

CHAP. III.

General Observations—Parents to guard against their Faults in the Presence of their Children—Children not to be made Playthings—The Child's Good and not the Parent's Ease, to be the Object—The Heart to be had in View rather than the outward Act—Guard against a Child's Artifices—Study Consistency of System—Intercourse with your Children—Freedom of Conversation—Study of Character—Personal Exertion in Education.

I SHALL proceed to offer to parents some general recommendations, which may guard them against evils not uncommon in families, and may shorten my remarks on many of the details of education in subsequent parts of this essay.

1. Let a parent be particularly on his guard against his faults and weaknesses when in the bosom of his family.

The reverse is not seldom the case. The circumspection and restraint practised abroad, are often greatly relaxed at home. Here liber-

ties and self-indulgences are thought more allowable; wrong tempers are not instantly repressed in the bosom, and are suffered to deform the countenance, and also sometimes to break out in unchristian tones, expressions, and conduct. We must all have observed this in others; and few of us, I conceive, are unconscious of having been sometimes taken by surprise on the entrance of a friend, and of having felt that it was necessary to recall both the mind and the face to greater serenity and benignity, in order to receive him properly. Now, can we seriously think that a heart and a countenance unfit for our friend, was fit for our children, who surrounded us before his arrival? Can we estimate the mischief which such moral deformity, placed before their eyes in the person of their father, may produce! Some one says, that no man is a hero before his valet-de-chambre. I will not stop to inquire what is becoming in a hero; but a Christian certainly ought, if possible, to be *more* a Christian before his family, where his influence is greatest, and the effects of his example the most important, than in any other situation. Juvenal has said, “*Maxima debetur pueris reverentia;*” though

his view of education was only to prepare youth for an upright and able discharge of their common duties in this life, with little regard to God or eternity. How deep then ought this maxim to sink into the heart of a Christian, whose views are so much higher, and who is to educate beings called to perform all their duties as those who now sit in heavenly places, and are kings and priests unto God !

2. Never make mere playthings of your children.

Many fathers treat their little ones as if nothing was to be sought in their society but mutual amusement. All is good humour when they are together ; and therefore all is supposed to be right, though there be little besides folly and self-indulgence on one side, and improper liberties, caprice, self-will, or artifice, on the other. In short, there seems to be a sort of conspiracy between the parties to indulge the natural man. The child is often even taught to be indecorous, and mischievous, and saucy, for the amusement of its parent. What excuse can be made for such a scene ? The poor child is greatly to be pitied : but really the parent, if we were to look no further, would appear to be

a sort of monster, devoid of principle, of feeling, and of common sense. Follow him, however, to his serious occupations, and you may find him a useful and respectable man. What a shame, that he is insensible to the high destiny and unspeakable value of the little creature whom he is spoiling for the sake of half an hour's foolish trifling ! What would he say of any one who threw about his gold repeater as if it were a ball, or sported with his wife's jewels as if they were marbles ? And yet his own folly is infinitely greater. The creatures whom he is placing in such danger for his sport are infinitely more precious than gold, which perisheth ; and pearls and diamonds are worthless compared with them. One would think that mere selfishness might restrain such absurdity even in a man who did not extend his view beyond this world. The time may come, when the evil fostered in the child will be a scourge to the parent, and when his sufferings will excite the less compassion in others, from their recollection that these scenes of egregious folly had undermined that natural respect which would otherwise have been a check to ill conduct on the part of his child. May parents, then, never

relax with their children? Must they always sustain the grave character of a tutor? Most certainly they may, and ought, frequently to relax with them, and even to take pains to make them happy by joining in their little amusements: but they may combine this course of proceeding extremely well with a constant recollection of the immortal nature and high value of their children, for whom Christ died, and with a suitable behaviour towards them. A father will soon learn, in such playful moments, “miscere utile dulci;” or, according to our English proverb, to “be merry and wise;” and he will rank such seasons among those which are most important for checking what is wrong in a child, fostering what is right, instilling good principles, infusing a just appreciation of things, and a taste for what is lovely and of good report. All the good seed sown on such occasions will be so combined with the child’s pleasures and affections, as, with God’s blessing, to take deep root in the soul, and promise a vigorous and permanent growth.

