

WHAT IS EDUCATION?¹

By ESSEX CHOLMONDELEY.

WHEN I first thought about education, I was not very much interested in the subject because to me it only meant a schoolroom with rows of desks and children sitting in them all busy learning about things which they were sure to forget later on. I thought that education was simply an affair for teachers, something to learn about at a college and then to practise in a school, something that needed a large amount of brains but which had very little to do with ordinary people. My ideas soon changed when I came to know Miss Mason and when I saw how she educated her students at the College in Ambleside.

There are many ideas of education. The word expressing the kind of education which interests most people is “bringing up.” We all know a well “brought up” person. We can each of us think of a child whom we consider well brought up and, unfortunately, of others whom we call badly brought up. If we consider that “bringing up” is the same as education, we shall find that most women and very many men are educators, all busy bringing up someone or something. We all need bringing up from our cradle to the very end of our lives. Miss Mason was always engaged in this work—she was always helping people in this way, bringing them up, no matter how old they were. Perhaps after we die we shall still be in need of this kind of education and we can certainly all help each other to it while we are alive whether we are children or whether we are grown up persons. “Persons” is a word to notice. Everyone is a person—different from every other person, all needing the same kind of things but all doing something different with them when we get them. Children are persons just as much as older people and it is a pity when this is forgotten.

What do we wish to bring children up to be or to do? Why do we educate? This question can be answered in very many ways. It is sometimes answered: “We want Tom or Jane to [p 686]

get on, so we wish him or her to have the best education possible.” This is right. The children must get on, but *where to?* To being a good business man, a successful professional woman? Success is not a good aim to have in view. If people only “get on” to success they have still very far to go. Perhaps every child—every person in fact—must “get on” to a different kind of success, I mean the power to live the life God has given him in exactly the way God intends him to live it. In order to have this power a person must be at his best, must be a complete person, “mind, heart, soul and strength” and must know how to chose [sic] the good and how to refuse the evil.

Where or how are we educated, brought up? At home? At school? Abroad in the world? Surely in all these places. We are “brought up” by people and things that we admire, love, reverence, get to know; we are educated by our friendships. For instance, think how the example of someone we love or of a hero that we admire, changes our behaviour, makes us act more unselfishly or gently: or again, how often a boy is educated in a certain direction by some specially loved interest, some hobby to which he devotes all the time and trouble that he is free to give. Love of work can educate people, too—can teach things which no school can teach—whether the work be gardening, or keeping a house or ruling a kingdom. It is our friendships,

the people we love, the places, hobbies, work we love, that bring us up into understanding, usefulness, goodness and virtue. Is it needful to say that it is the love of God which brings us up into eternal life?

There is very much talk on education at present, not only in the newspapers but all over the country. People are everywhere interested in it. It is a pity that there is a tendency to talk more about the kind of education which can be given in schools than the kind which should be found at home. This is no doubt because it is easier for teachers than it is for parents to meet and discuss their difficulties, so more teaching talk results. Talk or no talk, the greater part of a child's education takes place out of school and, if he is a fortunate, happy child, the greatest part takes place at home.

At home there is much to be considered. There is the children's health—an important part of bringing up. Again there is their behaviour—their habits. Last of all, but equally important, come their opportunities. Good health, good
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habits and varied opportunities are all things that the home life should give. Of these three, health is the best understood at the present time and need not be discussed here.

Under the word "habit," a far more weighty word lies hidden—*Discipline*. Discipline brings a person into control, restraint. They say that the present generation of young people lacks control of any kind and if this is true, it is a most unhappy generation, at the mercy of bad habits. Self-control means the power to form good habits. When children are young it is the parents' task to get them into good ways and keep them out of bad ones: but as people grow older everyone must do this for himself. Parents have different ways of forming good habits in their children. Some get the children's interest by punishment, by making it painful for them to do wrong: it is very uncertain whether this is a good way to help a child to right habits of life. Others form good habits in their children by encouragement, by firmness and by example. There must always be discipline in a home, habits of obedience, of punctuality, of sound work, of politeness, and many others which suggest themselves.

The home must give *opportunities*. There is less known about this part of education than there is about health and discipline, this is the reason why homes are not always very happy places even when they are comfortable ones. Every person is in need of something to love, something to do and something to think about. The ideal home is the one place where all these needs can be supplied. "Something to love"—there are the parents, the brothers, sisters, friends, perhaps a cat or a dog, chickens or pigs; there are chances of loving in every home. "Something to do." Children are always asking for it. Do not make the mistake of offering only amusing things to be done—or only dull ones. Give children the chance of helping as well as the chance of playing. They will be the happier and livelier. "Something to think about." This gets left out in so many homes, rich or poor, yet it is one of the most important parts of living. Thinking is difficult—it is quite impossible without something to think about. Thinking is not worrying, it is enjoying with the mind, enjoying other peoples' ideas and thoughts and jokes, enjoying beauty, music, pictures, enjoying country sights and sounds, birds and flowers. Children are not given enough chances of this life of the mind when they only have things to love and things to do. They grow up with

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two ideas, to work hard and to amuse themselves when they are not working. Everyone needs

a certain amount of amusement but they still more need plenty to think about; it is when people are not in the habit of enjoying with their minds that they rush off to every kind of amusement in their free time. Parents look to the schools for this part of education. They hope that the children are finding lovely things to think about at school and so they are very often. But all the same there must be home opportunities and in our own days the opportunity comes most easily through *books*. These are cheap and varied. There is sometimes a village library to help, or a school library. A little encouragement is often enough to start a child reading for himself, and what a resource all through life is this power of finding joy and refreshment in reading! Every person in the world should be equipped with this power—not just that of finding out the sense of printed words, but the power of making his own the written thoughts and experiences of great men and women. “Something to think about” has still another side to it. Parents should share things with their children, share interests and joys and sorrows. “Tell me what you read about at school to-day, Tom,” “What do you think happened while you were out this morning?” and so on. It is often quite small things which help to bring the children up.

Whether it be something to love, something to do or something to think about or all three which children are finding in their happy homes, let us be quite sure that we are giving them opportunities of loving, serving and thinking about God, for without this all education is powerless and all bringing up a waste of effort.

There is an old proverb: “Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

¹ Substance of an address given to a meeting of the Women’s Institute, Winterbourne Kingston Branch, August, 1925.