

CHAP. II.

The Period from early Infancy to the Learning to read—Faulty Course commonly pursued—A very early Attention to Tempers and Habits recommended—Religion how to be instilled—Parental Example.

THE years which precede manhood are naturally divided into several periods. The first is, from early infancy to the time when the child begins to read. The next is, from that time to the time of going (if a boy) to school or to a private tutor; and, if a girl, to the age of ten or twelve. On the present occasion my remarks will be confined to these incipient but highly important stages in education.

The period of infancy is generally suffered to slide away with little or no attention to the work of education. The child is supposed to be in a kind of irrational state, which will scarcely admit of moral discipline, and its parents seem to think only of its health and amusement. If it wants any thing, its wish must be gratified; if it cries, it is to be quieted by indulgence; or if this cannot be effected, attempts are frequently

made to cheat it into a belief that the desired object has suddenly vanished. If it has been hurt, the immediate cause of its misfortune, whether animate or inanimate, is not seldom to be beaten, and the child itself is encouraged to join in inflicting the punishment. Things proceed in this way nearly till the time when the child can talk, and often much longer; and when this system is changed for another, still it gives way very slowly, and in many cases some remains of it may be discerned for years after the child is allowed to be capable of instruction. What is the true character and tendency of this course of proceeding? It unquestionably fosters those seeds of evil which abound in our nature. Is man naturally self-indulgent? What then must be the effect of a studied system of indulgence? Is he impatient, and passionate, and vindictive? How greatly must these dispositions be cherished, by not only permitting but encouraging their gratification! Is he disposed, when in pursuit of favourite objects, to be little scrupulous with respect to violations of plain-dealing and truth? The artifices to which nurses and female relations resort would almost create such a disposition, were it not originally

in his bosom. With what eyes, then, must the Almighty look upon such a course of proceeding! It would be trifling with my readers to pursue this topic any further.

But now we proceed to the important inquiry, What system of management ought to be substituted in the place of that which has been described? All persons who do not think that a plea of necessity (a very unfounded plea, however, in the present case) may be urged in favour of the practice of positive evil, must allow that every thing should be avoided by mothers and nurses which has a tendency to cherish and bring into activity that depraved nature, which—if there be any truth in Scripture, or any reliance can be placed on experience—we all bring into the world. They will grant therefore, that Nanny, or the cat, or the chair, are not to be *slapped* because they happen to have displeased the child. But must not we confine ourselves to mere abstinence from fostering evils? Is it not visionary and chimerical to attempt to check bad tempers and habits, and to lay a foundation for good ones? Or if an attempt of this kind be not altogether hopeless, is it not at least unnecessary to make it at

Be careful of the Baptismal Regeneration heresy that is being alluded to here. It is unscriptural and regeneration through it is non-existent. Dr. VBK

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so early a period, when little success can be expected; and most advisable to defer it till the reason of the child is further advanced, and its ability to submit to discipline is greater? My experience gives me a view of parental duty very different from that to which these questions would lead. The Almighty Creator very soon begins to unfold in man those intellectual and moral faculties which are destined, when rightly employed, to qualify him for the highest services and enjoyments through the ages of eternity. In a few weeks after its birth, the child's reason begins to dawn; and with the first dawn of reason ought to commence the moral culture which may be best suited to counteract the evils of its nature, and to prepare the way for that radical change, that new birth promised in baptism, and the darling object of the hopes of every parent who looks on the covenants in that holy rite, not as forms but as realities. Let me appeal to every mother who delights to view her infant as it lies in her lap, whether it does not soon begin to read "the human face divine," to recognise her smile, and to shew itself sensible of her affection in the little arts she employs to entertain it. Does it not, in no long

time, return that smile, and repay her maternal caresses with looks and motions so expressive that she cannot mistake their import? She will not doubt, then, the importance of fostering in its bosom those benevolent sympathies which delight her, by banishing from her nursery whatever is likely to counteract them. She will not tolerate in a nurse that selfish indifference to the wants of an infant, which sometimes leaves it to cry while she finishes her breakfast or chats with a companion. Much less will she tolerate passionate snatches and scolding names, and hard and impatient tones of voice, in the management of her child. I may be pronounced fanciful; but I certainly think it would be of importance to keep sour and ill-humoured faces out of a nursery, even though such faces were not commonly accompanied by corresponding conduct. I am persuaded that I have seen a very bad effect produced by a face of this kind on the countenance and mind of an infant. Is it not reasonable to suppose, that if an infant sympathises with a smile, it may also sympathise with a scowl, and catch somewhat of the inward disposition which distorts the features of the nurse? Thus begin the efforts of a

parent to cherish all that is benevolent and affectionate in the bosom of a child ; and to prevent the growth of every thing of an opposite nature. And who shall presume to assign limits to the importance of such efforts in the education of a being whose leading disposition, if it fulfil the will of its Maker, must, both through life and through all eternity, be *love*?

