

THE PERSONALITY OF THE TEACHER.

It is in so far as a man or a woman is a person that he or she is recognized as a member of that Body in which mankind is knit together. He whose presence is unfelt, whose words are powerless to command attention, whose actions stir no activity, whose thoughts kindle no kindred flame, is found to be lacking in the one quality which above all is valuable to his fellows.

A person has those qualities which are common to all; these, we believe, are ordered differently in everyone according to the will of God. There is a law within the heart of every man, faithful obedience to which constitutes him a "person," one who is in true relationships with God, with man, and with the world around him, whose feet tread the paths of liberty. Parents desire that their children shall be persons. They set to work, searching for an education which shall make them to be persons not perceiving that they are trying to do that which God Himself has done already. The children are persons without human effort and only too often those about them are prevented from knowing the children as they are, owing to neglect of the personal law within their own hearts.

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Children are usually free from the machinery of civilization, from the daily responsibility and business which commandeers so much of the energy and attention of a man or woman. Their powers have not been blunted by contact with those baser materials which everyday life lays before them. They love, learn, seek, imagine, desire, with an intensity of experience. They see the relationship of idea to idea which older people are too much preoccupied to notice. They reason with an accuracy, enjoy with a whole-heartedness and suffer with an accuteness [sic] of which even their parents are sometimes ignorant. A man who has never been bound is unaware of his freedom and a child is unaware of his own personality. We, in chains, can at least secure that he never feels cold iron, but how are we to do this if we do not know the child's own path of freedom?

Great things are intended for each human being and before him is spread a table of rich opportunities, bright beauties, vital ideas. By feeding on that which nature and circumstance provide he finds the intention within him made actual in his own person. Without giving a thought to his own personality a man can come into possession of that great boon to mankind and can pay his debt, giving his contribution to the sum total of the human race. If educators can follow [sic] the example of nature by laying before the children a rich field of opportunity and ideas, the powers which are strong within them will select food and exercise for their personal needs. Prejudice and misconception regarding a teacher's work often hinder this liberality.

The influence of the teacher is often a conscious one, a fact which implies the possession of a pre-conceived idea of the person under his charge. This influence is prized by many, it is a force which is admired in class work, it adds power to the efficient teacher, who explains, questions, introduces, summarizes, or connects ideas before her passive class. By the width of her knowledge, her intelligent use of books, her confident manner, she coaxes her class into a state of attention, mediating between the unwilling intelligence and the knowledge which she has taken on herself to present to them. She, by her so-called personality, is urging a number of imperfect, undeveloped human beings to imbibe a form of knowledge which shall contribute to form their personality. But this conscious output of force is not a true expression

of personality. It is an activity which inevitably destroys itself. Those who continue to use it cease to live simply, they act.

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It is essential that those who educate children should have fulness of life. It has been said of the P.N.E.U. methods that they endanger, if they do not destroy, the personality of the teacher. I think the teachers themselves unconsciously vindicate the methods in this respect but the fact remains that the critics have stated a truth. That which they have been accustomed to consider as an expression of personality has been left behind by those teachers who have been trained by Miss Mason, whether at Ambleside or through her books. Just as it might be pleasant for a gymnast to stop his performance in order to go for a walk with his spectators, so the true P.U.S. teacher finds blessedness in giving up all the activities in which her pupils cannot share in order joyfully to walk with them. She has lost her personality, yes! But the children find it and they save it for her and keep it in a way which she could never do for herself. She need never think about it again, for in return she has found treasure of great price. That being removed which has blinded her eyes, she delights in finding and keeping the persons of the children. In the schoolroom there is no more an intercourse of child with adult but a sweet communion of person with person.

In this happy relationship the teacher is free to sympathize, share experiences, discover, work and rejoice *not* for but *with* the children entrusted to her. Could any more splendid field for personality be found, any wider scope for understanding and initiative? Being free herself she can now lead the children into the joyous experiences of ordering their own lives, of finding for themselves living ideas, of forming habits, of choosing the right. She will know the rare moments when it is wise to guide or restrain.

The persons of children are a never failing joy to those who can perceive them. Every narration becomes an enthralling interest, every indecision an anxiety, every choice a hope, every loyalty an honour and every obedience a glory. To one who watches and loves, it gradually becomes impossible to act in the rôle of mediator. The teacher finds that her own mind would be a passage too paltry to be the only meeting place of the child's immensity and the beauties of knowledge. She ceases to adapt conditions to the child's needs, to choose for him, to interpret nature, or to show him unity or continuity of ideas in what he reads—ceases, in fact, to commit those acts of disrespect common between person and person.

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The Jesuits who were the most successful teachers of the sixteenth century did not disrespect the personality of children as we do to-day, but they deliberately perverted it for the good of their order. They could scarce avoid doing so, having had their own tampered with. In this respect they were like the blind deliberately blinding those they lead. They cared for their charges primarily as members of the order, they were content to make them its good and happy servants, not caring to let them grow into the liberty of personal inward law. We, afraid of bondage and uncertain of freedom, allow our children to become bound by lawlessness and free only in the superficial things of life. And this is partly owing to the present misconception of personality, above all of the personality of the teacher. We know that children find it hard to lead a full life under the direction of men or women who are non-entities and we choose those people to be their companions who impress us by a certain force. More true education would become possible if parents and teachers would bear in mind the duty of being themselves "as

little children," "persons" who can recognize and help other "persons." A greater simplicity of thought is necessary to lead to a less self-conscious life. It is well to remember that personality is bound up in that part of life which if we lose we save. The P.U.S. teacher in losing her life for the sake of the children is assured that she has lost it unto Christ and that He keeps it unto life eternal. Her personality grows on undisturbed:—

“O marvellous! for even as he culled
The humble plant, such it sprang up again
Suddenly there where he uprooted it.”

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