3. In managing a child, let a parent always have the child’s good, rather than his own ease, in view.

In domestic education, when parents speak to

their children, in a tone of dissatisfaction, what is heard so frequently as, "Don't be so troublesome!" It is true, children ought not to be suffered to be troublesome, since both kindness and propriety forbid them to be so: but the tone of the complaint generally shows very clearly that the great grievance is, not that the child has those dispositions which make it troublesome, but that others, and particularly the complainant, are troubled. Thus the child soon discovers, that it is corrected rather for the ease of its parents and attendants, than for its own good; and it has before it an example and a lesson of selfishness, which may do it as much harm as it receives benefit from the check given to a bad habit.—What ought to be done on such occasions? Undoubtedly the troublesome practice should be prevented; but this should be done in such a way as to show the child that the parent would willingly submit to trouble, to promote its good; but that such dispositions as lead it to trouble others, are unholy, and must be eradicated. The pleasure a Christian will have in giving pleasure, and his pain in occasioning pain, must be pointed out, and proved and illustrated. As nothing is to be combated in

children with more care and perseverance than selfishness, so nothing is to be more strictly guarded against in parental example. The child is to be taught to make sacrifices cheerfully, and to deny himself, and take up his cross ; and the parent must be especially careful that his own example forward the learning of this difficult lesson. On occasions in which the admonition is, " Don't be troublesome," would not " Don't be thoughtless," " don't be violent," or, " don't be unkind," often be more appropriate? Is it expedient very generally to use a mode of expression which points to the effect rather than the cause of a child's conduct,—to the inconveniences brought on others, rather than to the state of his mind?

4. In correcting a fault, look to the heart rather than to the outward act.

How common is it for parents for pursue the opposite course! They are satisfied with condemning and preventing wrong conduct, without much attending to the temper of mind in which their animadversions are received ; and the child is often left unhumbled and discontented, and in a state as displeasing to God as when it was committing the fault in question. This mode of proceeding appears to me essentially wrong, and

productive of serious evil. It does not bring the child to repentance before God, and to peace with him. Its directs its view to the maintenance of decency in externals, rather than to a jealous scrutiny of its motives and dispositions, and an earnest desire of reconciliation with its God, after having offended him. Though these marks of true repentance cannot be expected at so early an age in their full extent, yet a broad foundation for them is often laid during the two or three first years of infancy. On the other hand, when we see a child scowl, or snatch up his shoulders, or pout and redden, on being blamed, can the rebellious and unbending spirit within be doubted? Is he humbled for his fault, and in a spirit to forsake it and seek forgiveness? Is there any putting off of the old man, and putting on of the new man? And yet, can it be denied, that this is the only temper to which the promise of pardon is made? It is the temper in which adults must come to Christ for pardon and peace; and it is therefore the temper to which, from the very dawn of reason, we should endeavour to bring children.

In our endeavours to effect this great object, kind and mild and serene, but unyielding, per-

severance is to be employed. There must be neither violence nor hurry. If the child is impatient, some constraint, if necessary, must be used to prevent ebullitions of passion or frotness, and time must be given for it to recover itself; then steady, and unwearied, but calm and affectionate, addresses to its reason and feelings, suited to its age, and habits, and natural disposition, must be employed. The sagacity and ingenuity of the parent must be tasked to select the best topics, and handle them in the best manner for the production of the desired effect. But, above all, his eye must be upon God for guidance and a blessing, and for putting his own mind in the frame best adapted to win upon the affections of the child, and impress his heart. The dawnings of a right spirit in him must be hailed; openness and confidence must be courted and encouraged; the kindness of God and Christ to penitents must be as fully and touchingly portrayed as their hatred of sin. Care must be taken not to overstrain or overpower the feelings; and when any danger of doing so appears, a pause must take place till they are relieved, and self-command is regained. This course

admits of great variations, and must be carefully adapted to the age and character and attainments of the child: but I think I can say from experience, that it will seldom if ever fail of ultimate success, if steadily and habitually pursued. It may be said to begin from nothing; and for several months a very small part of it will be brought forward, though there will be a continual progress as the mind of the child opens, and *something* right in moral feeling and habit is established. He will begin to learn the difference between being good and naughty; then, that though he desists from doing a naughty thing, he continues naughty till he is sorry for it and good-humoured; and then, and not till then, he may expect the kiss of forgiveness, and regain the favour of his parent. Next he will be taught to reflect on his happiness when good, and on the pain he suffers when naughty; and he will be told that this is from God, who loves goodness and hates naughtiness, as he sees his parents do. Then he will proceed to learn that, like his parents, God expects sorrow for sin, and a mild and humble prayer for forgiveness, before he will forgive a naughty child, and love him, and make

