entirely, because emotional response is short-lived, and the appeal is deadened by repetition: the response of the intellect to coherent and consecutive teaching appears, on the contrary, to be continuous and enduring. Boys and girls have as much capacity to apprehend what is presented to their minds as have their elders; and, like their elders, they take great pleasure and interest in an appeal to their understanding which discovers to them the ground plan of human nature—a common possession."

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As the Apochrypha [sic] is set for instruction in life and example in manners, so also may the wealth

poured forth by our great poets and novelists and painters be drawn upon. And why not adopt Mr. Bagnet's method in getting said for us what we either cannot say, or hesitate to say, for ourselves! "Old girl! will you tell him my opinion,' and again, 'Silence! the old girl,' says Mr. Bagnet, 'is correct—in her way of giving my opinions—hear me out!'"³

Our Divine Master provides a working method in this as in all other cases, "Without a parable spake He not unto them." He sets forth the material on which men's minds can work and draw therefrom their moral and spiritual nourishment, and "knowing their thoughts" spreads a varied banquet where each poor soul can take the special meat needed to sustain its spiritual hunger.

Is not the way here set forth for all? The banquet must be set forth, it must be varied and at the same table sit both elders and juniors learning of each other and of the things of life at the hands of the provider, be he poet, novelist, or painter, who sees life and sees it whole. And what a bond of fellowship comes of such browsing on a common pasture! Mrs. Russell Barrington, in her recent *Life of Walter Bagehot*, writes of her sister and herself:—

"It had been the habit of our sisterhood to read Jane Austen's books periodically aloud to each other, especially *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*, and the characters in them had become our intimate acquaintances. The link which bound a firm tie of friendship between Mr. Hutton and ourselves from the first visit he paid us, was created by his solemnly declaiming the opening sentence of Darcy's famous proposal in *Pride and Prejudice*, 'Long have I struggled.'"

So much of the so-called moral instruction of to-day is labelled like advertisements of patent medicine: a set of stories on Courage, Temperance, or what not, is offered apart from the context that gives the lesson proportion. Such stories (on a level with what boys resent as 'pi-jaw') fall frequently on unheeding, even unwilling ears, for they call for no process of mental digestion, a process which is not seldom attended by a thrill of discovery. Some incident in history, poetry, biography, discloses, for instance, to the reader, that he is not so very peculiar after all; that temptation is one 'common to man.'

It is the communion at a common fount of life that counts,

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—the mutual enjoyment of book or character, of bird or flower, of mathematical problem or scientific discovery. In such fellowship the mother, the teacher, becomes first the friend and then the philosopher and guide in life's occasions, chiefly because she has known how to enjoy and then to wait, to wait ready with the guidance that may be needed. If it is not asked for it is given best in the literary, impersonal form by some great writer, not in the form of an oral lesson on the subject, or a 'talk,' nor even in that of the topic started and 'discussion invited.' If guidance is directly asked for, with such a mutual understanding already established, a few words will set the traveller on the right road.

In this way the boy, the girl, may learn to face life with some conception of its forces or, at any rate, with sufficient ballast to steady the delicate machine at a crisis till the way is made clear; that is, perhaps, until another avenue to fulness of life shall open up when one is closed, for there are many ways to the desired haven.

Great writers see a character and see it whole; it lives before us and the greater or lesser moralities take their proper place. Life is not all love affairs, nor all tragedy, nor all comedy as the writers of many second-rate novels might appear to think, and man or woman in the hands of a novelist-philosopher appears as he is in the "daily round."