But parental cares soon extend. In a short time, impatience and selfishness show themselves in a child, and are accompanied by fretfulness, jealousy, anger, and envy. At so early a period does innate corruption display its powers, and call for the restraining hand of a parent ! But how are these evils to be counteracted at an age when both the body and mind are so tender, and when neither arguments nor explanations can be understood ? Undoubtedly great delicacy of treatment is required. The character of the child must be studied ; and, if possible, such correctives must be applied, as will not deeply wound its feelings. It is surprising what female ingenuity, quickened by maternal tenderness, will achieve in this way. Does a child, too young to listen to reason, want something it ought not to have ? Its mother will suddenly

turn its attention to another object, and thus prevent the rise of improper tempers, or arrest them in their course. Is it jealous of the attention paid to a brother? While she perseveres, perhaps, in showing to the brother the kindness which has raised this jealousy, she will pour such a stream of affection on both the children as shall at once show them how much each is the object of her love, and lead them by sympathy to feel a similar love for each other. This will be the best antidote to jealousy. But cases will arise, in which, with all her ingenuity, she will not be able to effect her purpose in this way. On such occasions if the child is too young to understand reason and persuasion, she will as far as possible, shorten and sweeten its trial, but without fostering bad dispositions in its bosom; if it is a little older, she will endeavour to turn the trial to good account, by holding up to it such Christian and filial motives as suit its capacity and character. These will be accompanied by such a description and exemplification, on the one hand, of the effects they ought to produce, and of the sunshine of soul to which they lead; and on the other, of the hatefulness of the fault in question, of the

unhappiness which must attend the commission of it, and of the regret and bad consequences which must follow; as may, by God's help, prepare its tender mind for spiritual discrimination, and a spiritual taste, (if I may so speak,) and give its infant affections some bias on the side of God and duty.

But how, some parents may ask, how can this be effected at so tender an age? It seems to us impossible. Believe me, much may be done, with very young children, by placing gradually before them, with cheerfulness and affection, and in a spirit suited to the occasion, religious truths, associated as much as may be with images pleasing to their minds. The appellations, GOD and JESUS, should soon be made familiar to them; and the dwelling-place of these Divine Persons may be so pointed out and described; and their power and their holiness, and more especially their love, may be so set forth and brought home to the feelings, by little and simple illustrations, that, while the tender mind is imbued with the first rudiments of religious knowledge, reverence, and affection for Divine things, if God smile on the endeavour, shall be excited in the heart. But special care must be

taken not to give fatiguing lectures, nor to make too powerful calls on the feelings. "Here a little and there a little," must be the parent's motto in conveying instruction at this age; and for that little, the seasons must be chosen when the child is most likely to lend a willing ear: and the subject must always be dropped before it becomes tiresome, unless there be some very pressing call for its being continued; in which case, indeed, the occasion itself will generally make it interesting. Very short and simple stories from Holy Writ may be employed with great advantage; as that of Jesus taking the little children in his arms and blessing them; that of his restoring the widow's son to life; and many others. If these are told in a cheerful manner, and with such little appropriate touches as will present the scene to the imagination of the child, they will seldom fail to delight it, and will be called for again and again. When they are fixed in its memory, it is evident with what great advantage reference may be made to them when the parent finds occasion to have recourse to dissuasion, or reproof, or exhortation.

In conveying instruction, it is a most important point for the parent always to bear in mind, that

far more may be done by exciting the sympathy of the child than by appealing to its reason. Things indeed should always be presented to it in the garb of truth and good sense: but unless its feelings are in unison with its convictions, it may be perfectly persuaded of truths without being influenced by them in practice. And how are the appropriate feelings to be excited in its bosom? Chiefly by the feelings of the parent being in unison with the subject on which he speaks. Is he dwelling on the greatness of God, or on his all-seeing eye, or on his eternity, or on his glory? Let his own heart harmonise with his lofty theme, and probably the right string in that of his child will vibrate. Is he describing the Divine love, and tenderness, and mercy, especially as exemplified in Jesus Christ? If his own feelings are impressed by the picture he presents, those of his child are not likely to be altogether unmoved. But reverse the case as to the parent, and what is to be expected from the child? Who can be so absurd as to hope, that when religious truths are taught as a schoolmaster teaches the grammar, good impressions will be made on the heart? Do we see, in fact, that when the Cate-

chism is so taught, any such impression is made? Step into a village-school where that excellent compendium of our holy religion has been learnt merely as a task, and you will find the children as little affected by its truths (even if they understand it) as they are by the lessons in their spelling-book. One would almost think that they conceived it pointed out the high privileges and the sacred duties of the inhabitants of the moon, and that they had nothing to do with it but to get it by heart. Few, if any, parents, it is hoped, who make religion a branch of education, proceed in a way so utterly irrational as the generality of village-schoolmasters in teaching the Catechism; but in whatever degree they approach to the village-school system, in that degree must they look for a similar result. If