him happy. While this is in progress, the parent will endeavour to make the child feel the evil and folly of naughtiness, and the beauty and true wisdom of being good. This will not be very difficult to inculcate, when the child is sensible that sin and misery, and holiness and happiness, generally go together. During the latter part of this course, gospel facts and principles will be gradually opened. The child will have heard of Christ ever since he first heard of God; and now the distinct character and offices of Christ will begin to be unfolded. He will be painted as the Friend of mankind; as the great Refuge of all who have done wrong; as always willing to help them, and beg his Father to forgive them; as all kindness and goodness, and as setting us an example of all that is lovely and excellent; and as now exalted in glory, and all-wise, and all-powerful. Pains will be taken to make him the object of affection attempered by reverence, and to make it pleasant to the child to please him, and painful to offend him. The child will in like manner be made acquainted with the Holy Ghost, and heaven, and hell, and the day of judgment, and eternity, and the lost state of man, and redemp-

tion. All these things will be taught with an immediate reference to practice and the heart. They must be unfolded gradually, and with a strict attention to the abilities and temperament of the child ; and especial care must be taken, that by God's blessing the feelings shall be properly affected as the understanding is informed.

5. Be on your guard against the little wiles and artifices which children will soon employ to obtain their ends.

It is surprising how ingenious and adroit they will be in this way. They will endeavour to do, as mere play, something which they know to be wrong and forbidden ; and to put you off by a laugh and a joke when you require them to acknowledge that they have done wrong. These little tricks lead to much evil. They undermine sincerity and simplicity of character ; and instead of being amused by them, as is often the case, a parent should view them with concern, and in that spirit carefully repress them. It is a good general rule in early youth, that nothing shall be said or done in joke which would be wrong if in earnest. More latitude may be allowed to those who are

grown up : but children cannot discriminate between what is innocent in jokes, and what is not ; and if they could, they have not sufficient steadiness of principle, and sufficient self-command, to confine themselves within the proper bounds, when suffered in their moments of gaiety to approach the brink of what is wrong. It is of the greatest possible importance, to preserve the mind from the taint of cunning and deceit ; and therefore we ought to be more anxious to avoid doing too little than too much to secure this point. Simplicity and integrity of character, the great foundation of every thing good, depend upon it.

6. Do all you can to secure a consistency of system in the management of your children.

It is quite apparent how indispensable it is that the father and mother should at least not counteract each other. If they do not and cannot think alike on the subject of education, by mutual concessions and accommodations they should pursue a similar plan with their children. Grievous are the consequences when they proceed differently. The children presume to erect themselves into judges between their parents : they play off one against the other.

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Not only one parent sinks in their esteem, but they often lose respect for both, and are disobedient to both. Thus the Fifth Commandment is habitually broken; and bad principles and bad habits are as likely to be established by education in a young family so circumstanced, as good ones. Let me entreat parents to shun this fatal rock. If one of them is conscious that the other is best qualified for the work of education, let such parent be disposed to yield points as far as duty will allow, and to strengthen the hands of the other. And even that other, instead of presuming on superior ability in this line, and carrying matters with a high hand, and peremptorily insisting on points respecting which there may be a difference of opinion between them, should proceed with as much accommodation as can be made consistent with duty; and where a point cannot be yielded, still the *suaviter in modo* should be practised with peculiar care, and the necessary duty performed in a way as little grating and offensive to the parent who disapproves, as may be. Let the more enlightened parent recollect, that an indifferent plan of education, in which parents harmoniously join, will generally answer much