Dowden, in writing of Shakespeare's spiritual progress, says:—

"With every fresh discovery of crime Shakespeare made discovery of virtue which cannot suffer defeat. The knowledge of good and evil grow together. While Shakespeare moved

gaily upon the surface of life, it was the play of intellect that stirred within him the liveliest sense of pleasure ... Now that he had come to comprehend more of the sorrow and more of the evil of the earth—treachery, ingratitude, cruelty, lust,—Shakespeare found perhaps less to delight him in mere brightness of intellect; he certainly gave his heart away with more fervour of loyalty to human goodness, to fortitude, purity of heart, self-surrender, self-mastery—to every noble expression of character. . . If the sense of wrong sank deep into his soul. . . yet he surmounted all sense of personal wrong, and while life grew more severe, it grew more beautiful”: and he “discovered Horatio and Kent, Cordelia and Desdemona.”

The knowledge of good and evil grow together as do the wheat and the tares and the good and the bad tendencies in every man. But it is always sowing time and growing time in the field of character, and hope is there while good seed is still to be had. Two counsels among others are given in *Ourselves* in dealing with the question of the inevitable meeting

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with evil. The imagination may not dwell on images of sin met with in book or picture and the mind must reject the evil thought by an effort of the will. Temptation comes to all: it is the “entering in” that is our concern.

A hundred examples of the way in which the problems of life are faced will occur to all those who love to dwell on what “our (poet and novelist) Fathers have told us.”

Thackeray shews that so gentle, sweet and good a young woman as Amelia Sedley is not worthy the love of a great-hearted Dobbin,⁴ that Helen Pendennis,⁵ with all her saintly devotion, hindered the education of her son, that Colonel Newcome,⁶ with all his charm and nobility, had not the strength of character to make him a wise father as well as the friend of his son. Dickens gives us the delightful Steerforth,⁷ full of promise, beloved of all his friends, who yet loses his way in life. Jane Austen shows how Emma,⁸ delightful as she is, has to learn that ‘managing ways’ “do not become a young woman.”⁹

By the way, in a recent educational catalogue, giving a list of historical and other novels for the use of teachers, *Pride and Prejudice* is recommended as a faithful picture of the time, but is said to be “not an ideal book for a girl’s educational reading—unless the pitiless disclosure of the shallow feminine mind serves as a tonic.” Such a qualification shews that we still look askance at some of our wisest teachers. Can we spare such a study in prejudice as it clouds the mind of a charming young woman or in the “better-than-my-neighbour” ways of a young man whom we should all like to call friend? Mrs. Browning gives us in little Ellie¹⁰ a picture of a young girl with her dream of a prince and her secret of a swan’s nest. Every child who has the proper nourishment of Fairy Tales lives in a world of romance, untainted and unconscious of the personal conflict that may attend the coming of a prince. And in spirit she lives through an age of romance and chivalry, the first preparation for the sterner realities which will come in her next course of instruction, History, Poetry, Novels, etc. Mr. Kipling always

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knows what is “worth while,” and he writes *To the True Romance*:—

“But we that love, but we that prove
Thine excellence august,
While we adore discover more
Thee perfect, wise and just.”

Meredith heads one of his chapters,¹¹—“Shews one of the shadows of the world crossing a virgin’s mind,” and it is at the time of the “crossing of these shadows” that all have to “take soundings of the things they do.” Natalie Radnor complained that Victor could not do this, and in the stress of life his mental balance gives way. She saw the limitations of his character, but, hampered by the “shadow” on

her own life, she could hardly gauge [sic] the possibilities of her daughter's [sic] mind and feared in Nesta's attitude to another "shadow" a "state" of moral insensibility." [sic] Meredith here takes every parent and teacher by the hand. The mind, he shows, travels on the wings of imagination, it is there before you can stop it or guide it. Then where does safety lie? Nesta "flew her blind quickened heart on the wings of an imaginative force, and those of the young who can do that are in themselves incorruptible by dark knowledge irradiated under darkness of mind." And then he adds,— "Let but the throb be kept for others, that is the one secret of redemption, if not for preservation."