“ Si vis me flere, dolendum est
Primum ipsi tibi,”

be a just description of human nature, when applied to adults, it is doubly and trebly so in the case of children. Adults have been used to attach certain feelings to certain truths and certain incidents, the recurrence of which will do much towards exciting those feelings; but

children have not yet learnt, (except in some obvious instances,) how the circumstances of life will influence their own welfare, and the welfare of others; and therefore it is no wonder that their feelings should not be excited, until they see how others feel. The great Creator has ordained, that in early childhood all the powers and faculties of man shall be placed under the guidance, and in a very great degree under the forming hand of his parents. His feelings are as ready as his intellectual powers to take the impression that may be given them. How strong are the prejudices imbibed from parents in early youth! When pains are taken to produce a similarity, how clearly do we see the prominent features in the manners, habits, and feelings of parents reflected in their offspring! A little Gipsey is an adult Gipsey in miniature. I am told that among the Gentoos a like similarity is very apparent; and I have myself been struck by it among the Quakers—a sect whom I by no means mention to dishonour. Why may not the potent engine which produces such striking effects among these and other classes of men, and often promotes feelings and habits adverse to good sense and propriety, to

good order or to true religion, be employed in favour of the best interests of man and the glory of God? To suffer it to lie idle, is folly and sin. But in fact it will not be absolutely idle. One thing or another children will always be catching from their parents; and, through the corrupt bias of human nature, they will be far more ready to catch the evil than the good: and even in copying what is innocent, if not positively good, in parents, they will be very apt to give it some turn, or associate it with some quality, which may make it subservient to evil. What then is likely to be the effect of negligence in this great point? In truth, can we look around us, and not have lamentable proofs of its effect? How many children of good parents do we see imitating little, in parental example, but neglect of duty! In the parent, this neglect has been chiefly visible perhaps in education; but the child, as might be expected, extends it much farther. Or, suppose the parent to be led by a blind fondness to humour his child, to overlook his faults, and to allow himself to omit the present duty of restraining and ruling him, under some

vague hope that a more favourable time will arrive for the exercise of his power, or that God will in his own time, by his own providence, and by the teaching of his own Spirit, correct the faults which the father tolerates. Shall we not be extremely likely to find that a child so educated will chiefly resemble his parent in giving way to self-delusion and self-indulgence, and in indistinct and unscriptural reliance on future gifts of Providence, to the neglect of present duties? But it is not only by copying his faults that a child derives evil from a parent; if care be not taken, qualities and habits innocent, or even commendable, will be so caught or so imitated by the child as to administer to the gratification of his evil passions.—Is the parent energetic? Let him guard against his child's adopting his energy as an engine of pride or ambition.—Is he jocose? His playful humour may be imitated by the child, for the purpose of putting aside serious thought or vigorous application; or of indulging in ridicule or satire; or of practising tricks not consistent with simplicity and sincerity of character, and employed probably for selfish purposes. Nay, unless care be taken,

Piety itself in a parent, that child of Heaven, may lead to fanaticism, or cant, or hypocrisy in a child. Certain tones and gestures, which (though, as I think, to be avoided) are in the parent the accompaniment of true communion with his Maker, often become quite pitiable or disgusting in the child, not being connected with those deep devotional feelings which can alone make them tolerable; or, if so connected, being utterly unsuited to his age.

This subject may be pursued farther; but enough has been said to excite the reflections of well-meaning parents; and those reflections will naturally point to the particular circumstances of each individual, and be far more useful than any thing I could add. No one can doubt the deep responsibility of every parent to make a good use of his power over the dispositions and affections of his offspring. And since in exercising that power, nothing will be so operative as his own example, how earnest should he be, that the light which shines in him may be the true light of the Gospel, purified as much as may be from every thing that may obscure or defile it! And also how earnest should he be

to join to such an example a sagacious watchfulness, and even a holy jealousy, to prevent his child from misunderstanding it, or the principles and motives from which it springs; and to prevent a perverse or deceptious use being made of it!