better than a superior one respecting which they differ. Besides, by kind accommodations, the misjudging parent is often won by degrees to see things in a more just light, and to acquiesce in a better system. Where both parents act on principle, and refer to the Bible as their standard, and do not interpret it in a very different way, a degree of accordance, which will answer tolerably well for practical purposes, may reasonably be expected. The greatest difficulty arises when one of the parents does not act on principle, or refers, substantially, to a different standard from the other. Even in these distressing cases, the *suaviter in modo*, on a true Christian foundation, will do wonders. It often disarms hostility and counteraction, and leaves the young family very much in the hands of the parent best qualified to educate it. And I fully believe, from personal observation, that the Divine blessing rests in an uncommon degree on the labours of a Christian parent so unhappily circumstanced, and fruits follow excellent and abundant beyond all human expectation. With what pleasure have I seen a majority of the young members of a family, most lamentably exposed to temptation by one parent,

snatched out of the fire, as it were, by the pious and constant, but meek and unassuming, labours of the other!

In families where the parents proceed harmoniously and well in the work of education, their plan is often lamentably counteracted in the nursery, or the school-room. If the children are indulged there in bad tempers and habits; and still more, if they there meet with bad examples; with passion, or pride, or deceit, or a love of ease and luxury; all which is done in the parlour may be undone, and perhaps more than undone: and notwithstanding all the efforts of the parents, the progress of the child may be not in good, but in evil. Even on the most favourable supposition, the fruits produced by the exertions of the parents, under such circumstances, will be scanty and crude. The bias of nature will be so in favour of what is wrong, and so against what is right, that, if Divine Grace did not wonderfully favour the exertions of true piety in education, the task of the parents would be hopeless. How carefully, then, should nurses and others, who are put about children, be selected! And how attentively should the course of things in the nursery

and the school-room be watched and regulated ! To this end, the nurse or the governess should be impressed with a sense of the very high importance which the parent attaches to good tempers and good habits ; to which must be added, good principles, if the child is old enough to understand them. But it will by no means be sufficient to endeavour to make this impression by general declarations. It must be made in detail and by example, and with a persevering, but not a harassing, recurrence to those points which seem to be not sufficiently understood, or not properly carried into practice. The vigilant eye of the parent will always be wanted to keep things in the right course, as well as to put them into it at first. It must be laid down as a principle, that nothing must be concealed by the child. That vile maxim against telling tales out of school (vile, when employed to keep parents in ignorance,) must be utterly proscribed ; and openness and confidence must be zealously cultivated, both in the child and in those who have the charge of him. But the parents must not trust to being informed of every thing important to be known. They must delicately, but effectually, make the

requisite inquiries ; and also take care by personal inspection (conducted, however, with kindness and delicacy to the nurse or the governess) to ascertain the real state of things. But, with all that can be done, it will seldom be found possible to put the management of children in the nursery on a truly good footing. The class of persons to be employed is so ill-educated and unenlightened, and such of them as are pious are generally so injudicious, that not only the plan of the parent with the child will scarcely ever be even tolerably maintained when the child is out of his sight, but positive and serious evils will be produced and cherished. It is highly important, therefore, that the child should be as much with the parent as circumstances will permit. Every hour in the society of a parent who understands education, and pays proper attention to it, is an hour gained to moral improvement, and (as far at least as regards children yet in the nursery) is too often an hour redeemed from what is far from deserving that appellation. In whatever way the child is employed, whether in talking or playing, a moral lesson may be instilled, moral habits may be encouraged, and bad ones repressed :

the parent will continually be obtaining a greater insight into the child's character, and the child greater affection for its parent. Thus good will be doing, and a foundation laying for still greater good. Indeed, God seems to me to afford no slight ground for presuming that children should be much with their parents, by making the society of each so pleasant to the other, where the parent performs his part as he ought, and the child has not been spoiled by excessive indulgence in some other quarter. But the evidence of his will, which arises from the benefit resulting to the child, and also, I believe, to the parent, from this intercourse, is irrefragable and decisive.