It is the "throb kept for others" that enables a soldier lad, a doctor, a nurse, to face the horrors which meet them in these days of "lust, oppression, crime": that may steady a boy or girl at some life crisis, that may save a child from shock. A little boy of 5 ½ lost his much-loved mother. The lady in whose kind care he had been left was sorely put to it how to tell the child of his sudden loss and yet save him from shock. He was playing with his native nurse, and as the lady told him how his mother had had a bad pain and had gone away and that it would be a long time before he could see her, the child began to cry, saying he must go to her at once, but to the lady's surprise the nurse began to clap her hands and said,— "How good for her." The child's "blind quickened heart" flew on the wings of imagination to the happiness of his mother, and he was not only saved from shock, but this idea of her happiness has never left him.

Again, what a picture Scott gives in Diana Vernon¹² of the [p 48]

way in which a girl learns to hold her own with dignity and reserve amidst a motley crew of unruly cousins—a study which may well give confidence and courage to all parents and teachers.

Diana and Nesta are well worth comparing; each finds her feet, though one comes from a "sterilised" home and one has to learn the ways of the world early. But each, as "little Ellie," is entirely unoccupied with self, so that life has still hope and fulness, even though a rat has in each case "gnawed the reeds" of early illusion.

To take an instance of another "shadow." Shakespeare sees the danger of falling in love with the idea of falling in love, and tells of,—

"A little western flower
Maidens call it love in idleness."

By means of which Titania was made "to pursue with the soul of love" the first object she saw. We are not, perhaps, in these days, prone to such "shadows" bred in idleness, for happily most women take up some form of occupation and many are trained for their work, but the rush of life is apt to breed a restless mind which cannot browse, which has no quiet resting place in book or hobby; and, again, we must learn from our great novelists "to take soundings of the things we do," to learn "the tricks and the manners" of mind, of our own, as well as that of others.

In conclusion, perhaps a word may be said about one form of moral education which has recently come much before us.

In the October number of the *Hibbert Journal*, there is an able article by Dr. Forsyth on Ibsen's *Treatment of Guilt*, and the writer shews that "self-culture" brings no solution to the problem.

"Our individuality we begin with, but our personality is a growth—especially by grace. ... All this cult of personality . . . is the idolatry of a principle which . . . carries us far into the regions of the holiness of God. . . . But as culture treats it, it is idolatry. . . . It is the greatest mistake to think that we can achieve our personality by cultivating our individuality. Individuality may provide characters, but not character. . . . To take up . . . even our spiritual self-culture for a profession is the worst use of life ... The most powerful personalities have been people who

hardly knew there was such a thing as their personality. They were lost in a task, a duty, a cause, a God.”

The advantage of the moral instruction gained at the hands of a Master Novelist is that the teaching remains impersonal, and is there, when wanted, in the guise of a “man called Help,” who gives the reader his hand and “sets him upon sound

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ground,”—sound, because it is objective, the ground of our common humanity. The pedestal of self-culture is subjective, too high for the contemplation of the rights and wrongs of any but the occupier, a lesson with dire results that Germany has been condemned to teach the world.

Ten years ago Miss Mason wrote,—

“Most of us have little chance of seeing men and things on a wide scale, and our way to an instructed conscience is to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest. We must read history, novels, and poetry, whatever falls under the head of literature, not for our own ‘culture’—some of us begin to dislike the word ‘culture’ and the idea of a cultivated person; any effort which has self at the bottom is poor and narrow. But there is a better reason for an intimacy with literature as extensive and profound as we can secure. Herein we shall find the reflections of wise men upon the art of living, whether in the way of record, fable, or precept, and this is the chief art for us all to attain.”¹³

¹ *Essay on William Cowper*, by Walter Bagehot.

² Kegan Paul.

³ *Bleak House*. [sic]

⁴ *Vanity Fair*.

⁵ *Pendennis*.

⁶ *The Newcomes*.

⁷ *David Copperfield*.

⁸ *Emma*.

⁹ Cf. *Ourselves, and Some Studies in the Formation of Character*. (Kegan Paul, 3/6 each).

¹⁰ *One of our Conquerors*.

¹¹ *The Swan’s Nest*.

¹² *Rob Roy*.

¹³ *Ourselves*.