It often happens, however, that there is an inconsistency in education more to be deplored than any which has yet been mentioned :—this is the inconsistency of the parent with himself. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, contrasting the correction employed by parents with that used by the Almighty in his government of his true servants, says, “ They,” (the parents) “ verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure*, but he for our profit,

* A friend has intimated that the Greek phrase,

that we might be partakers of his holiness." What a picture is this! God, the Sovereign Proprietor of all his creatures, invariably pursues the good of those whom he deigns to call his sons, in all the discipline to which he subjects them; while man, who can call nothing his own, who is a mere trustee under the Almighty, who, in his conduct towards his children, should always bear in mind that both they and he are bought with a price, and that not his own gratification, but the will of God, should be his rule in all he does as a father,—man presumes to forget his imperious duties in education, and to make it his object to please himself rather than his Sovereign Lord! If we did not continually see the fact, we should not believe it possible that the work of education would be so often carried on under the supreme influence of selfishness. His own ease and comfort translated "after their own pleasure," would be better rendered "as they thought fitting." If the latter be the real import of the original, the passage will not form so broad a foundation for my observations as if it were that given in our translation. But however this may be, I am convinced that the extent of the evil pointed out in them is but too fully proved by fact and experience.

venience and the indulgence of his own feeling and humour, frequently seem to engage a father's first attention in his proceedings with his children; and, except in striking cases, which oblige him, as it were, to depart from so lax a system, the good of the child is clearly made, in practice, though not in theory, a secondary object: so true is the description of the Apostle: he proceeds according to his own pleasure, rather than for the profit of his children. When education is not conducted so very ill, and the good of the child is *generally* the main object of the parent, and his own inclinations are *generally* made to bend to it; yet, in many families, this general course is subject to most numerous and grievous exceptions. When the stimulus to self-gratification is strong, the parent yields to it, the rules of good education are violated, and the child cannot but be injured. The injury (unless God avert it) will be in proportion to the extent of this fault. *Some* portion of it is found in all parents: but I am speaking not of a few thinly scattered instances rarely occurring, such as must be expected from so weak a creature as man even in his best estate, but of its more frequent and glaring recurrence, to

the serious interruption of a good system of education.

Now it is clear that this fault, in whatever degree it may exist, is an enemy to consistency of conduct. As it proceeds from the parent yielding to a different motive from that which ought to actuate him, and sometimes at least does actuate him, when with his children ; this new motive must lead to different results from those which would flow from the other, and produce inconsistency. But this is by no means all. A man with whom self-gratification is a leading motive, is inconsistent with himself. He will conduct himself towards his child according to his present humour. One hour he will be indulgent, and the next severe : at one time he will allow his child to do things which at another he will forbid. The child also will find out that he can carry points by management ;—by making his request when the parent is in a yielding humour, or by bringing him into such a humour by coaxing and wheedling, or by overcoming his objections by importunity. Inconsistency must be the consequence : and an inconsistency the more to be deplored, because it will be connected with a failure in respect

for the parent who is the author of it, and with the practice of cunning and art in the child,—habits of mind most adverse to all that is good.

The very high importance of consistency must be apparent to all. Will children be likely to value good principles as they ought, when their parents do not steadily act upon them, and enforce them? Will good habits be rooted and fixed in the child when he is allowed at times to indulge in the opposite bad ones? Will he be led to see the beauty of holiness of heart, and of holy conduct, when he is *allowed* at times to taste the sweets of sin (for every fault is a sin) from which he ought to be weaned, and when he finds his own self-indulgence sanctioned by the self-indulgence of his parent? “The ways of Religion are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace;” but to those only who steadily walk in them. They have no charms for those whose conduct is marked by frequent or gross inconsistencies.

7. Spend much time with your children: encourage them to be free before you; and carefully study their characters.

For what is education? It is co-operating with the Divine Spirit in forming the mind and

changing the heart of an immortal being, whose nature is extremely complex, by no means easily understood, and differing greatly in different individuals; in all, however, weak and corrupt, and averse to the change to be wrought in it. Is it possible to doubt, that what is above recommended must be necessary in this work? Can too great pains be taken where so much is at stake? Can success be rationally expected, unless great pains are taken, and your labours are enlightened and judicious? And can you flatter yourself that you take due pains, or that your labours will have a proper direction, if you give little time to your arduous task, and do not employ proper means for becoming well acquainted with the characters of your children?

It is wonderful that a parent can *hope* to be an effectual instrument under Divine Grace, in leading his children from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, by proceeding in the way in which religious education is often conducted. Is it not generally true, that even in religious families, more thought, and care, and time are employed in teaching children to read, than in teaching and persuading them, by God's help, to be real Christians? The

father sees but little of those who are young, and much less than is desirable of such as are older. The first he considers as scarcely at all under his care ; and though he probably gives some instructions to the latter, they are commonly such as are more calculated to enlarge their knowledge, and improve their understandings, than to regulate their dispositions, and make them new creatures. His avocations often are such as to make it impossible for him to be a great deal with his children ; but he generally might be much more with them than he is ; and, when with them, might employ the time much more usefully for the promotion of their best interests than he does. It often happens that they are under a degree of restraint in his presence, which, added to the little time he spends with them, prevents his obtaining a deep insight into their characters ; and, therefore, either many evils escape his notice, or he adopts some wrong mode of correcting them ; and many a tender germ of good passes unobserved, and withers for want of his fostering care.-- The mother is much more with her children, but generally, I think, not so much as she ought to be. This is the more to be lamented, because women are admirably

fitted for training their offspring in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. They have a remarkably quick insight into character : and a warmth of affection, a tenderness and a delicacy, which win the affection of others, and enable them to correct faults without giving offence, and to present Christian principles and virtues to their children in their most amiable form. I believe that there has seldom been a man who had a good and amiable mother, that has not in after life looked back on her instructions and example with reverence and delight. Cowper's admirable little poem, on viewing his mother's picture, touches the hearts of all of us, because it describes scenes and feelings dear to every virtuous mind ; scenes and feelings of which many of us have partaken, and all wish to partake. Every hour which a Christian mother spends with her children has balm on its wings. She contrives to make even their pastimes a moral lesson ; and though she cannot (and it is not desirable that she should) make their regular lessons a pastime, yet she adapts them well to the abilities of her scholars, accommodates them well to times and circumstances, and divests them of whatever is oppressive and revolting. To mix

the pleasant with the useful, is at least as important in education as in poetry ; but good mothers far exceed good poets in that art. Surely, then, a mother should be jealous of every thing which keeps her from the bosom of her family ; —a sphere in which she is so gifted to shine, and to be a blessing to those most dear to her. How sad it is, when she throws away this pure gold for mere dross, by giving up those hours to an excess of visiting and company, or even of reading, which ought to be spent among her children ! And how sad, too, when such high powers to train her young charge for Christ and glory are not under the guidance of an enlightened judgment, or receive a wrong direction ! I have been grieved to see maternal sensibility much more alive to the bodily than to the spiritual health of the objects of its solicitude : electrified when there was an idea that a child had received some slight hurt, but little moved while it was contesting a point with a nurse, or teasing a brother. And I have been much more grieved, when I have seen it fall into partiality and favouritism ; or exhaust itself in anxieties about the persons of the girls, to the comparative neglect of their understand-

ings, and to the great injury of their feelings and dispositions; or employ itself in heaping on them accomplishments, instead of leading them on in useful attainments and Christian habits; or yielding to the influence of humour or caprice; or (worse than all) giving itself over to a blindness to the faults of the objects of its love, and ruining them by indulgence and commendation.

The only plausible excuse which parents, possessing health and sufficient time, can make for not employing themselves actively in the education of their children is, that they put them into hands more fit for that task. This may be a good reason for sending boys, after a certain age, to school, or to a tutor; though still, even in their case, much remains to be done by parents. Waving, however, the consideration of this part of the subject, the excuse which has been mentioned does not appear to be admissible, under any common circumstances, in the case of girls and of younger boys. Of these, the parents are certainly the natural guides and instructors. By long knowledge of their offspring, by their just title to respect as parents, and by affections and sympathies on both sides, they are fitted

for this task far better than strangers can be. And if they suffer these great instruments of good to be lost, or perverted to evil; or if they fail to qualify themselves for their task by obtaining other requisites, and by allotting to it sufficient time and thought, and taking due care and pains; they must be answerable to God. They may, with much propriety, call in assistance, especially in the mechanical parts of education; but should always consider themselves as keeping the higher branches, which respect the principles, dispositions, and habits, chiefly in their own hands. Can they entrust these to nursemaids? They must certainly answer, No! Or to governesses? These, in general, are but ill qualified to undertake this most important part of education. Besides, being extremely inferior to the parents in the points which have been mentioned, they are almost always unprepared for the task. The boarding-schools, at which they are educated, afford them little instruction in this line, beyond what is necessary for ensuring the getting of lessons, and the maintenance of peace and subordination.